

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 30 July 2021.

PRESENT	Councillors Bob Bowdler, Johnny Denis, Kathryn Field, Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood, Matthew Milligan and Colin Swansborough.
ALSO PRESENT	Liz Rugg - Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care Sally Carnie – Head of Looked After Children’s Services Nicola Scott – Operations Manager, Residential LAC Services Sally Williams – Operations Manager, Residential and Directly Provided Services Adrian Sewell – Operations Manager, Fostering Team Beverley Moores – Strategic Lead, Children’s Disability Social Care ISEND Steven Crowe – Registered Homes Manager, Brodrick House Janet Fairless - Registered Homes Manager, Homefield Cottage Charlotte de Retuerto – Registered Homes Manager, Acorns Scott Lipa - Registered Homes Manager, Lansdowne Secure Unit Aaron Sams – Democratic Services Officer

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR

1.1 Councillor Kathryn Field was elected Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 APRIL 2021

2.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 30 April 2021.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

3.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Sam Adeniji.

4 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

4.1 Councillor Matthew Milligan declared a personal non-prejudicial interest that a close relative is a registered Foster Carer in East Sussex.

5 URGENT ITEMS

5.1 There were none.

6 EAST SUSSEX FOSTERING SERVICES ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2020/21

6.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined the performance and progress of the East Sussex Fostering Service for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. Adrian Sewell (Operations Manager – Fostering Service) provided further detail regarding the key activities and work of the service. This included information regarding: recruitment & retention activities, publicity campaigns, Foster Carer training, the work of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and an update on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the service.

6.2 The Panel were informed that 351 placements were made during the reporting period and that 277 of these were in-house and 74 were agency placements.

6.3 In response to a question from the Panel, Members were informed that the enquiry to conversion rate for potential carers was 9% in the previous financial year which is the highest conversation rate for the past 3 years. Whilst the Panel welcomed the latest increased figure, Members queried whether the 9% figure was still too low. In response, the Panel heard that nationally conversation rates are low and that in comparison to other local authorities East Sussex has a relatively high level of conversion. The Panel further heard that many people consider fostering and make initial enquiries about the role and then decide for a variety of reasons that it is not for them, or that it may be something they return to at a future date. Liz Rugg, Assistant Director for Early Help and Social Care also informed the Panel that the Foster Service has a selection process for approving Carers and that not everybody that expresses an interest will be approved.

6.4 The Panel discussed the recruitment campaigns for Foster Carers and requested more detail on the specifics of the targeted campaigns. In response, Mr Sewell informed the Panel that the targeted campaigns focus on the fostering of particular groups such as Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and children with disabilities. Further details were also provided about the content of the advertisements and the ongoing work with the Communications & Marketing Team. Sally Carnie, Head of Looked After Children Services also updated the Panel on the Department's targeted social media campaigns, which enable fostering recruitment posts to appear in the social media feeds of those that have already engaged with particular profiles which relate to fostering..

6.5 RESOLVED – to note the report.

7 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

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

7.2 Liz Rugg, Assistant Director for Early Help and Social Care updated the Panel on the latest data regarding LAC in East Sussex. Members heard that in the last quarter there has been an increase in the numbers of LAC and that on 30 June 2021 the total had increased to 622, up from 612 in March 2021. The Panel were informed that the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic continues to place significant additional pressures on many households, including on carers, agency foster carers and on placements with family members.

7.3 The Panel asked about the rate of payment for East Sussex County Council employed Foster Carers. Liz Rugg informed the Panel that fostering payments are comprised of two parts: the maintenance rate and the fee. The maintenance rate is non-taxable and covers the costs of the maintenance for looking after a child, and the fee is payment for being a foster carer. The fee received by individual carers takes into consideration, for example, the longevity of service and the level of training the carer has undertaken.

7.4 RESOLVED – to note the report.

8 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

8.1 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.

9 OFSTED INSPECTION REPORT FOR HAZEL LODGE

9.1 The Panel considered an Ofsted Inspection report for Hazel Lodge Children's Home.

9.2 Nicola Scott, Operations Manager – Residential Looked After Children's Services introduced the report. The Panel were informed that the Ofsted review took place at the end of May 2021 and that the overall inspection judgement was 'good' but that one area, the effectiveness of leaders and managers, received a 'requires improvement to be good'.

9.3 The Panel asked for more detail about the Ofsted review outcome and the steps being taken to ensure an effective action plan is in place. Nicola Scott confirmed to the Panel that a detailed action plan is in place for making these improvements and assured the Panel that this plan is shared with both Ofsted and the Regulation 44 inspectors to monitor its progress.

9.4 RESOLVED - to note the report

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

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

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

10.2 The Panel received a verbal update from each of the Registered Homes' Managers (RHM's).

10.3 The Panel asked about the definition of 'missing' with regards to a child being absent from their home and sought assurance that this is resolved quickly and effectively. In response, Liz Rugg informed members that the term 'missing' includes a child being absent without permission or explanation. The Panel were also provided with information about the procedures the Department have in place to locate missing children and how they work closely with the Police to ensure children are located and returned as quickly and safely as possible.

10.4 The Panel asked whether children who have left a Home are able to keep in touch with staff and other residents. In response the Panel heard that if a child wants to, arrangements are in place to support continued contact and that children who are old enough often communicate with their peers via social media

10.5 The Panel raised a point of concern from one of the Regulation 44 reports. This report stated that no residential staff or children were interviewed as part of the inspection. Liz Rugg informed the Panel that inspections can take a number of forms and that occasionally the inspector does not have a chance or feel it necessary to interview staff or children. However, this is not typical, and most inspections will include interviews.

10.6 RESOLVED – to note the reports.

11 ANY OTHER EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED URGENT BY THE CHAIR.

11.1 There were none.

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

12.1 There were none.