

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 29 January 2026.

PRESENT Councillors Kathryn Field, Bob Bowdler, Georgia Taylor, Penny di Cara and Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood

ALSO PRESENT Carolyn Fair – Director of Children’s Services
Kathy Marriott – Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care
Deborah Ennis – Assistant Director, Commissioning and Transformation
Fiona Lewis – Head of Looked After Children Services – Provider Services
Sally Carnie – Head of Looked After Children Services – Operations
Sarah Roper-Brooks – Designated Nurse and Deputy Head, Children in care and care leavers, NHS Sussex, Integrated Care Board
Katie Smee-Giles – Principal Social Worker
Jill Nwokedi – Operations Manager
Summer Kelly – Governance and Democracy Officer

28. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2025

28.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2025.

29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

29.1 Apologies were received for Councillor Colin Belsey. Councillor Penny di Cara was in attendance as substitute.

29.2 Apologies were also received for Councillor Anne Cross and Councillor Colin Swansborough.

30. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

30.1 There were none.

31. URGENT ITEMS

31.1 There were none.

32. REPORTS

32.2 Reports referred to in the minutes below are contained in the minute book.

33. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

33.1 RESOLVED to exclude the public and press from the meeting for item 7 (see minute 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 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual.

34. CHILDREN'S HOME REGULATIONS 2015, REGULATION 44: INSPECTION REPORTS FOR JULY - SEPTEMBER 2025 AND RECENTLY PUBLISHED OFSTED INSPECTION REPORTS

34.1 The Panel considered the Quarterly Registered Children's Home report relating to all East Sussex County Council Children's Homes, including updates from Regulation 44 reports and relevant Ofsted reports.

34.2 The following points were highlighted to the Corporate Parenting Panel:

- 1) Six East Sussex County Council Residential Children's Homes have been rated 'good'; and Broderick House has recently received an 'Outstanding' Ofsted judgement.
- 2) All homes received monthly visits from their relevant Regulation 44 Independent Person, this included unannounced visits.
- 3) The variation to transition for Acorns Residential Home to become Seaside Short Breaks has been submitted to Ofsted. The service will also be registered with Care Quality Commission, this will allow for enhanced care. Recruitment to the service has been positive. Acorns Seaside Short Break is awaiting an Ofsted visit; children cannot be placed in the home without the Ofsted visit taking place.

34.3 Following the discussion, the Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

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

36. CORPORATE PARENTING MONITORING REPORT: CHILDREN WE CARE FOR

36.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services.

36.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel:

- 1) The data published within the report is largely similar to the patterns and trends of last year. East Sussex County Council children in care continues to be below the national rate of England.
- 2) A total of 420 children were living in foster care at the end of December 2025, this is an increase of 7 since the last quarter. This makes up 60% of the overall total number of Children in Care due to the rise in the overall number of children in care. 269 (an increase of 6) were living with approved East Sussex County Council carers. 96 children were living with external agency foster carers which is a decrease of one.
- 3) 10 children were placed in unregistered provision, the majority are aged 16-17 and are within provision that is in the process of registering with Ofsted, or in CQC placements. The panel heard that unregistered placements are only used in exceptional circumstances where there is no suitable alternative regulated provision available.

36.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

37. HEADING HOME UPDATE

37.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services.

37.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel:

1) Heading Home is the term now used instead of reunification, this was changed following staff and child centred consultation and is built on the NSPCC framework along with guidance following national reform.

2) The Heading Home Strategy is underpinned by clear principles, such as children at the heart of decision-making, recognising and managing risk as part of good social work and a whole system approach.

3) There has been a culture shift on the nature of permanence for children. The service focus is on enabling, where appropriate and safe, children to return to their family networks, whilst recognising that for some children this is not possible

37.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

38. LANGUAGE OF CARE UPDATE

38.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services.

38.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel:

1) Following staff consultation and working group efforts new terminology was introduced within East Sussex County Council in September 2025, the new terminology is highlighted at appendix 1 to the report.

2) A further service development day has been planned, in order to allow for the Children We Care For service to explore respectful language.

3) It is hoped that the change in terminology will better reflect the care, support and respect that East Sussex County Council strives to provide.

38.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

39. VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT

39.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services.

39.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel:

1) The Virtual School is funded through a combination of the Pupil Premium grant, Children with a Social Worker grant and the base budgets within Children's Services.

2) The Virtual School aims to support the best possible educational outcomes for Children in Care, children with a social worker as well as children previously looked after and those in Kinship care.

3) The Virtual School has worked with school and Local Authority services to ensure that there were no permanent exclusions of children in care last academic year. A range of interventions were put in place including additional adults, alternative provisions and placement support.

4) The Children in Care Achievement Awards took place at Bedes School in October 2024, where Jacqueline Wilson presented the awards. In March 2025 Achievement Awards for a younger cohort took place. A number of trips have also been held for the Virtual School cohort, these have included visits to Bede's School Zoo, Depot cinema in Lewes, Glyndebourne Opera House and Brighton University Engineering department.

5) The Virtual School continues to work closely with the Fostering Placement Team, the Assessment and Planning team to support children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and have continued to fund an Extended Support Assistant within the Team Around the School Team (TASS).

6) Since 2021, Virtual School Heads have had a non-statutory strategic duty to promote the educational outcomes of all children with a social worker and a cohort of children who have poorer outcomes in all areas. In September 2024, this role was extended to include children in Kinship care. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will go on to make this role statutory.

39.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

The meeting ended at 11.59 am.

Councillor Kathryn Field
Chair