

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 23 October 2024.

PRESENT Councillors Colin Belsey, Bob Bowdler, Anne Cross, Penny di Cara, Kathryn Field (Chair) Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood, Colin Swansborough

ALSO PRESENT Carolyn Fair - Director of Children's Services
Cathy Marriott – Assistant Director of Children's Services
Fiona Lewis - Head of Looked After Children Services - Provider Services
Sally Carnie - Head of Looked After Children Service – Operations
Meshelle Carmody - Children in Care Council Co-ordinator (item 59)
Donna Collins – Operations Manager – Fostering Duty and Commissioning (item 64)
Georgina Seligmann - Governance and Democracy Manager

55. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 JULY 2024

55.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 24 July 2024.

56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

56.1 There were no apologies for absence, Cllr Colin Belsey was welcomed to the CPP.

57. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

57.1 Cllr Colin Belsey declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest that a close family member is an East Sussex County Council (ESCC) CiCC officer.

58. URGENT ITEMS

58.1 There were no urgent items.

59. CICC PLEDGE

59.1 The Panel received a presentation on The Pledge from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and noted that all children in care receive a copy and that a copy has been provided to all Councillors.

59.2 The Panel noted the invitation to the CiCC meeting in December.

60. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

60.1 The Panel RESOLVED to exclude the public and press from the meeting for items 6 and 7 on the agenda (see minutes 50 and 51) 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.

61. REGULATION 44 QUARTERLY SUMMARY REPORT - QUARTER 2 (JULY 2025 - SEPTEMBER 2025)

61.1 The Panel considered the Quarterly Registered Children's Home report relating to all East Sussex County Council Children's Homes, has been developed, including updates from Regulation 44 reports and relevant Ofsted reports for members of the Corporate Parenting Panel to consider.

61.2 Lansdowne Secure Children's Home received an in September, the final report has not been received and so will be shared at the next meeting of the Panel along with the inspection report for Broderick House which took place on 22 October.

61.3 All homes have received monthly visits from their Regulation 44 Independent Person including unannounced visits. The visits continue to pose valuable challenge and offer constructive reflections for the Registered Managers.

61.4 There were 40 recommendations made by the Independent Persons across the 7 homes this Quarter: of these 7 related to Leadership and Management and 14 for the Protection of Children standard. It should be noted that this does not include any recommendations for Lansdowne in September as that report had not been received at the time of writing the report. As reported at previous meetings, there is evidence of managers making good progress across the homes on all recommendations. The Operations Manager appointment has been very successful and is achieving good outcomes and officers have been working to ensure there are appealing career pathways for staff working across the homes which is evidenced through the recent internal promotions.

61.5 The Panel noted that officers do need consider there to be any sustained concerns and that staff may be required to make several different reports about incidents which occur across a short period of time and that this is a manual process which cannot always be achieved at pace and an electronic reporting system is being trialled as a result.

61.6 Officers intend to use Acorns as a short breaks service in the future as it would be an opportunity to build up staff expertise amongst those who cannot work full time or who are building up their skill set.

61.7 The Panel welcomed the new format to the report and requested that future reports include details of any issues the Panel should be aware of.

61.8 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

62. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

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

62.2 Sally Carnie, Head of Looked After Service updated the Panel on the latest position for LAC in East Sussex. The Panel heard that in the last quarter there has been another significant increase in LAC from 655 to 684 (increase of 29). There were 61 children admitted to care and 44 children discharged from care which impacted the overall number. This was made up of several large sibling groups, increased numbers of children being accommodated and a group of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) being transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). Via sections 20 no spontaneous arrivals all via NTS.

62.3 There are fewer children living in Foster Care this quarter but set against this the service is seeing an increase in enquiries and initial visits and approvals and it is hoped that there will be more foster placements available to children in the future as a result.

62.4 Supported housing and accommodation numbers remain stable but fewer children in unregistered placements which is positive. All family type provision has seen an increase in children living in those arrangements which is a sign that the unification strategy is getting some traction. There are 3 children in secure homes but within an ESCC facility so it is raising the income it need to.

62.5 There has been an increase in the leaver population and officers highlighted the need to consider the local offer for these young people. An overreliance on residential agency placements continues to put pressure on budgets though officers always try to use foster care and family placements where appropriate. The service has seen continued levels of children with very complex needs, with a significant increase in last 6 months, and this can then be difficult to put care in place within the family.

62.6 The Council has traditionally tracked well against other Local Authorities with good foster carers and relationships with suppliers however this has slipped and there is a need to increase the number of foster carers and officers wish to look at multi-issue/needs facilities in house. The new commissioning manager meets monthly with neighbours – perform well comparatively but need to do more to increase the capacity to place children in the best placements. The number of inhouse placements has increased by 30% which is positive.

62.7 There is has a significant group of children post covid who are experiencing mental health challenges which means they cannot be looked after at home due to their complex need and officers work with the Integrated Care Board to see how needs can be met at an earlier stage.

62.8 The Panel agreed that a report at a future meeting which sets out a fostering timeline would be welcome and noted that officers will bring a dashboard with a summary of the overall performance which would include financial information.

62.9 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

63. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN ANNUAL REPORT

63.1 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 2023-24.

63.2 Sally Carnie and Fiona Lewis, Head of LAC Services drew the Panel's attention to the following points:

- Ofsted Inspection: LAC judged to be outstanding:
 - Children go into care at the right time after all family options have been explored.

- CIC are well cared for and live in placements which meet their needs and care leavers were well supported.
 - Social workers and personal advisors were found to support young people very well.
- 883 children looked after over the year; the rate is higher post pandemic and officers are working to stabilise and then reduce the figures. The level of complexity is much higher which makes finding appropriate placements more challenging.
 - 30% of children have a global majority background and most of these are separated children and a number of care leavers (1/3) now made up of that cohort.
 - There has been a significant increase in children placed in agency children's homes; a 60% increase since 2021 in use of homes which is the reason for cost escalation and reflects the national situation.
 - There have been improvements in adoption numbers and timeliness and more than 3 placements and outcomes for care leavers.
 - ESCC is part of a regional adoption partnership, 15 children were adopted and officers remain highly ambitious for children in care.
 - There has been significant amount of work to increase the number of Fostering households with a net increase of 8. Recruitment remains very challenging and is a national issue, there is a new payment structure in place this year so much more competitive.
 - The placement support service is vital to the success of the placements which has helped 134 children this year.
 - ICB recognise that these children's health needs should be prioritised across the system and mental health and emotional wellbeing of LAC key focus.
 - Education: virtual school is an area of excellence, extended duty for children in need and on protection plans and adopted children and there is a focus on employment opportunities for care leavers.
 - Officers have worked with Impower to do improved forecasting work and whether the right interventions were in place and could the placement mix be managed differently. Achieved some significant changes for some children using the Valuing Care approach and now want to embed it across the service and the new dashboard will highlight if this is having the designed impact.
 - There was an overspend of £27 million and work is focused on fostering placements and to manage the market more efficiently and the residential strategy.

63.3 The Panel noted that it can be challenging to forecast the costs of very complex care delivered in house however in house residentials generally offer better value for money. There is often more staffing required for in house placements and the cost is also driven by the need for health to be available to them all the time. This is part of the work of the regional groups which will look at regional sufficiency and best practice in other LAs which has helped expedite setting up in house facilities.

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

64. PLACEMENT AND COMMISSIONING TEAM

64.1 The panel considered a presentation about the Placement and Commissioning Team introduced by who drew the Panel's attention to the following points:

- Understanding and managing the market, building relationship and sufficiency planning are all vital to the success of the work of the team which aims to find a needs led, high quality and cost-effective home for each individual child.
- ESCC works with partner Local Authorities in signing up to shared frameworks to cap market pricing and work collaboratively in improving market management.
- The Valuing Care tool is being imbedded within the work of the team; this supports understanding of a child's needs and progress made, enabling timely reduction in package costs/ step down.
- Day to day the team have between 70 –110 children open or waiting to move into identified placements.
- Next steps for Commissioning include:
 - Tender of agencies to support commissioned packages and review of frameworks.
 - Scrutiny of packages of care to ensure review of cost, and appropriate move on/step down.
 - Participation in the Regional Care Co-operative and Regional Fostering hub.

Councillor Kathryn Field
Chair