

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held at Priory, Room 2F Centre Block, County Hall - County Hall, Lewes on 17 October 2023.

PRESENT Councillors Bob Bowdler, Penny di Cara, Kathryn Field (Chair), Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood and Matthew Milligan

ALSO PRESENT Alison Jeffery - Director of Children's Services
Fiona Lewis – Head of Looked After Children Services
Meshelle Carmody – Children in Care Council Coordinator and Placement Support Worker
Dawn Price – Operations Manager, Safeguarding Unit
Belinda Trunfull – Governance and Democracy Officer

14. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 JULY 2023

14.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2023.

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

15.1 Apologies were received from Councillors Johnny Denis and Colin Swansborough.

16. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

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

17. URGENT ITEMS

17.1 There were no urgent items.

18. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

18.1 RESOLVED to exclude the public and press from the meeting for items 6 and 7 on the agenda (see minutes 19 and 20) 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.

19. ESCC CHILDREN'S HOMES QUARTERLY REGULATION 44 SUMMARY REPORT

19.1 The Panel considered the 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

19.2 The Panel considered an Ofsted Inspection report for The Bungalow Children's Home.

19.3 The Panel welcomed the report and received a verbal update from Fiona Lewis, Head of Looked After Children Services. The Panel heard how the department has been working with Aidhour the Local Authority's (LA) partner to produce the new style report replacing the previous ones which were individually produced by the children's homes managers. The reports are independent, scrutinized and fact checked. The Panel were in agreement that the reports are clear and well laid out.

19.4 Fiona Lewis updated that a robust action plan has been implemented to address issues at the Bungalow and that a new operations manager was now in post with further recruitment ongoing.

19.5 The Panel discussed staffing issues and were updated that in the last quarter, there had been more use of agency staff. Overall staff engagement has been positive with improved morale.

19.6 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

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

20.1 There were none.

21. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

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

21.2 Fiona Lewis, Head of Looked After Children's Services updated the Panel on the latest position for LAC in East Sussex. Data was drawn as a snapshot on the last day of the month. The LAC's system remains under pressure with a national and local shortage of care placements. This is a national issue across the country, however strenuous attempts were made to place children within their family networks.

21.3 The number of LAC increased by 9 bringing the total number to 686. 337 children were living in foster care (a decrease of 5), of that number 245 were living with approved ESCC carers (decrease of 5). 5 children were placed with foster carers (decrease of 3) and 90 children were living with agency carers. 2 children were placed with Other local authority foster carers. 95 young people were living in supported housing options, homes or hostels (an increase of 7). 17 children were placed for adoption at the end of September (a decrease of 3).

21.4 Since the previous quarter, children living with kinship foster carers increased significantly from 77 to 90. The number of young people seeking asylum increased by 10, bringing the total up to 81.

21.5 The panel discussed the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) and the challenges faced by LAs that take on a disproportionate responsibility, particularly Kent. Fiona Lewis updated that an additional manager for UASC has been recruited at a local level which will enable the LA to increase its offer. East Sussex has always complied fully with NTS referrals.

21.6 In response to a question around recruitment of foster carers and rates, the Panel heard that this area continues to pose a challenge, however, a proposal is currently being drawn up

and will be shared with the Panel when complete. There are plans for a new regional platform to increase recruitment of local authority carers.

21.7 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

22. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) ANNUAL REPORT

22.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the annual performance of the LAC Service for 2022-23.

22.2 Fiona Lewis, Head of LAC Services drew the Panel's attention to the following points:

- There were more children in care than in the previous year
- There is a large push to record and understand the ethnicity background of LAC
- Challenges around fostering recruitment have increased given the extremely competitive nature of the market both from the independent sector and neighbouring local authorities
- Increased tracking and monitoring has been implemented to monitor the health of LAC
- Ongoing work with the through care team continues to focus on refreshing the offer which will include individual mental health needs
- Sufficiency of all placement types continued to be very challenging which consequently led to occasions where children were placed in unregistered provision for short periods of time. A specialist team of consultants (Impower) were engaged at the end of 2022-23 to assist with the development of sufficiency solutions

22.3 The Panel discussed the re-opening of Lansdowne Secure Children's home in the early part of 2024 and sought more information on the home's capacity. Fiona Lewis updated that the home will initially take on 7 children, however there was capacity to take up to 11. There are currently 70 children on the referral list. Children will be selected based on matching.

22.4 In response to a question around visiting the newly refurbished facility, the Panel were informed that the Children's Services team will look to arrange a visit and tour of the facility once it re-opens in 2024.

22.5 The Panel further discussed potential opportunities around respite care and how this could be explored as a potential recruitment opportunity. In response to a question around kinship care, Fiona Lewis updated the Panel that there was no tax implication to carers on payments made. Fiona further added that it is possible for kinship carers to proceed to becoming foster carers as assessments can be made based on the child already being fostered.

22.6 The Panel thanked the Children's Services team for all their hard work and RESOLVED to note the report.

23. CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL (CiCC) ANNUAL REPORT - 1 APRIL 2022 - 28 FEBRUARY 2023

23.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on Children in Care Council (CiCC) Annual Report from 1 April 2022 to 28 February 2023.

23.2 Meshelle Carmody, Children in Care Council Coordinator and Placement Support Worker updated that participation had resumed to pre Covid levels, however, due to the Covid period, the current CiCC members will serve for an extended 12 months until summer 2023. It had been a positive year for CiCC members, with a significant increase in confidence levels,

demonstrated by many of the senior members taking on bigger roles in advocating for the voices of cared for young people at a national level.

23.3 The Panel were further updated on the CiCC's participation in various national events including: meeting with Josh McAlister to discuss his recommendations from the independent care review; lobbying parliament on various issues; digital ambassador project; Digital Hive content creation; promoting resources for online safety and resilience online; showcasing projects and delivering talks at University of Sussex.

23.4 The Panel discussed meeting with the old cohort of young people ahead of completing their CiCC service to bid them farewell. The service fed back that arrangements will be made to accommodate this in February 2024.

23.5 The Panel discussed the CiCC's impact on young people completing their membership. Meshelle Carmody updated that overall impression was positive and that it was highly valued, this is evidenced in the handover written for the new cohort, where the positive impact of the CiCC shines through.

23.6 The Panel discussed the future of the previous CiCC cohort and the support in place. Meshelle fed back that some young people plan to continue delivering talks at universities, whilst others plan to attend college. Contact is maintained with the young people post CiCC as some find it helpful being able to speak with someone different.

23.7 The Panel noted that the issue with National Insurance numbers taking too long to arrive is being addressed. Social Workers have been reminded to ensure that applications are made on time to prevent unnecessary delays.

23.8 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

24. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT

24.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual report for the period 2022/23.

24.2 Dawn Price, Operations Manager – Safeguarding Unit, introduced the report updating on the contribution of the Independent Reviewing Officers to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for LAC. This included details on LAC, My Voice Matters, UASC, the ethnic minority population, IRO profile leaflets and training.

24.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

The meeting ended at 11.40 am.

Councillor Kathryn Field
Chair