

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held at Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes on 30 April 2021.

PRESENT	Councillors Chris Dowling, Kathryn Field, Jim Sheppard, Sylvia Tidy (Chair) and Francis Whetstone
ALSO PRESENT	Liz Rugg – Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care Teresa Lavelle-Hill – Head of LAC Services Nicola Scott – Operations Manager, Residential LAC Services Scott Lipa – Practice Manager, Placement Support Service Beverley Moores – Strategic Lead Children’s Disability Social Care ISEND Emma Phillips – Senior Residential Care Worker Dawn Siddens – Designated Nurse for LAC Shirin White – Registered Homes Manager, Acorns Charlotte de Retuerto – Registered Homes Manager, The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive Georgia Carty – Residential Homes Manager, Hazel Lodge Ian Williams – Registered Homes Manager, Lansdowne Secure Unit Roy Noble – Deputy Homes Manager, Homefield Cottage Gabriella Vine – Member of the Children in Care Council Liberty Gibbons – Member of the Children in Care Council Meshelle Carmody – Children in Care Council Coordinator and Placement Support Worker Aaron Sams – Democratic Services Officer

76 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 JANUARY 2021

76.1 RESOLVED: to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2021.

77 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

77.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Charles Clark and Councillor Colin Swansborough.

78 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

78.1 There were none.

79 URGENT ITEMS

79.1 There were none.

80 CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL (CiCC) ANNUAL REPORT - 2020 - 2021

80.1 The Panel considered the Annual Report of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and welcomed two members of the CiCC to the meeting to present the report and update the Panel on the work of the CiCC.

80.2 The Panel heard about the following areas of the CiCC's work:

- **Mental health of young people:** The Panel heard that the issue of young people's mental health was voted as a key priority in the UK's Youth Parliament *Make your Mark* survey in 2020. The CiCC also recognise the importance of this issue and will continue to work towards ensuring mental health support is treated as a priority in East Sussex. As a result, since June 2020 a CiCC member has been working alongside the East Sussex Youth Cabinet and East Sussex Community Voice (ESCV) to support Mental Health in Schools Teams (MHST), with the work focused on reviewing the current provision of mental health support in schools and how it could be improved.
- **Education of children in care:** The Panel were informed of the ongoing work undertaken by the CiCC to support the education of children and young people in care. This role includes working closely with social workers and the Virtual School to share the personal educational experiences of children in care. As a result of this work, the Panel heard, for example, that the CiCC have raised concerns regarding the status of children in care being unintentionally flagged in lessons when they have needed to leave class to attend a meeting.
- **Online Safety and Social Media:** The Panel heard that the CiCC are developing a Digital Safety Training course to be available later in 2021 for children and young people in Care. The course has been developed in response to the ongoing negative mental health impacts reported by young people due to social media use. The CiCC therefore are hopeful that its training course will help young people use the internet safely and regulate the time they spend online.
- **Buddy scheme:** During the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions the CiCC started a buddy scheme project to ensure that children in care had a 'buddy' that they could have regular online contact with. The Panel heard that this initially small project has now developed into a larger piece of work, with a system being deployed for buddying up children that are entering into care for the first time with those that have more experience of life in care.
- **Family contact during Covid-19:** The CiCC updated the Panel on the measures which have been put in place to allow for children in care to have contact with their birth families during the Covid-19 restrictions. The contact moved online during this period and the response to this has been mixed; with some families finding that it allowed for more regular contact as the travel aspect was removed, and some finding it more difficult to connect and engage when the contact

was virtual. The Panel heard that as Covid restrictions are eased the ways in which contact is provided will be reviewed.

80.3 In response to the information provided to it the Panel discussed the following key items:

- Members asked for more information regarding the issue of children being taken out of lessons to attend meetings, and the unwanted attention this may focus on the child. The Panel asked whether the identification lanyards worn by the Social Workers that take the children out of the lessons could be temporarily removed to avoid being noticed by other children within the class. Liz Rugg, Assistant Director for Early Help and Social Care informed the Panel that this would be an effective and simple change and that she will ensure that this information is passed onto Social Workers
- Members asked for further detail about the Buddy Scheme and its overall reception from the children and young people involved. In response the Panel were informed that children and young people in care have found the scheme extremely valuable as it has allowed them to have regular contact with others in similar circumstances. It has also helped with the mental health of those in care as they have a regular outlet to discuss issues and how they are feeling. Scott Lipa, Practice Manager for the Placement Support Service, also updated the Panel on the positive impact of the Buddy Scheme and informed them that this project has been so well received that this coming summer the project will be expanded and developed into a more formal piece of work.
- The Panel discussed the mental health support available for children and young people in care during the Covid-19 pandemic and asked whether the young people felt that they were being supported. The CiCC representatives informed the Panel that despite some 'in person' services being unavailable during the lockdown restrictions, those in care have felt supported. The Panel heard that being able to access services and communicate with friends and family online has had many benefits and whilst not always ideal, it had helped support the mental and emotional wellbeing of individuals.
- The Panel discussed and welcomed the Youth Inspect & Advise Group (YIAG) project. This project will see four schools in East Sussex undergo a young person-led inspection of mental and emotional health provision, with the young people themselves providing an assessment of the services available. In response to a query raised by the Panel, Scott Lipa, Practice Manager for the Placement Support Service Informed Members that the inspections carried out thus far have been virtual. However, the goal is for this project to take place in person as long as this can be achieved in line with Public Health guidance relating to Covid-19. Mr Lipa also confirmed to the Panel that they will be provided with an update on this project at future meetings.

80.4 The Panel gave thanks to the CiCC and commended their positive work in representing and supporting those in care.

80.5 RESOLVED: to note the report.

81 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

81.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on Looked After Children (LAC) statistics.

81.2 Liz Rugg, Assistant Director for Early Help and Social Care updated the Panel on the latest data regarding LAC in East Sussex. The Panel heard that in the past quarter there has been an increase in the number of children in care, with 612 children at the end of March compared to a figure of 607 at the end of December. The Panel heard that the ongoing impact

of Covid-19 continues to place significant additional pressure on foster carers. Although in support of this vital group, a decision was taken to offer the Covid-19 vaccination to ESCC foster carers so as to increase safety and ensure placements were still available for children.

81.3 The Panel discussed the difficulty in finding secure placements for children that have experienced high levels of trauma and therefore can pose challenging behavioural issues. Liz Rugg assured the Panel that every effort is made to find the most suitable secure accommodation for these children, but that there is unfortunately a national shortage of placements. The Panel were also informed that there is a need for the Council to create bespoke care packages around the most challenging children, and that this can include the adaption of existing buildings to accommodate them and the use of agency staff.

81.4 RESOLVED: to note the report.

82 ANY OTHER NON-EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED URGENT BY THE CHAIR.

82.1 There were none.

83 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

83.1 RESOLVED to exclude the public and press from the meeting for items 9 and 10 on the agenda (see minutes 26 and 27) on the grounds that if the public and press were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as specified in category 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual. It was considered that the public interest in maintaining the exception outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

84 CHILDREN'S HOME REGULATIONS 2015, REGULATION 44: INSPECTION REPORTS

84.1 The Panel considered Regulation 44 Reports for the following Children's Homes:

- Acorns
- Brodrick House
- Hazel Lodge
- Homefield Cottage
- Lansdowne Secure Unit
- The Bungalow

84.2 The Panel discussed a range of issues, including: building improvements at the homes, staff wellbeing, the educational developments of the children and the ongoing day to day activity within the homes.

84.3 The Panel also asked about the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Children's Homes. The Registered Homes Managers provided the Panel with detailed information on how issues caused by the pandemic have been mitigated, but it was noted that many children have struggled with mental health and behavioural issues due to the pandemic. The Panel were informed however that with restrictions easing and with front line staff being offered vaccinations there is an overall sense of optimism and return to normality at the homes.

84.4 The Panel gave thanks to the Registered Homes Managers and their colleagues for their excellent service and support to the children and young people in the Council's Care.

84.5 RESOLVED: to note the reports

85 ANY OTHER EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED URGENT BY THE CHAIR.

85.1 There were none.