

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held at Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes on 20 January 2023.

PRESENT Councillor Sam Adeniji, Councillor Bob Bowdler, Johnny Denis, Kathryn Field, Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood and Matthew Milligan

ALSO PRESENT Kathy Marriott – Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care
Alison Jeffery – Director of Children’s Services
Fiona Lewis – Head of Service Looked After Children
Lisa Schrevel – Project Manager – Housing and Accommodation
Sally Carnie – Head of Looked After Service
Jill Nwokedi – Practice Manager
Tina Henderson – Founder Trustee, East Sussex Foster Care Association
Susanne Beesley – Chair, East Sussex Foster Care Association
Georgina Seligmann – Governance and Democracy Manager
Belinda Trunfull – Member Services

25. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 OCTOBER 2022

25.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2022.

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

26.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Colin Swansborough.

27. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

27.1 Councillor Matthew Milligan declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest that a close family member is an East Sussex County Council Foster parent.

27.2 The panel noted that Councillors Sam Adeniji, Johnny Denis, Kathryn Field (Chair) and Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood are elected District and Borough Councillors.

28. URGENT ITEMS

28.1 There were no urgent items.

29. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

29.1 RESOLVED to exclude the public and press from the meeting for items 6 and 7 on the agenda (see minutes 30 and 31) 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.

30. QUARTERLY REGISTERED CHILDREN'S HOMES REPORT

30.1 The Panel considered Quarterly Registered Children's Home reports for the following Children's Homes:

- Brodrick House
- Homefield Cottage
- Hazel Lodge
- Silver Birches
- Lansdowne Secure Children's Home
- Acorns
- The Bungalow

30.2 The Panel considered Ofsted Inspection reports for the following Children's Homes:

- Acorns
- Hazel Lodge
- Brodrick House

30.3 The Panel welcomed the reports and received a verbal update from Fiona Lewis, Head of Service Looked After Children. The Panel heard how the homes coped with challenges during the Christmas period, however, despite this, the young people were able to enjoy the festive period.

30.4 The Panel were satisfied that the Home Managers had appropriate action plans in place to address the recommendations within the reports.

30.5 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

31. ANY OTHER EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED URGENT BY THE CHAIR.

31.1 There were none.

32. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

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

32.2 Kathy Marriott, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care updated the Panel on the latest position for Looked After Children in East Sussex. During the last quarter, there has been an increase of 24 children living in care, bringing the total to 654. Of this total, 358 children are in foster care (an increase of 6) with high levels remaining within in-house provision; 90 children were living with agency carers; 83 young people were living in supported housing options homes or hostels (an increase of 13) and 19 children were placed for adoption.

32.3 79 children were living with kinship foster carers (a decrease of 9); 28 living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order (an increase of 7); 85 living in residential children's homes (an increase of 8) of which 20 living in East Sussex County Council (ESCC) children's homes and 65 placed in agency residential children's homes (an increase of 6).

32.4 2 children remain in a secure unit with 1 child placed in an external secure unit. There are no children remanded into custody. There are 77 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and 104 asylum seeking young people who were care leavers (children over 18 years old). There has been a rise in Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) which has led to significant pressure on the specialist UASC team, local services and accommodation. There are 341 children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders (an increase of 1) and those subject to Special Guardianship orders decreased by 1 to 478.

32.5 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report and requested that the following information is included in future reports:

- Further information on the breakdown of looked after children placed with parents
- A summary of information regarding work undertaken to support unaccompanied asylum seekers

33. LANSDOWNE SECURE UNIT-TEMPORARY CLOSURE AND FORWARD PLAN

33.1 Kathy Marriott, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care updated the Panel on the temporary closure of Lansdowne Secure Children's Home. The home has been operating since 2013 providing placement for vulnerable children across the UK. It was extended in 2021 to provide an additional 5 beds and has consistently received good Ofsted reports in the past.

33.2 Significant difficulties recruiting and retaining staff as well as the absence of a registered manager from the end of January 2023 means that the County Council has made the difficult decision to temporarily close the home. There are currently 3 children at the home whose placements are all due to end in January. The pause in service will allow for a review and redesign of the staffing structure as well as develop an enhanced recruitment strategy to enable delivery of a resilient, viable and sustainable service in the future.

33.3 The panel noted the temporary closure of the home and discussed cost, bed capacity and staff recruitment. The panel heard that:

- According to the children's legislation, care homes are required to have a dedicated registered manager with statutory responsibilities, meaning that they cannot be licenced to run multiple homes
- The home is only able to accommodate a maximum of 8 - 10 beds due to the level of complex needs of the young people being accommodated
- Demand remains high and pricing structure will be reviewed
- Recruitment remains a challenge and appealing options will be considered to attract and retain staff

33.4 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report and requested to visit the home once it has reopened.

34. PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY-NATIONAL CONTEXT

34.1 The Panel received a presentation from Kathy Marriot, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care outlining the Placement Sufficiency. The number of Looked After Children (LAC) has increased nationally, with higher numbers of LAC in all placement options other than adoption.

34.2 The service continues to experience pressure due to a lack of foster carers where recruitment has not been able to keep up with demand. Demand for emergency placements and a lack of supply can at times mean that Social Workers are having to care directly for LAC. The increase in demand means that at times unregulated provision is having to be utilised, with at times high cost of agency staff.

34.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the information within the presentation.

35. EAST SUSSEX SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY PRESENTATION

35.1 The Panel received a presentation from Lisa Schrevel, Project Manager - Housing and Accommodation.

35.2 The panel discussed housing options and asked for more information with regard to planned provisions. In response Lisa Schrevel informed the panel that the Local Authority (LA) is working with housing partners to increase housing options and looking into diversity provision for post 18-year-old as well as shared housing option. There is also ongoing work with Districts and Boroughs to set up a housing pilot scheme for 18 - 25-year-old care leavers.

35.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the information within the presentation.

36. KEY PRIORITIES IN RELATION TO CARE AND PLACEMENTS FROM OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

36.1 The Panel received an update from Jill Nwokedi, Practice Manager on the key priorities in relation to care and placements from children and young people. Jill Nwokedi updated that most young care leavers had fond memories of their time in care, and were able to recognise how supported they felt, however, results from the Bright Spots survey indicated that loneliness and isolation was a key issue for young care leavers living independently.

36.2 Sally Carnie, Head of Looked After Service informed that this information will be used to inform the next Sufficiency Strategy.

36.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report and agreed that it would be useful to meet the young people in person at a future meeting.

37. FOSTER CARERS ASSOCIATION REFLECTIONS ON DEMAND, CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

37.1 The Panel received an update from Tina Henderson, Founder Trustee, East Sussex Foster Care Association and Susanne Beesley, Chair, East Sussex Foster Care Association who drew the Committee's attention to the following key areas informed by discussions with members of the Foster Care Association:

- Mental health support - early identification and mental health support for some children in care needed (relating to their experiences and trauma), can result in complex challenges being displayed by the children
- Education – some children with complex needs are not receiving full time education or operating at a reduced timetable due to lack of provision for additional support
- Clubs – positive that clubs prioritise waiting lists for children in care by allowing quick access to clubs such as Cadets, Scouts etc
- Cost of living – significant pressure is being felt especially around cost of energy and food with some carers not feeling financially recognised
- Recruitment – children whose families foster could themselves be future foster carers, therefore, it is essential that they are well looked after to maintain this future

recruitment-East Sussex runs some excellent activities and supports for children in fostering families

- Lifelong Links – welcome this programme, although needs more embedding across service.
- Respite – although there are respite options in place, current context is that demand is high, this can impact on carers' ability to make use of respite options

37.2 Tina Henderson and Susanne Beesley also updated that they felt that they had a good working relationship with the LA and felt supported. The training package on offer from the LA is excellent and placement support is a highly valued and appreciated service.

37.3 The updates were welcomed by the Panel Members who received a further update from Children's Services department who informed the panel of the following points:

- Relationship between ESCC foster carers and ESCC should be celebrated as a real strength with high quality support given
- Challenges around current cost of living pressures recognised, service seeks to ensure carers are supported in the best way possible within the resources available
- The service is committed to continue working together with foster carers to improve all areas with a view to implementing quick wins where possible

38. DISCUSSION-CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL RESPONSE TO SUFFICIENCY CHALLENGES AND PROPOSALS

38.1 Kathy Marriot, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care updated that the next thematic agenda will look to include topics on education, employment and training with a view to inviting partner agencies to the meeting.

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

39.1 There were none.

The meeting ended at 12.32 pm.

Councillor Kathryn Field
Chair