



## CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

TUESDAY, 16 JANUARY 2024

10.00 AM COMMITTEE ROOM, COUNTY HALL, LEWES

MEMBERSHIP - Councillors Bob Bowdler, Johnny Denis, Penny di Cara, Kathryn Field (Chair), Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood, Mathew Milligan and Colin Swansborough

### A G E N D A

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2023 (*Pages 3 - 6*)
2. Apologies for absence
3. Disclosure of Interests  
Disclosure by all members present of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the member regards the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
4. Urgent items  
Notification of items which the Chair considers to be urgent and proposes to take at the end of the appropriate part of the agenda. Any members who wish to raise urgent items are asked, wherever possible, to notify the Chair before the start of the meeting. In so doing, they must state the special circumstances which they consider justify the matter being considered urgently.
5. Exclusion of Press and Public  
To consider excluding the public and press from the meeting for the next two agenda items 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 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual.
6. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Children's Homes Quarterly Regulation 44 summary report (*Pages 7 - 22*)  
Report by Director of Children's Services.
7. Any other exempt items considered urgent by the Chair.
8. Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics (*Pages 23 - 28*)  
Report by Director of Children's Services.
9. Lansdowne Secure Unit update on relaunch (*Pages 29 - 32*)  
Report by Director of Children's Services.
10. IMPOWER - Sufficiency and Valuing care (*Pages 33 - 34*)  
Report by Director of Children's Services.
11. Any other non-exempt items considered urgent by the Chair.

PHILIP BAKER

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8 January 2024

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## 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.

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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

# Agenda Item 6

By virtue of paragraph(s) 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A  
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date of meeting: **16 January 2024**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Title: **Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics**

Purpose of Report: **To update the Panel on changes in the last quarter**

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**Recommendations:** **The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the report.**

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## 1. Background

### Financial Appraisal

1.1 Services for Looked After Children are predominantly funded from the Children's Services base budget with some additional smaller funding streams supporting specific activity e.g. Virtual School activity from the Pupil Premium Grant and the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children's grant from the Home Office.

## 2. Supporting information

2.1 Data found at Appendix 1 is drawn as a snapshot on the last day of the month and some changes occur as data is cleansed within the system. Any changes made to the system will update the data as at the correct date of the activity not the date of entry, therefore the end of year figures produced for the Department of Education 903 collection will show the finalised East Sussex County Council (ESCC) figures. This quarter has seen a decrease in the overall number of Looked after Children from 686 on the last day of September 2023, to 671 on the last day of December. This equates to an overall decrease of 15. The decrease has resulted from a combination of factors; data cleansing and a strenuous focus on reunification work with children and their birth families. The service remained very busy in order to achieve this outcome, and the sufficiency of any placements either in-house, or in the independent sector, continued to be extremely difficult. The national sufficiency challenges have shown no sign of improvement and the Local Government Association (LGA) and Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) have all made representations to government regarding this issue, and the impact it is having on budget pressures for Children's Services across the country.

2.2 A total of 329 children were living in foster care at the end of December, which is a decrease of 8 since the last quarter. Of that number, 233 were living with approved ESCC carers. This is a further decrease of 12 from the previous quarter, a trend which continues to be concerning. 3 children were placed with foster carers who were also approved adopters as part of the Fostering for Adoption pathway, this reduced by 2 since the last quarter. 91 children were living with agency carers, this has increased by 1 since the previous quarter. In addition, there were 2 children placed with Other Local Authority foster carers, which remains the same as the last quarter. There were 19 children placed for adoption at the end of December which is an increase of 2 since the previous quarter.

2.3 There were 100 young people living in supported housing options, homes or hostels, which is an increase of 5 since the previous quarter. This period has seen the introduction of a new Ofsted regime for the regulation of this type of provision. The service has worked hard to assist the sector with advice and support regarding the new process, and the majority of the providers used by ESCC have applied to be registered. This has meant there has been no disruption to children already living in these types of placements. The figure of 100 also includes 6 children under the age of 16 placed in a Z1 placements

where there was no alternative regulated provision available. In these circumstances robust risk assessments and monitoring plans are made to ensure children are cared for safely.

2.4 At the end of the quarter, the number of children that were living with kinship foster carers, decreased significantly from 90 to 77.

2.5 The number of children living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order to ESCC, also decreased from 34 to 30. Planning for placements of this sort is always monitored rigorously to mitigate any risk factors. Agreement and authorisation for this type of placement is given at a senior level, unless it is court mandated.

2.6 At the end of December, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes increased slightly from 108 to 111, a total increase of 3 in the quarter. Of the overall figure of 111, 20 children were living in ESCC run children's homes, which is an increase of 2, and 91 were placed in external residential homes. Exhaustive attempts are made to place children in our in-house provision prior to referring out to an agency placement. There are rigorous negotiations on both quality and price when placement searches are made with external providers. Wherever possible ESCC attempts to find family-based placements for our children either within their own networks or with foster carers. Where this is not possible and external residential homes are commissioned, there remains a commitment to step the children down into a family arrangement at the right time.

2.7 At the end of December there was 1 ESCC child placed in an external Secure Unit.

2.8 At the end of December there were 0 children remanded into youth detention accommodation.

2.9 At the end of December there were 4 children placed in a Family Centre or Mother and baby units.

2.10 ESCC fully participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. The number of children seeking asylum was 82 at the end of December, which is an increase of 1 from the previous quarter. In addition, there were 113 Asylum Seeking young people who were Care Leavers during this period, 101 aged 18-21 and 12 aged 21-25. This is the same overall number from the previous quarter.

2.11 The number of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders increased from 345 to 348, an increase of 3, and those children subject to a Special Guardianship Order decreased from 474 to 470, a decrease of 4.

2.12 There was 1 complaint from a Looked After Child supported by an advocate during this period. This complaint has now been resolved and is closed.

### **3. Conclusion**

3.1 It is very pleasing that there has been an overall reduction in the number of Looked after Children during this period. However, the children who have remained in care continue to have some complex needs and require high levels of skilled care. The placement data reinforces this with fewer children in fostering/kinship type placements and some small increases in the placement types for children with more complex needs. Hence, the Looked After Children's system has continued to be very pressurised during this period with a national and local shortage of care placements. All key Local Authority commissioning groups have reported similar issues, and how difficult it has become to find suitable regulated placements for their Looked After Children. It is to the credit of the ESCC duty placement service that they have continued to find Ofsted or Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered placements for the majority of our Looked After Children.

**ALISON JEFFERY**  
**Director of Children's Services**

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

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## Appendix 1

Placement Type	Placement Provider Desc	Total
A3 - Placed for adoption with consent (under section 19 of the 2002 Act) with current foster carer	PR2 - Other LA provision	2
A5 - Placed for adoption with placement order (under section 21 of the 2002 Act) with current foster carer	PR1 - Own provision by LA	2
A6 - Placed for adoption with placement order (under section 21 of the 2002 Act) not with current foster carer	PR1 - Own provision by LA	10
	PR2 - Other LA provision	5
H5 - Unregistered Provider Supported Accommodation	PR4 - Private Provision	2
	PR5 - Voluntary/Third Sector Provision	1
H5 - Registered Provider of Supported Accommodation	PR4 - Private Provision	81
	PR5 - Voluntary/Third Sector Provision	10
K1 - Secure unit	PR2 - Other LA provision	1
K2 - Homes and Hostels		1
	PR1 - Own provision by LA	20
	PR4 - Private Provision	90
	PR5 - Voluntary/Third Sector Provision	1
P1 - Placed with own parents	PR0 - Parents or other person with parental responsibility	30
R3 - Family centre or mother and baby unit	PR3 - Other public provision	1
	PR4 - Private Provision	2
	PR5 - Voluntary/Third Sector Provision	1
U1 - Foster placement with relative or friend- long term fostering		2
	PR1 - Own provision by LA	23
U3 - Foster placement with relative or friend- not long term or FFA		1
	PR1 - Own provision by LA	54
U4 - Placement with other foster carer- long term fostering		3
	PR1 - Own provision by LA	86
	PR4 - Private Provision	38
	PR5 - Voluntary/Third Sector Provision	3
U5 - Placement with other foster carer who is also an approved adopter- FFA	PR1 - Own provision by LA	3
U6 - Placement with other foster carer - not long term or FFA	PR1 - Own provision by LA	144
	PR2 - Other LA provision	2
	PR4 - Private Provision	52
	PR5 - Voluntary/Third Sector Provision	1
Z1 - Other placements		6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>671</b>

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**Report to:** Corporate Parenting Panel

**Date of meeting:** 16 January 2024

**By:** Director of Children's Services

**Title:** Lansdowne Secure Children's Home Progress Update

**Purpose:** To provide brief update on Lansdowne Secure Children's Home

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to note the progress update.**

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### **1 Background**

1.1 A decision was taken in December 2022 to temporarily pause services at Lansdowne Secure Children's Home to support restructuring of the offer and ensure sustainability.

1.2 All staff were temporarily redeployed following consultation; this has provided valuable learning and the opportunity to share skills across other residential children's homes and the Connected Families team.

1.3 A Subject Matter Expert (SME) was employed to support Lansdowne's redesign. Support has also been provided through partnerships with the Secure Accommodation Network (SAN), the Department for Education (DfE), NHS England (Health Commissioners), East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Education Services and an Independent Education Advisor. Care experienced young people including some previously resident at Lansdowne have provided extensive support with recruitment and are helping to build staff induction and children's welcome packs.

1.4 The SME Report in April 2023 identified key areas for development including recruitment/capacity, staff development, practice/behaviour models and infrastructure; the report also identified opportunities to enhance the service through a wider curriculum offer, moving across to digital record management and identifying options to develop the site. A brief update on these areas of focus is provided below. The SME continues to support with advice, guidance and sharing networks.

### **2 Progress**

2.1 **Structure / Recruitment:** The new Lansdowne structure provides a strengthened Senior Management Team which will support practice and ensure a more resilient service. The Looked After Children's Service successfully recruited a skilled Service Manager/Registered Homes Manager who will provide leadership across a multidisciplinary team including Care, Education and Health staff. Support Services (facilities, data, housekeeping) have been enhanced to ensure the smooth running of this complex facility.

2.2 The Care teams are led by two Deputy Service Managers focussed on Operations and Care Planning respectively. These newly appointed managers bring experience across forensic mental health, probation, youth custody, residential care and social pedagogy. They will support an experienced team of Duty Managers, Team Leaders and Support Workers as well as staff focussed on Care Planning and Reintegration.

2.3 **Education** at Lansdowne was previously provided through an Academy Trust. As part of the restructure, we have brought the school under the line management of the Service Manager. The new Head of Learning has developed an ambitious, creative curriculum and has appointed an experienced team to deliver this.

2.4 **Health** services at Lansdowne are commissioned through NHS England but also sit within the revised management structure; consultation is ongoing to ensure a holistic offer including increased Speech and Language provision whilst retaining existing psychology expertise and access to universal services.

2.5 **Policies:** all policies have been reviewed and are being made available online; work to develop a consistent approach across the national secure network is planned for 2024.

2.6 **Incident Management:** The Looked After Children's Service has reviewed its approach to behaviour, incident management and physical restraint. Staff have received Safety Intervention training from the Crisis Prevention Institute and there are now 6 CPI-SI licenced in-house trainers who will support practice, target emerging behaviours and upskill the workforce. This model will be rolled out across East Sussex children's homes as well as at Lansdowne.

2.7 **ClearCare (electronic care management system):** In line with Ofsted guidance and best practice we are moving away from paper-based systems to digital record keeping, this will enhance management oversight, regulatory compliance and reduce inefficiencies. The system also provides powerful analytical tools and promotes children's voices across their record. The system will be tested during January and February prior to full roll out.

2.8 **Estate:** The pause allowed for a full evaluation of the structure of the building and site. Safety issues were identified with fire doors which necessitated significant work to ensure compliance. This work is on track and will not delay reopening. The SME is working with ESCC to develop business proposals and bids for DfE improvement funds, for example to develop a music studio, safer Multi-Use-Games-Area, increased parking and updated media units. These bids are supported in principle by Ofsted, Atkins (estate partners) and the DfE.

2.9 **Business Model:** Children's Services have assessed the market and revised charges accordingly. East Sussex children who require secure accommodation at Lansdowne will be tracked in line with costs avoided. The High Dependency Unit was previously underutilised which will be addressed going forwards.

### **3 Next Steps**

3.1 Ofsted visited Lansdowne on 20 December 2023 and confirmed that subject to registration of the Registered Homes Manager (RHM) the home is ready to reopen. The Service Manager's RHM Application is with Ofsted, we expect confirmation of registration by mid-January which will enable the current restrictions to be lifted.

3.2 Recruitment to remaining support staff posts is underway to ensure that we can scale up to capacity over the next twelve months.

3.3 The Service Manager and SME have met with the Secure Welfare Coordination Unit and are starting to look at referrals in anticipation of accepting children from mid-January.

### **4 Conclusion and Recommendations**

4.1 Members are asked to note the update.

**ALISON JEFFERY**  
**Director of Children's Services**

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MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

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<b>Report to:</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>16 January 2024</b>
<b>By:</b>	<b>Director of Children's Services</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Update on IMPOWER work with East Sussex County Council</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	<b>To update the panel on the work of IMPOWER with Children's Social Care since May 2023</b>

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the update.

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### **1. Background**

1.1. IMPOWER is a consultancy that works exclusively with the public sector with a focus on improving outcomes for people by transforming public services. IMPOWER works with frontline staff across the system to identify opportunities to enhance outcomes. Over the last five years IMPOWER has worked with over thirty local authorities to improve outcomes for children and families and reduce costs, working across Children's Services, with 12 authorities specifically using the Valuing Care approach.

### **2. Supporting information**

2.1 IMPOWER started working with East Sussex County Council in May 2023 focusing on placement sufficiency and enhancing our ability to secure the right care for the right child for the right length of time. The first phase of work focused on better understanding the needs of looked after children in East Sussex and associated pressures in the system and identifying opportunities to do things differently to enhance the existing offer in East Sussex.

2.2 IMPOWER presented a detailed analysis of children and young people's needs in East Sussex and associated placement cost pressures in July 2023, as well as the identification of opportunities within a first cohort of children and young people with complex needs using the Valuing Care approach. IMPOWER worked closely with teams and individuals within Children's Services to develop a set of proposed interventions which can realise the opportunities identified to reduce cost and improve outcomes for children. The proposed interventions included needs-driven changes to care and support using the Valuing Care approach, a coordinated drive to improve foster carer recruitment and retention, and enhanced market management and commissioning to match the current market reality.

2.3 The work with IMPOWER from August to October 2023 (Phase 2) and November 2023 to January 2024 (Phase 3) has focused on progressing the opportunities identified in the first phase of the project.

2.4 A multi-agency panel has been established that is taking a strength-based approach to the opportunities identified in the first cohort of children including reunification with families, step down from children's homes to foster placements, and permanence - all where this is appropriate and the right plan for the individual child. Two home matching events have been held in October and December, which trialled taking a more proactive strength-based approach to finding family based (foster) placements for children and young people matched to their needs. A second larger cohort of children was identified in Phase 2 to continue to roll out the Valuing Care approach and social workers were trained to complete Valuing Care profiles for this additional cohort of looked after children. The opportunities identified in this second cohort of children are currently being progressed. Rigorous tracking has been established to closely monitor the associated financial impact of any placement changes.

2.5 Extensive engagement has also taken place with foster carers and the Fostering Service during August and September 2023 to identify and prioritise opportunities that will have the most impact on foster carer recruitment and retention. These opportunities are being progressed in the current phase of the project, including: the identification and training of Foster Carer Ambassadors to take a key role in a word-of-mouth recruitment campaign; refreshing and improving the East Sussex fostering website; enhancing the buddying scheme for foster carers; and introducing the Valuing Care approach to foster carers to support with identifying strengths and development areas for foster carers, and to support the utilisation and matching of in-house foster carers.

2.6 Work is currently focused on developing clear plans to embed the Valuing Care approach across process, practice and commissioning in East Sussex.

### **3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

3.1 Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the update.

**ALISON JEFFERY**  
**Director of Children's Services**

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#### LOCAL MEMBERS

All

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None