

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** 12 December 2017

**Report by:** Director of Children's Services

**Title:** Annual Progress Report of Looked After Children's Services  
1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017

**Purpose:** To outline the performance of the Looked After Children's Service  
between 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017

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**RECOMMENDATION:** The Cabinet is recommended to note the contents of the report

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**1. Background**

The Annual Report is attached as Appendix 1. At present the full comparative national data is still not available and so an update will be provided to the next Corporate Parenting Panel meeting so that local performance can be assessed in that context.

**2. Budget Implications**

The services for Looked After Children (LAC) are supported via core funding from the CSA budget, a small proportion of the Dedicated Schools Grant and the Pupil Premium for additional education support for children.

**3. Recommendations and Reasons for them**

Cabinet is recommended to note the contents of the report.

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Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None

**List of Appendices**

**Appendix 1** - LAC Annual Report 2016 – 2017

Listed within Appendix 1 are the following annexes:

**Annexe 1** - Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017

**Annexe 2** – Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 1 April 2016– 31 March 2017

**Annexe 3** – Independent Reviewing Officer's Annual Report 2016 – 2017

**Annexe 4** - Missing People Annual Report

**Annexe 5** – LAC Mental Health Service Audit 2016 -17

## 1 Looked after Children Trend Data

1.1 On 31 March 2017 there were 558 Looked After Children (LAC) in ESCC; this represents an increase of 14 children (2.57%) as compared to 2015/16 and a rate of 52.7 per 10,000 population. This is below the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) expected rate (a measure in terms of population profiles and deprivation levels) of 57.2 and the 2016 England rate of 60.3.

1.2 There is a strong link between rates of LAC and the rate of children subject to Child Protection (CP) Plans, with arguably some risk held at that lower level. The rate of children subject to CP plans has shown an increase from 44.2 per 10,000 in 2015-16 to 44.9 per 10,000 in 2016/17. This is higher than the IDACI expected rate of 42.9 and the 2016 England rate of 43.1.

1.3 The LAC data only ever gives a snapshot of the children moving in and out of the system at a fixed date each month/year and considerable activity sits beneath it. The data below is referred to as 'churn'. This cohort of children will come in and out of the system within the year, or some may come in and stay whilst others leave. It has been calculated that the churn figure for 2016/17 is 175 which, when added to the total number of LAC, equates to the service working with 733 children. This total figure is higher than last year (729 children), but the churn rate was lower than for the previous years (185 for 2015/16, 179 2014/15).

1.4 There was an increase in admissions to care from 190 during 2015/16 to 198 during 2016/17. This increase was across all age groups. The number of 0-5 year olds admitted to care during 2016/17 increased from 94 in 2015/16 to 98 in 2016/17, with a slight increase in admissions for 6-12 year olds from 43 in 2015/16 to 44 for 2016/17 and for children aged 13+ an increase from 53 for 2015/16 to 56 in 2016/17.

1.5 At year end there was a decrease in the number of LAC discharged from care, from 191 in 2015/16 to 183. The number of 0-12 year olds discharged from care also fell to 106 during 16/17 from 117 in 15/16. This was made up of 77 0-5 year olds and 29 were 6-12 year olds. There was a slight increase in the 13+ age group from 74 discharged in 2015/16 to 77 in 2016/17.

1.6 These figures combined continue to show a picture of an overall increase in the number of LAC worked with during the course of the year. There remains a high level of activity with the cohort of 0 to 5 year olds given the increased number of admissions and fewer discharges as children became subject to Adoption, Special Guardianship or Residence Orders, or remained in family arrangements. The 6 to 12 year old cohort showed higher admissions to care with a similar discharge pattern (as in the previous year), producing a net increase over the year. This means that for this age cohort of children, once they enter care, they tend to remain in permanent placements. The 13+ cohort continue to show a higher level of admissions. This relates mainly to a few children with complex needs, who are often subject to child sexual and/or criminal exploitation, as well as children remanded to care, or who are unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASCs).

1.7 In terms of UASC, at year end ESCC was caring for 24 children, mainly male and over 16, with an additional 15 having ongoing support needs as care leavers. These young people have usually arrived in a clandestine way via Newhaven, or been found elsewhere in East Sussex. East Sussex also continued to accept UASC via the national dispersal scheme. A small number of young people have disappeared from care placements before age assessments can be completed to determine whether they are indeed children.

1.8 The end of year snapshot data showing LAC placements were as follows (2016 figures in brackets):-

with foster carers	429	(440)
Of these: in house carers	304	(313)
Kinship carers	38	(37)
Agency carers	87	(90)
Placed for adoption	30	(31)
In supported lodgings	14	(7)
ESCC children's homes	23	(18)
Agency children's homes	25	(26)
Agency special schools	1	(1)
Placed with parents	23	(16)
Independent Living	7	*
Youth custody/secure unit	5	(5)
Hospital/NHS establishment	1	(0)
Absconded	0	*

\*not recorded as a separate category for 2015/16

## 2. Fostering

2.1 On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 there were 456 children in foster care. 392 of these children were placed with in-house placements. This includes in-house 'parent and child' placements, children subject to Special Guardianship Orders placed with foster carers and those older young people remaining in their "Staying Put" fostering placements through to independence. The number of East Sussex LAC placed with agency foster carers has decreased from 77 children in 2015/16 to 64 at the end of March 2017. The figures above illustrate that 86% of children were looked after by in-house foster carers, which is an increase of 4% from the previous year.

2.2 2016/2017 has been another challenging year for the recruitment of foster carers. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) experience is consistent with that of both of our neighbouring authorities and of Fostering Services nationally, who have all reported similar challenges. Fostering capacity appears to have reached saturation point in the South East and at times the placement team has found the Private Provider market unable to respond to the demand for fostering placements of any kind. Very complex and challenging children are particularly hard to place with sometimes 50+ searches yielding nothing.

2.3 21 households offering 50 placements were approved in 2016/17 compared to 26 households in 2015/16 offering 44 placements. 3 of these households were transfers from Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) providers, and 1 of these households already had an East Sussex child placed with them at the point of transfer. 17 further assessments did not progress to Stage 2 (presentation to the Fostering Panel) due to a combination of changes in personal circumstances that could not have been predicted earlier, incentives offered to IFA foster carers to remain with their agencies and concerns emerging about standards. Despite the fall in the numbers of new approvals, ESCC Fostering Service performs better in relation to both recruitment and retention as compared to our immediate neighbouring authorities based on the Ofsted Dataset returns of 2015/16. More up to date comparative data is awaited.

2.4 ESCC Supported Lodgings carers provided a number of 'step-down placements' for children from residential and foster placements and for vulnerable homeless young people. As in the previous year, the service has seen an increase in the number of young people with very complex needs. A few young people have been able to step-down from therapeutic residential placements to supported lodgings

providers. This has in part been due to the support and training on offer to carers and to the increased approval of 6 carers being dual registered as both foster carers, and Supported Lodgings carers. The use of Supported Lodgings carers as 'step down' has achieved a saving of £419,000 over the year, but more importantly it has also been in young people's best interests, supporting them on the path to independence. At March 2017 there were 34 Supported Lodgings households providing a total of 50 placements across the county. This has given the service a net gain of 2 households and one placement as a result of 5 resignations and 7 new approvals. A priority for 2017/18 is to recruit a broader range of Supported Lodgings carers as part of a Corporate accommodation project investment for 2017/18. Please see **Annex 1** for full Fostering Service Annual Report 2016-17.

### **3. Physical and Mental Health**

3.1 Performance in relation to the timeliness of Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) during 2016/17 has improved. The proportion of IHAs completed on time (within 20 working days), increased from 49% in 2015/16 to 63.8% in 2016/17. 71% of initial health assessments were completed within 25 working days. At the end of March 2017 the contract for IHAs and for undertaking adoption medicals transferred from Kent Healthcare Trust to East Sussex Healthcare Trust (ESHT) following an effective transitional period from December 2016 onwards. This has the advantage of integrating IHAs, LAC health care plans and adoption medicals as part of the community paediatric service agreed with ESHT. The intention is to create greater clarity across the system with all health partners, including maternity services, health visiting and school nursing, and also with social work, adoption and fostering teams in ESCC. A more integrated pathway should lead to further improvements in timely IHAs and to the delivery of better health care plans for children.

3.2 The LAC Mental Health Service (LACMHS) received 64 new referrals during 2016/17, all of which were accepted and an initial consultation was offered. A number of children were also seen urgently due to the severity of the symptoms they presented such as suicidal thoughts and/or serious self-harm, depression or psychotic symptoms. In addition, there was also a cohort of LAC in receipt of ongoing therapeutic support such as individual therapy, dyadic therapy (child and carer together), systemic therapy and/or consultation to the foster carer and network. At one point there were 78 LAC in receipt of this service. LACMHS also provided:

- Two Therapeutic Parenting Groups (working with 21 carers of 15 young people, their social workers and supervising social workers)
- Three Therapeutic Parenting Groups provided to the residential staff of Homefield, Brodrick House and Hazel Lodge
- Weekly consultation to staff at Homefield, Brodrick House and Hazel Lodge.
- Weekly consultation to the Through Care Team
- Monthly 'drop in' surgeries to the Fostering Service and each of the three LAC teams
- Mental health services commissioned by NHS England to Lansdowne Secure Unit, including sessions of a child and adolescent psychiatrist, a clinical psychologist, and a mental health nurse.

3.3 LACMHS continues to work in close collaboration with its partner agencies to provide a service for children with a care plan of permanent placement out of their birth family. The response to new referrals continues to be prompt (e.g. a risk assessment being provided within one week) and ongoing therapeutic work continues to be highly valued by all partners. The challenge for LACMHS continues to be the increased complexity of children within the LAC cohort, and the consequent demand for intensive ongoing support to the child/young person and their networks. The impact on service delivery has meant that the waiting time for ongoing

therapeutic interventions for some children continues to be lengthy. However; alternative ways of reducing waiting times are being discussed within the team, and with the management of Sussex Partnership Trust.

For a more detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis see **Annex 5** LAC Mental Health Service Audit 2016 -17, LAC in Fostering and Residential.

#### 4. Adoption and Permanence

##### 4.1

	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
1. Number of children adopted	57	43	45	38
2. Number of adoption matches (children)	50	56	32	38
3. Number of permanent fostering matches (children)	10	7	10	14
4. Number of East Sussex adoptive matches (children)	40	33	26	30
5. Number of consortium adoptive matches (children)	1	6	0	0
6. Number of inter-agency matches (children):				
Permanence:	4	3	2	0
Adoption:	9	17	6	8
7. Number of prospective adopters approved (households)	44	50	41	30
8. Number of permanent carers approved (households)	8	4	2	1
9. Number of children approved for adoption up to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017 (including 2 re-approvals)	52	43	53	52
10. Number of children approved for permanence up to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017	24	26	14	32
11. Number of approved adopters waiting to be matched	17	20	22	20
12. Number of disruptions presented to Panel:				
Permanence:	0	0	0	0
Adoptions:	1	0	1	0

4.2 The number of children with a plan for adoption remained consistent with 53 in 2015/16 and 52 in 2016/17. This consistency was not reflected nationally, with some Courts appearing to favour Special Guardianship Orders over Adoption Orders.

Locally there appeared to be more children who remained with their birth families during the legal process with an eventual removal than had been seen in previous years. This has the potential to build in greater delay in permanence planning for some children. The service placed the majority of children with ESCC adopters. Of the 44 children matched this year, 36 were matched with ESCC approved adopters, and 8 placed with interagency adopters. Of the 8; there were 2 sibling pairs, one sibling group of 3 children and a single child. Most of the children with a plan for adoption had experienced domestic violence, trauma and loss, and were likely to have ongoing and complex therapeutic, post adoption support needs as a result. The national Adoption Scorecard issued by the Department for Education (DfE) evidenced that ESCC placed children for adoption more speedily than the national average, achieving placement in 212 days as compared to 223 days in the previous year.

4.3 During 2016/17 the Agency received 192 enquiries from people interested in adoption, 81 households attended information events and 46 households moved on to register their formal interest. The conversion rate from information event to registration remained high, but unfortunately only 30 adopters were approved by year end. This fall in the numbers of new approvals reflects the national picture where there is often a mismatch between the type of child adopters want and are approved for and the profile of children needing adoptive families.

4.4 The specialist mental health service, 'AdCAMHS' has continued to offer a dedicated therapy and consultation service during the year to families post adoption. The service works to maximise adoption stability by promoting positive attachments within adoptive families which ultimately will hopefully prevent placement breakdown. At year end 'AdCAMHS' was working with an average of 65 families. The Adoption Service has continued to work closely with the Government's Adoption Support Fund to provide therapeutic support but sadly to date it hasn't been possible to move from a model that seeks funding for individual children/families to a potentially much more cost effective model of funding the whole of AdCAMHS. The placement of children with complex needs, or who are older and part of sibling groups always poses more challenges in the context of adoption support and sadly a number of older children have returned to the care system.

Please see attached **Annex 2** for Adoption Service full Annual Report.

## **5. Residential Services**

5.1 The childrens' homes have continued to make overall progress in both ensuring good outcomes for children and in improvements to their Ofsted ratings. All homes successfully completed therapeutic parenting training with their staff, delivered over several months by CAMHS colleagues. This has had a very positive impact on staff, and on the quality of care provided to the young people with the most complex needs and challenging behaviours. The homes have worked hard with a number of young people in their care, facilitating moves either back home or into supported accommodation.

5.2 In the summer of 2016 a new Registered Homes Manager was appointed to Brodrick House, thus providing additional capacity within the management structure in order to satisfy Ofsted regulations and expectations. This has helped to improve Ofsted inspection ratings across the homes with all being judged as 'Good' during this reported period. Two new external Deputy Managers were also appointed to two of the group homes bringing new enthusiasm and experience to the management team.

5.3 The Registered Manager of Lansdowne Secure Unit had an extended period of absence during 2016. Fortunately this period was covered by a very experienced

manager from an “Outstanding” secure unit from another local authority. Immediately after this interim appointment, Lansdowne was subject to a full Ofsted inspection. The interim manager was instrumental in pulling together a rigorous improvement plan following a disappointing inspection judgement of ‘Requires Improvement’. Staff and managers worked hard with the improvement plan in place to reach a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating at the next full inspection.

5.4 Care of LAC who are disabled and Inspection outcomes of the two homes have remained strong. Over the year the Disability Service has moved to a model of having a separate registered manager for both the Bungalow and Acorns in December 2016 in line with expectations from Ofsted.

## **6. Care Leavers Service**

6.1 In 2016 the DfE produced the strategy document ‘Keep on Caring’, which sets out a vision to reform support for care leavers based on innovation, system reform, and on the embedding of Corporate Parenting responsibility across society. It identifies 5 key outcomes that care leavers will be supported to achieve:

- Be better prepared and supported to live independently
- Have improved access to education, employment and training
- Experience stability and feel safe and secure
- Have improved access to health support
- Achieve financial stability

6.2 The Government has underpinned this strategy with revised legislation (The Children and Family Social Work Act 2017) particularly in relation to Corporate Parenting responsibilities, and is fully expecting that alternative delivery models will be explored and implemented. There is recognition that there is a need for a cross Government approach as many of the issues are interrelated. Key aspects of this new legislation requires Councils to provide a published local offer for all its care leavers, and to extend the role of Personal Advisors to support care leavers up to 25 years.

6.3 As a response to the “Keep on Caring” Government strategy, ESCC undertook its own self-assessment against the 10 ‘gold standards’, which have been developed from a range of sources including from the Ofsted framework, DfE data packs and the Children’s Commissioner. The framework allows ESCC to identify both its current strengths and the areas that need development. An improvement plan for the Care Leaver’s service is in place for 2017/18.

6.4 At the end of 2016/17, the service was working with 241 young people; 13 under 16, 71 16 - 17 year olds and 157 18 - 24 year olds. A significant proportion of these young people had highly complex behaviour with a range of challenging safeguarding issues. A ‘Through Care’ model has been established, whereby younger LAC with complex challenging behaviours were referred to the service at an earlier stage with the aim of establishing a relationship with a care leaving specialist to help plan a more seamless transition into independence. This model has worked well for a number of children who have responded positively to the different approach and to a more empowering ethos.

6.5. The Care2Work strategic board has implemented a range of developments designed to improve the skills of care leavers and to ensure a successful transition into education and employment. The action plan was reviewed in 2016/17 and it was pleasing to note that there had been a significant impact on the employability of this cohort of young people. With the appointment of an enterprise advisor and in line with the ‘Keep on Caring’ agenda, a new action plan and programme for 2017/18 will

aim to consolidate and embed the good practice already established, and in particular to contribute to the Passport to Independence for each young person.

6.6 As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, of the children who were in continuous care for at least 12 months before sitting their GCSE examinations, 72% (23/32) of 16 – 17 year olds (year 12) were in education, training and employment (EET); 71% (32/45) of 17 - 18 year olds (year 13) were EET. This performance, although slightly lower than last year, included a greater cohort of care leavers who had significant learning disabilities, and who were managed within the Disability Transition Service. Of all eligible care leavers, 13% (18/140) were at University.

National data updated in February 2017 for care leavers who are ETT, and were looked after (for a total of at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday including some time after their 16th birthday), show that ESCC performs better as compared to the national average and to the South East:

	National	SE	East SX
17 & 18 year olds	61%	59%	65%
19, 20, 21 year olds	49%	47%	61%

National data updated in February 2017 for care leavers who are 19, 20, 21, and who are eligible for Higher Education (HE) and were looked after for (a total of at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday including some time after their 16th birthday), again shows that ESCC performs significantly better as compared to the national average and the South East:

	National	SE	East SX
19, 20, 21 year olds	7%	5%	13%

6.7 As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 there were 5 16 to 18 year old care leavers living in bed and breakfast accommodation. Clearly this type of accommodation is completely unsuitable for care leavers. To address these challenges, and improve outcomes for young people, on 22 February 2017, the Chief Executive agreed to invest £650,000 to transform the accommodation offer for vulnerable young people. The scope of the Project is as follows:

- Vulnerable young people including care leavers and homeless young people
- Increasing the numbers of supported lodgings providers
- Developing the market and undertake specialist commissioning for supported semi-independent and independent accommodation
- Developing a 'Staying Close' provision to residential children's homes
- Developing a medium and high risk Crash Pad accommodation

This work is currently being overseen by a Project Board whose membership comprises representatives of key commissioning bodies, housing authorities, relevant service providers and young people and provides strategic, operational and specialist input and expertise. It includes the Assistant Directors of Children and Adult Services and Heads of Housing for the 4 districts and boroughs. The Project Board will report to the Health and Housing Subgroup of the East Sussex Better Together Programme Board to ensure strategic coherence. Progress in developing a range of supported accommodation options for care leavers and vulnerable young people will be a key priority for the forthcoming 18 months.

6.8 Transition planning for LAC who are the most complex in terms of disability is managed by a specialist Transitions Team, managed within Adult Social Care.

## 7. Performance

7.1 Although performance is set out in the grid below, the 2016/17 national data set has not yet been published by the DfE, therefore this section does not benchmark the performance of ESCC against other local authorities and statistical neighbours for 2016/17. There continues to be significant improvement in adoption timeliness and in reduced offending of LAC. However, there has been a dip in performance in placement stability (NI63 and NI62). This is largely attributed to some movements of children in large sibling groups (due to limited placement options at the point of reception into care) and to a small cohort of young people with complex needs and challenging behaviours. There has also been a dip in performance of care leavers aged 17 to 21 placed in suitable accommodation and young people aged 17-21 who were in education, employment or training. However, the other indicators in relation to employability of older LAC and care leavers remains well above the South East and national averages (see 6.1 above). LAC in ESCC continue to achieve better educational outcomes than their peers nationally, particularly at key stage 1 and at key stage 4. A specific report from the Virtual School will be available later in the year when educational outcomes have been validated nationally. The Independent Reviewing Officer Report in **Annex 3** also provides some helpful information.

Where performance has improved/increased it is shown with a ↑ and where it has dipped with a ↓

Indicator Ref	Description	2016/17 Value	2015/16 Eng	2015/16 Value	2014/15 Eng	2014/15 Value	2013/14 Eng	2013/14 Value
NI 58	Emotional & Behavioural Health of children in care	14.2 ↓	14.0	13.4 ↑	13.9	15.4 ↓	13.9	15.1 ↓
Adoption Scorecard 1	Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted. (3 year average)	479 days ↑	558 days	517 days ↑	593 days	520 days ↑	628 days	536 days ↑
Adoption Scorecard 2	Average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match with an adoptive family (3 year average)	212 days ↑	226 days	223 days ↓	223 days	190 days ↑	217 days	199 days ↓
Adoption Scorecard 3	% of children who wait less than 16 months between	61% ↑	47%	59% ↑	47%	57% ↑	51%	54% ↑

Indicator Ref	Description	2016/17 Value	2015/16 Eng	2015/16 Value	2014/15 Eng	2014/15 Value	2013/14 Eng	2013/14 Value
	entering care & moving in with their adoptive family (3 year average)							
NI62 Placements 1	Number of children looked after with 3 or more placements during the year	13.8% ↓	10.0%	10.8% ↓	10.0%	9.7% ↓	10.9%	8.9% ↑
NI63 Placements 2	% of LAC under 16 who've been lac for 2.5 years or more & in the same placement for 2 years or placed for adoption	65.0% ↓	68.0%	64.0% ↔	68.0%	64.0% ↑	66.5%	57.4% ↓
Placements 3	% of LAC at 31 <sup>st</sup> March placed outside LA boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live	10.0% ↓	13.0%	9.4% ↑	12.5%	10.0% ↓	12.2%	8.7% ↑
Leaving Care 2 <i>* see note below</i>	% of former relevant young people aged 17-21 who were in education, employment or training	55.5% ↓	49.0%	62.4% ↑	47.8%	52.6% ↓	45.0%	55.0%
Leaving Care 3	% of former relevant young people aged 17-21 who were in suitable accommodation	76.1% ↓	83.0%	81.7% ↑	80.7%	74.3% ↓	77.6%	85.3%
Thrive PI 9	Rate of Children looked after per 10,000 population aged under 18	53.0 ↓	60.0	51.7 ↔	60.0	51.7 ↑	60.0	54.5 ↑
PAF C19	Average of the % of children looked after who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months who had an annual	90.3% ↓	87.0%	92.8% ↑	87.7%	92.6% ↓	86.4%	93.5% ↑

Indicator Ref	Description	2016/17 Value	2015/16 Eng	2015/16 Value	2014/15 Eng	2014/15 Value	2013/14 Eng	2013/14 Value
	assessment and their teeth checked by a dentist during the previous 12 months.							
PAF C81	Final warnings, reprimands and convictions of lac	3.4% ↑	5.0%	3.8% ↔	5.2%	3.8% ↓	5.6%	1.8% ↑

*\* Leaving Care 2 Indicator – this is calculated using data collected at the time of each young person’s 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.*

## 8. The Virtual School

8.1 The Virtual School for LAC maintained a core staffing establishment during 2016/17, supporting the education of all ESCC LAC, care leavers and adopted children wherever they were educated. Pupil Premium from the Government enabled the school to enhance its provision to schools, carers, individual LAC, and recruit a bank of specialist tutors. In addition, the Head of the Virtual School fostered excellent working relationships across the Council and with the local community, which resulted in LAC being prioritised for a range of complementary services such as the establishment of the VS choir, supported by both the ES Music service and by Glyndebourne. .

## 9. LAC who are Missing from Care and who are at risk of Children’s Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

9.1 Multi Agency Children’s Sexual Exploitation (MACSE) operational and strategic groups continue for all children missing and at risk of CSE. The groups sit within the structure of the LCSB. The process involves monthly multi agency meetings on both sides of the county, co-chaired by social work managers and by the Police. A very positive multi agency audit was completed in January 2017 that identified effective working practices. A clear and emerging theme in the last 6-9 months has been the increase in cases relating to criminal exploitation where children aged 13-17 are being groomed and recruited to assist in the supply of illicit drugs, including heroin and crack cocaine, within East Sussex. This issue has been identified across the county, but with specific ‘hot spots’ in certain areas. A number of children from other Local Authorities, especially from London, are also being exploited criminally to come and supply drugs in East Sussex. Some of these criminals are also mixing with some of our most vulnerable children locally, thereby increasing the risks.

9.2 The strategic Action Plan remains a live document that is updated regularly and includes details of emerging themes from casework that is being carried out. The priorities for 2016/17 included tackling the emerging risks around criminal exploitation and continuing the greater awareness of and focus on boys, who can be missed all too easily.

9.3 All Return Home Interviews (RHIs) relating to missing children in East Sussex are now carried out by a national charity, Missing People, who are an independent organisation commissioned to deliver this work across Sussex by the three Sussex Local Authorities and by Sussex Police. RHIs are offered to all children who are reported to and treated as missing by Sussex Police. As a new development in

2016/17, a weekly meeting took place between East Sussex MASH Practice Managers, Sussex Police and staff from Missing People. This acted as an additional check and balance in the system to ensure that all children being recorded as both missing and absent (not where they should be, but we knew where they were), were being offered an effective response. As part of this meeting, MASH Practice Managers have access to the current list of children in ESCC childrens' homes, since these children are a particularly vulnerable group. The Registered Homes Managers are able to feed into this meeting to determine when they feel RHIs are also required for children categorised as absent rather than as missing but where an interview is needed given their overall level of vulnerability.

9.4 In 2016/17 32 LAC went missing, 11 of whom were missing more than once. There were also 8 LAC who were absent, and 4 of these were absent more than once. In terms of periods of when children were missing, there were 56 occasions of children being missing for less than 24 hours, 10 times when they were missing between 24-48 hours, 7 times when they were missing between 2 and 4 days and 13 times when they were missing for 5 days or more. All these children were actively tracked by Sussex Police and by Children Services staff. Risk assessments are regularly reviewed on high profile children who go missing and, where necessary, formal multi agency strategy discussions are held in line with Safeguarding Procedures.

9.5 Of the 32 LAC that went missing, 19 were male and 13 were female. 13 of this cohort were aged 16 and above. For further information on the data see **Annex 4**, the Missing People Annual Report.

## **10. Inspections**

10.1 The inspection outcomes for the residential homes during 2016/17 were as follows:-

- Homefield full inspection 24/07/16 was judged overall as 'good'.
- Interim inspection 6/01/17 judged as 'improved effectiveness'.
- Hazel Lodge full inspection 22/07/16 was judged overall as 'good'.
- Interim inspection 14/12/16 judged as 'improved effectiveness'.
- Brodrick House full inspection 08/09/16 judged overall as 'good'.
- Interim inspection 24/01/17 judged as 'sustained effectiveness'.
- Lansdowne Secure Unit 12/07/2016 judged overall as 'requires improvement'.
- Interim inspection 21/02/17 judged as 'improved effectiveness'.
- The Bungalow full inspection 06/07/16. judged overall as "outstanding"
- Interim inspection 27/02/17 judged as "Declined in Effectiveness"
- Acorns full inspection 26/10/16 judged as overall "good"
- Interim inspection 26/10/16 judged as "Sustained Effectiveness"

## **11. Corporate Parenting Panel**

11.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel met quarterly during 2016/17 to scrutinise the performance of all services in relation to LAC and Care Leavers, paying particular attention to outcomes. It also received presentations from the Children in Care Council and from the East Sussex Foster Care Association. The reports set out below were presented and considered:

April 2016:

- Update on Preparations for SEND Inspection
- Safeguarding concerns for young people in Secure Training Centres
- Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics
- Ofsted Inspection reports for the following

- Acorns at Dorset Road
  - Brodrick House
  - Hazel Lodge
  - Homefield Cottage
  - Lansdowne Secure Unit
- Children's Home Regulations 2015, Regulation 44: Inspection reports for December 2015 & January 2016 for the following children's homes:
    - Acorns at Dorset Road
    - Brodrick House
    - Hazel Lodge
    - Homefield Cottage
    - Lansdowne Secure Unit
    - The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive

July 2016:

- Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2015/16
- Ofsted Inspection reports for the Bungalow – March 2016
- Children's Home Regulations 2015, Regulation 44: Inspection reports for march and April 2015 for the following children's homes:
  - Acorns at Dorset Road
  - Brodrick House
  - Hazel Lodge
  - Homefield Cottage
  - Lansdowne Secure Unit
  - The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive
- Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics
- Annual progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service
- Annual progress report of the East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service

October 2016:

- Ofsted Inspection reports for the following
  - Hazel Lodge
  - Homefield Cottage
  - Lansdowne Secure Unit
  - The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive
- Children's Home Regulations 2015, Regulation 44: Inspection reports for May, June and July 2015 for the following children's homes:
  - Acorns at Dorset Road
  - Brodrick House
  - Hazel Lodge
  - Homefield Cottage
  - Lansdowne Secure Unit
  - The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive
- Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics
- Corporate Parenting Panel Terms of Reference and ways of working
- Looked After Children Annual Report 2015-16
- The Virtual School Annual Report including the use of Pupil Premium

January 2017:

- Children in Care Council
- East Sussex Foster Care Association Annual report

- Ofsted Inspection reports for the following
  - Acorns at Dorset Road
  - Brodrick House
  - Hazel Lodge
- Children's Home Regulations 2015, Regulation 44: Inspection reports for August, September, October and November 2015 for the following children's homes:
  - Acorns at Dorset Road
  - Brodrick House
  - Hazel Lodge
  - Homefield Cottage
  - Lansdowne Secure Unit
  - The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive
- Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics

## **12. Conclusion**

12.1 Overall the LAC service continued to perform well during 2016-17 and to achieve good outcomes for children in the care of ESCC. Continued pressure on recruitment and retention of in house carers and on availability of placements within the private market in the South East has impacted on placement stability, especially for those children with the most complex needs.

12.2 The challenge for 2017/18 is to continue to ensure that the right children are in the right placements for the right amount of time, and that we secure the best outcomes possible within a context of reducing resource in Children Services.

12.3 Maintaining good performance is a significant achievement within a context of diminishing resources, however the ongoing steady rise in both LAC numbers and in placement costs that has been evident over the past year and has continued since April 2017 is placing significant pressure on already stretched budgets and may result in a year end pressure for 2017-18 of £1.5m in the LAC service.

## Annex 1

**Report to:** Corporate Parenting Panel

**Date:** 28<sup>th</sup> July 2017

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

**Title of report:** Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service  
1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017

**Purpose of report:** To outline the performance of the Fostering Service between  
1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017

---

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report

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#### **1 Financial appraisal**

1.1 Services to LAC are supported by base budgets within Children's Services. There are no increased costs arising from this report.

#### **2 Supporting information**

2.1 The Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service is attached as Appendix 1.

#### **3 Recommendation**

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report.

**Director of Children's Services:** Stuart Gallimore

Contact Officer: Adrian Sewell  
Tel. No: 01323 463121  
Adrian.sewell@eastsussex.gov.uk

Local Members:  
All

Background documentation:  
None

## **1. Safeguarding**

1.1 This outcome is fundamental to the delivery of fostering services across East Sussex and is embedded in each of the core functions which are addressed fully throughout the report. The core functions are as listed:

- Recruitment and retention
- Assessment
- Supervision and review
- Foster carer training
- The matching and placing of children and young people with foster carers

## **2. Recruitment and Retention of Carers**

2.1 2016/2017 has been another challenging year for the recruitment of foster carers. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) experiences are consistent with those of both our neighbouring authorities and of Fostering Services nationally, who have all reported similar challenges. There appears to be a number of different reasons for this. Some applicants continue to be concerned about the implications of allegations. Previous high success rates in ESCC's recruitment of foster carers have, to some extent, exhausted the existing pool of carers. The number of foster carers transferring from agencies has also decreased this year. Those carers who initially agreed to transfer due to lack of placements and support from their own agencies have then been persuaded to remain with their own agencies by being offered financial incentives. In addition, the successful reduction in the use of agency placements has resulted in fewer carers looking after East Sussex children who are available for transfer. There are also some agency carers wishing to transfer who have not always meet the quality standards of ESCC Fostering Service.

2.2 As with last year, the recruitment and retention team have continued to achieve their timescale targets for assessments of 6 – 8 months (dependent on the complexity of the assessment). In order to attain the expedient and efficient transfer of carers from other agencies, the recruitment and assessment team continue to use an abridged assessment tool, optimising the existing statutory information from the foster carers' previous agency. This has allowed the Fostering Service to approve transferring carers within a maximum of 3 months of their initial enquiry.

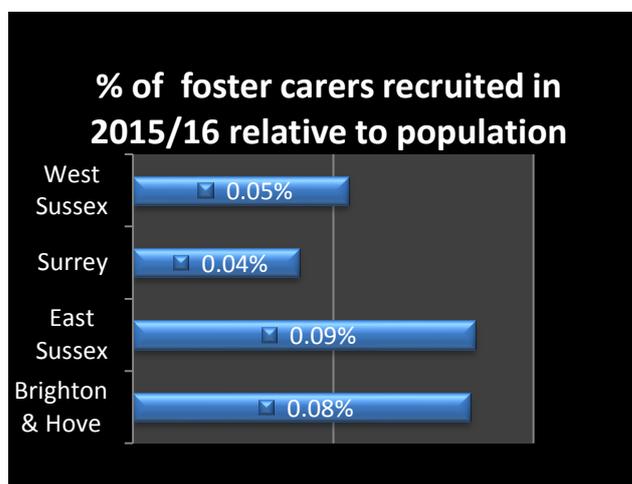
2.3 From 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017, 411 new enquiries were received which led to 182 screening calls and 76 initial visits to prospective foster carers. This year the Fostering Service has introduced a text enquiry service where applicants can text, phone, email, or complete a web form to enquire about the service. These methods maximise enquiries at weekends and out of office hours.

2.4 There were 6 'Skills to Foster' pre-assessment preparation courses held during 2016/17 and 28 households attended these courses. During the assessment process, the Children in Care Council (CICC) continued to play an active role by holding informal interviews with applicants and providing feedback for the assessment report.

2.5 There were 21 households offering 50 placements approved in 2016/17 compared with 26 households in 2015/16 offering 44 placements. 3 of these households were transfers from independent fostering providers and 1 of these households had an East Sussex looked after child placed. The reasons why 17 further assessments did not progress to Stage 2 (presentation to the Fostering Panel) were as follows:-

- 3 agency carers chose to remain with their agency after being offered “incentives “
  - 9 cases were due to changes in personal circumstances that could not have been predicted earlier
  - 5 cases were closed by the Fostering Service due to issues at Stage
- There were 6 fostering assessments still in progress at 31 March 2017.

2.6 ESCC Fostering Service performs better in relation to our immediate neighbouring authorities in recruitment activity. This is based on the Ofsted Dataset returns of 2015/16. This is the first year Ofsted have released this information.



East Sussex Fostering Service still performs slightly better than the national average for the retention of its foster carers.

2016/17	ESCC	Nationally
Loss of foster carers	8%	12%
Average length of service of carers	7.34 years	7.8 years

The breakdown of reasons that carers have given for leaving ESCC during 2016/17 were as follows-

- Adoption of foster children
- Termination of approval
- Retirement

Given that ESCC continues to have a high percentage of foster carers over 55 years of age, it is anticipated that there will be an increasing number of foster carers retiring. This local trend reflects a wider national demographic trend.

2.7 The Fostering Service continues to employ the marketing strategy of ‘continual presence’. This consists of wide-ranging extensive advertising throughout the year using a range of different mediums. The Fostering Service marketing strategy for 2016/17 has focussed on ‘You can be a foster carer in 6 months’ and ‘Don’t keep our children waiting’.

**Below are some examples of mediums used to recruit foster carers:**

- Radio advertising - Heart FM
- Monthly newspaper advertising – county wide in all areas of East Sussex and on the borders of Kent, West Sussex and Brighton
- Lamppost banners

- Football hoarding advertising – Lewes, Eastbourne and Hastings
- Roundabout advertising – 2 in Eastbourne and 1 in Hastings
- Car park tickets – Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Seaford and Newhaven
- Bus stops – Eastbourne and Hastings
- Net Natives – interruption advertising
- Advertising on the Amey courier vans
- Display vans in both Hastings and Eastbourne
- 'Your County' magazine – delivered to every household in East Sussex
- Editorial in East Sussex Herald & Hastings Observer – January 2017
- Magnet Magazine
- ESCC payslips
- Twitter
- Facebook

### Recruitment Events

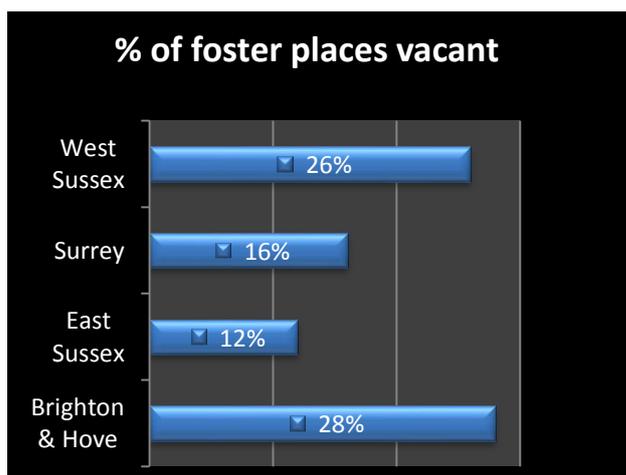
- The Fostering Service has facilitated a number of information events in different locations to ensure a high profile across the county. Information evenings have been held on a monthly basis in Eastbourne, Hastings and Uckfield. The service also facilitated 3 further information evenings in Eastbourne, Lewes and Hastings giving information about the needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children requiring placements in East Sussex. The Fostering Service also attended and gave out information at Volunteer Fairs in Peacehaven, Uckfield and at 2 staff conferences.

### Retention Events

- In May 2016, an evening event was held at Barnsgate Manor to say "Thank You" to our foster carers. This was attended by 120 carers and staff.
- In August 2016, all foster carers and their families caring for East Sussex children were invited to a picnic at Knockhatch. Both children's social workers and supervising social workers attended. Agency foster carers were also invited to give them the opportunity to meet ESCC foster carers and staff, and to find out more about our service.
- In October 2016, the children of our foster carers were invited to an activity day at 'Branching Out' in celebration of 'Fostering Network's Sons and Daughters week'.

## 2.8 Percentage of foster care vacancies

The % of foster care vacancies is indicative of a service's ability to match and effectively manage its foster carer's resources. ESCC Fostering Service had only 12% foster care vacancies as outlined in the Ofsted data set in 2015/16 as compared to higher numbers in neighbouring authorities. The more recent Ofsted 2016/17 returns would indicate a similar percentage of healthy operational vacancies within ESCC Fostering Service.



### 3. Foster Care Training and support

3.1 From 1st April 2016 to the 31st March 2017, 796 training places have been taken up by foster carers (as compared to last year's equivalent of 589), evidencing a substantial increase in attendance.. Overall, the evaluations of the courses by participants were rated as excellent, although there has been a reduction of evaluations being completed since the introduction of the East Sussex Learning Portal.

3.2 New courses introduced this year have included:

- Fostering changes, under 12's, addressing behaviour management strategies
- Introduction to child sexual abuse
- Managing children with sexually harmful behaviours
- Caring for asylum seeking, refugee and unaccompanied children
- Supporting education and success, a practical approach for primary aged children
- Supporting education and success, a practical approach for secondary aged children
- Internet safety: fostering in a digital world - 13 years old and over
- Internet safety: fostering in a digital world - under 12 year olds

3.3 Given the varied expertise, knowledge and skill base of our foster carers, a number of courses have successfully been delivered by experienced foster carers. The new courses so far delivered by foster carer trainers are:

- Parenting traumatised children
- Practical skills to help children protect themselves
- Understanding self-harm
- Caring for children with additional needs
- Using visuals to help communication
- Supporting new carers workshops
- Creative ideas for digital photo albums

These courses have received excellent feedback. Foster carers have identified the value of having experienced carers who understand the fostering task delivering specific expertise training. This model of delivery also provides a more cost effective way to upskill those foster carers that need further training. To ensure the quality of training, there is an agreed framework of requirements and support identified with opportunities for continual professional development. 16 foster carers are undertaking a variety of qualifications. These include the level 3 diploma children and young people's workforce qualification, and Level 3 and 4 in training and education. There are also 5 dedicated foster carers involved in the delivery and assessment of the children and young people's qualification.

3.4 Planned courses for 2017/18 include (in conjunction with the Virtual School):

- Mental health first aid
- Supporting Thrive in education
- Supporting young people where English is not their first language.

3.5 Other courses that Foster Carers / Supervising Social Workers are being trained to deliver are:

- An introduction to Non-violent resistance

- An introduction to Theraplay
- Understanding sensory attachment
- Understanding the angry child
- The impact of childhood experiences on mind, body and brain

To support the reduced training budget, identified training will be actively promoted to other agencies for income generation opportunities.

#### **4 Foster carer support and supervision**

4.1 The Fostering Service currently has 292 fostering households that provide a range of placements for children and young people including parent and baby placements. Supervision and contact plans are assessed on the complexity of the children placed, taking into account the needs of the foster carers and their families. The pressures and demands over the last year on foster carers and supervising social workers (SSW's) have increased, but the quality of the support provided has remained of a high standard.

4.2 Support groups are available to provide foster carers with opportunities to meet with other carers, to increase support networks and to give the opportunity for shared learning. There are four localised groups in Uckfield, Rotherfield, Eastbourne and Newhaven. There are also three themed support groups: a parent and child foster carers' support group; a support group for carers of adolescents and a 'men who foster' support group. In recognition of the growing demands on foster carers and the increased complex needs of the children placed with carers, a "Buddy" system was launched in April 2017. Nationally, research evidences that peer support for foster carers is very successful. There are a number of 'Buddy' systems around the country which focus on the support of carers in relation to moving children on, coping with allegations and childcare and support. There is no doubt that foster carers receive a different kind of support knowing that they are talking to a colleague who has often experienced the same issues as they have.

4.3 Further support is provided for foster carers through the fostering advice line - an out of hours service, available to all foster carers and supported lodgings providers for 365 days per year. This service is staffed by a team of 7 workers from the Fostering Service, working on a rota basis, to provide support and advice to all foster carers. The service deals with a range of issues such as placement disruption, children and young people missing from placement, police involvement or generally supporting carers in managing challenging behaviours presented by our children or young people. The fostering advice line received 297 contacts from foster carers seeking support or advice during 2016/17.

4.4 There continue to be close working relationships with Looked After Children(LAC) teams, The Child and Adolescent Mental Health service (CAMHS), The Virtual School and Placement Support Services(PSS); all of which are invaluable in supporting foster carers in sustaining placements and endeavouring to meet the children and young people's needs.

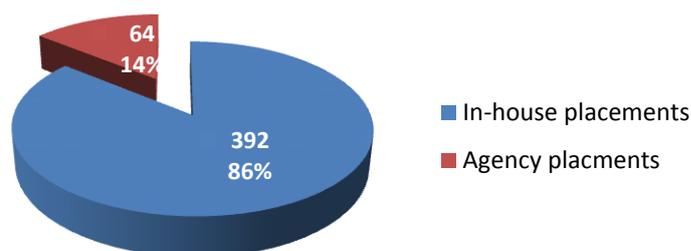
#### **5 Health**

5.1 Meeting the health needs of LAC remains a high priority for the Fostering Service. Foster carers continue to prioritise the health needs of their children with supervising social workers monitoring foster carers contribution to timely health assessments. There have been a number of training courses available which can be accessed by foster carers to focus on the health needs of young people. These include: autism, self-harm, first aid and healthy living.

## 6 Placement Activity

6.1 On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 there were 456 children in foster care. 392 of these children were placed with in-house placements. This includes in-house 'parent and child' placements, children subject to special guardianship orders placed with foster carers and those older young people remaining in their "staying put" fostering placements through to independence. The number of East Sussex LAC placed with agency foster carers has decreased from 77 children in 2015/16 to 64 at the end of March 2017.

### Placement Activity 2016/17



The above figures illustrate that 86% of young people were looked after in-house foster carers which is an increase of 4% from the previous year.

6.2 As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, 25 young people (over 18 years of age) remain with their foster carers under 'Staying Put' arrangements. There are also 26 children who are currently subject to special guardianship orders placed with East Sussex foster carer and there has been 1 adoption order granted to an East Sussex foster carer during 2016/17.

6.3 Of the 506 referrals received between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017, 441 resulted in placements being made or matched. Of the 506 referrals, 65 were ultimately not required. On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 there were an additional 23 active referrals waiting to be matched with foster carers. These figures represent a slight increase in the number of matches and placements made as compared to last year. This is a significant workload for a small duty team who may also be seeking residential placements for some of our children.

## 7 The Supported Lodgings Team

7.1 East Sussex's supported lodgings provision continues to be an invaluable resource for LAC, care leavers and homeless young people. As in the previous year, the service has seen an increase of young people with very complex needs being accommodated within the service. A few young people have been able to step-down from therapeutic residential environments to supported lodgings providers. This has in part been due to the support and training on offer to providers and the increased approval of 6 providers being dual registered as foster carers and supportive lodging providers. During the last year, supported lodgings providers have provided a number of placements for children from in-house residential placements as well as from costly external agency placements. This has achieved a saving of £419,000. This vital step-down provision has not only made a valuable contribution to budgetary savings but has also been in young people's best interests, supporting them on the path to independence.

7.2 As of March 2017 there were 34 supported lodgings households providing a total of 50 placements across the county. This has given the service a net gain of 2 households and one placement as a result of 5 resignations and 7 new approvals.

7.3 In the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 the Supported Lodgings Team received 107 referrals requesting placement for young people of which 21 were for LAC placed in foster care, 41 were for care leavers and 45 were in respect of homeless young people. Of the 107 referrals received 19 were ultimately not required.

7.4 Flexibility of providers and their ability to accommodate a range of young people with different needs remains one of the primary objectives of the service. A priority for 2017/18 is to recruit a broader range of supportive lodgings providers. A new recruitment campaign is currently being launched.

## **8 User Participation**

8.1 The Children in Care Council (CICC) continues to go from strength to strength. A new group was formed during 2016 comprising of 17 young people. All members are working on accredited courses such as Asdan, Youth Voice, Arts Award, First Aid Training, Food Hygiene, and Leadership.

8.2 The CICC attended 31 holiday activities, giving 98 young people the opportunity to raise issues about being in care and helping 45 young people to resolve their own individual issues.

8.3 CICC members have also participated in 80 opportunities to promote their work both locally and nationally. Examples below include:

- Production of a short film 'This is Us'. CICC members have been holding assemblies in their own schools to encourage discussions of, and reducing the stereotypes about being in care
- Meeting with the Children's Commissioner about separating siblings
- Attendance at the All Party Parliamentary Group to hear about The Family and Social Work Act and how ESCC could improve outcomes for looked after children in Personal Health Social Emotional lessons and apprenticeships
- Involvement nationally with Social Care Institute for Excellence in a national mental health project
- Holding local consultations, with CAMHS, CGL (Change Grow Live Advocacy Service) and LAC Nurses
  - Regularly attendance at foster carer's preparation groups and recruitment panels for staff
  - Shadowing of the Chief Executive Officer for the NSPCC for national takeover day. This was a very exciting opportunity in which the CICC joined a web chat with 50 other people and attended a meeting inside Buckingham Palace.
  - Generating income of £2700 to enable young people to attend courses and a summer prom
  - Design of new Pledge leaflets and a contact card
  - Production of a very successful Christmas newsletter that was sent to all ESCC young people in care aged 8.
  - Attendance at the Corporate Parenting Panel to update members on their work progress

## **9 Working in Partnership with East Sussex Foster Care Association (ESFCA)**

9.1 The Operations Manager attends the monthly evening meetings of the ESFCA management group to report on the developments of the East Sussex Fostering Service and on Children's Services more generally. During 2016/17 ESFCA elected a new chair and new trustees and agreed an ambitious agenda to support East Sussex County Council's foster carers, which has been very helpful to

our LAC. They have also continued to provide support to foster carers who have raised concerns at the surgeries held in conjunction with both the Fostering and LAC Operational Managers.

## 10 The Placement Support Service (PSS)

10.1 The PSS is currently supporting 98 children in placement. During 2016-2017, 28 new pieces of work were commissioned including 6 pieces of life story work. The PSS also responded to 85 emergency or crisis requests from carers that resulted in 101 days support. The use of placement support is vital in sustaining extremely challenging placements, which would most likely, in the absence of this service, require alternative and more costly agency placements.

10.2 PSS staff are increasingly being asked to provide additional support to young people who are unable to sustain their school placement thus creating additional pressures on foster carers. This additional direct work is funded by the Virtual School. Income of £2,700 was generated by the service from grant applications to fund various activities and training for young people.

10.3 Despite some financial challenges the PSS has continued to provide some holiday and weekend group activities to LAC aged 5 to 17. All activities have an educational element and cover sport, art, environment or national curriculum. During the year:

- 41 group holiday activities were provided
- PSS worked with 110 young people
- 461 places were offered to children and young people
- 10 to 15 young people attend on average each activity

The feedback of 98% of young people who evaluated their activities ranged between good and excellent. The Fostering Service's partnership with St Bede's has continued, allowing our young people to access sports facilities and their swimming pool free of charge. The PSS has also been able to negotiate free tickets to a few of Brighton and Hove Albion football matches for our LAC.

10.4 A successful summer prom was held in June at the request of the CICC and other young people. This was jointly funded by the department and by income generated by the CICC. 120 young people and their carers attended the event. Feedback from young people included:

*'Everyone dressed to impress and looked absolutely amazing'*  
*'We danced all night as well as taking an insane amount of photos in the photo booth to help maintain long lasting memories'*  
*'It was an incredible experience; I can't wait for the next one'*  
*'The prom also gave the young people an opportunity to have fun with old friends as well as make new friendships'*  
*'We felt really special celebrating - well 'just us'*

10.5 Foster carers value PSS support and holiday activities highly as illustrated by the comments extracted from annual evaluations:

*'We are more than just foster carers; placement support gives us time to be 'us''*  
*'We get valuable time for ourselves; placement support is a great benefit to this young man'*  
*'Over the years placement support has given us valuable time to simply re-charge for a while'*

*'It is difficult to say if we would have survived without placement support'  
'Placement support is so important for my family to continue fostering'  
'It has been invaluable to have placement support when young people are challenging'  
'Gives my young person time out and builds their confidence'  
'I would like to pass on my thanks to the placement support service for supporting my young person and carrying on my strategies'  
'Without PSS I could not have offered the young person a placement for the 7 weeks she was here'*

## **11 Summary**

11.1 The Fostering Service continues to be highly effective but primary challenge of the service continues to be the recruitment and retention of foster carers. As outlined earlier in the report, in relation to population size, ESCC's Fostering Service remains proportionally the lead authority regionally in the recruitment and retention of foster carers as compared to our 4 neighbouring authorities. The recruitment strategy for 2016/17 focused on the transfer of suitable carers from independent agencies, especially for those carers who had East Sussex LAC placed with them. However, the tactics employed by agencies have served to thwart this plan with most carers initially wanting to transfer subsequently remaining with their agencies following the offer of increased enhancements. For 2017/18 the service will persevere with the transfer of suitable carers where possible, as well as continuing robust and energetic recruitment of a range of new foster carers.

### **The Key Management Priorities for 2017/2018 include:**

- To continue the provision of high quality training and support for our foster carers so that stability for children is prioritised.
- To continue with an extensive recruitment strategy throughout the year to attract potential foster carers to come to East Sussex as the preferred fostering agency in this area. This will include targeted recruitment on the borders of East Sussex in order to recruit foster carers that (potentially) the Fostering Service could make available to our neighbouring authorities should there be a surplus.
- To recruit a wider pool of supportive lodgings providers to ensure more housing options are available for vulnerable homeless 16 and 17 year olds and for our care leavers.

Adrian Sewell **Operation Manager Fostering Service**

## **Annex 2**

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **28<sup>th</sup> July 2017**

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

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017**

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017**

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**RECOMMENDATION: The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report**

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### **1. Financial appraisal**

1.1 There are no increased costs arising from this report.

### **2. Supporting information**

2.1 The Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service is attached as Appendix 1

### **3. Recommendation**

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report.

STUART GALLIMORE  
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Carole Sykes, Operations Manager, Adoption and Permanence Service Tel: 01323 747406

Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: none

## 1. Supporting Information

	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
1. Number of children adopted	57	43	45	38
2. Number of adoption matches (children)	50	56	32	38
3. Number of permanent fostering matches (children)	10	7	10	14
4. Number of East Sussex adoptive matches (children)	40	33	26	30
5. Number of consortium adoptive matches (children)	1	6	0	0
6. Number of inter-agency matches (children):				
Permanence:	4	3	2	0
Adoption:	9	17	6	8
7. Number of prospective adopters approved (households)	44	50	41	30
8. Number of permanent carers approved (households)	8	4	2	1
9. Number of children approved for adoption up to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017 (including 2 re-approvals)	52	43	53	52
10. Number of children approved for permanence up to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017	24	26	14	32
11. Number of approved adopters waiting to be matched	17	20	22	20
12. Number of disruptions presented to Panel:				
Permanence:	0	0	0	0
Adoptions:	1	0	1	0

## 2. Recruitment Activity

**2.1** Activity levels have remained consistent over the past year and prospective adopters have continued to give positive feedback about the process. The dedicated telephone number for enquiries, specific adoption recruitment email address and the on-line enquiry form ensured that all enquirers received a prompt and personal service. Nonetheless there was a significant drop in the number of applications. This reflected the national picture and also that of neighbouring authorities and partners in Adoption South East (ASE).

**2.2** The time taken to approve prospective adopters was maintained at an average of nine months from registering an interest to approval at Adoption Panel. With the introduction of the two stage assessment process it had been anticipated that most adopters would want to get through to approval as quickly as possible. However, the local evidence has shown that many more applicants want to take time to prepare themselves for adoption through Stage 1. However the time taken to assess applicants in Stage 2 remained on target.

**2.3** During 2016/17 the Agency received 192 enquiries, 81 households attended information events and 46 households registered their interest in adoption. The conversion rate from Information event to registration remained high, but unfortunately only 30 adopters were approved by year end. This was, in part, due to a significant number of the applicants having far more complex histories than the service has seen in previous years. A number of assessments could not be completed and resulted in the applications being paused, whilst others were counselled out of adoption completely. Fortunately the over recruitment of the previous year offset the reduction in approvals for 16/17.

**2.4** The Service continued to offer monthly information events for prospective adopters, which profiled the needs of the children waiting. ESCC advertising and recruitment activity was hosted through the Government Gateway, First4Adoption, New Family Social, Coram BAAF and ESCC websites. In addition, the service's Facebook page was developed to offer information regarding local adoption services, as well as any key national developments.

**2.5** Throughout the year the Government regionalisation agenda gathered pace, with the five pilot adoption regions set to go live in Autumn 2017. During 2016/17 ESCC joined the ASE partnership with Brighton and Hove, Surrey and West Sussex to explore forming an adoption region. Four subgroups were formed to develop closer working practices across the region in relation to recruitment, family finding, adoption support and finance. There remain a number of challenges given the different staffing structures, processes and cultures of each authority. However the partnership persisted in working together to find solutions which would also preserve some of the key individual features from each authority.

**2.6** During 2016/17 the Service continued to receive enquiries from applicants living outside ESCC boundaries. Currently ESCC generates income from the interagency fees charged when ESCC approved adopters are used by other local authorities. Ten ESCC families were used by other local authorities to place 12 children during 2016/17, generating an income of £291,000. However this is likely to change if ASE becomes a fully functioning region with centralised processes.

**2.7** In 2016/17 6 experienced adopters were reassessed as second time adopters, and 1 set of foster carers were assessed to adopt a child already in their care. In addition, 7 prospective adopters were approved for fostering to adopt i.e. beginning the placement as foster carers but then converting to adopters if the care child for the child becomes adoption. This minimises disruption for very young children.

### **3. Children with a plan for Adoption.**

**3.1** The number of children with a plan for adoption in ESCC remained consistent with 53 in 2015/16 and 52 2016/17. This was not reflected nationally, with some Courts appearing to favour a plan for Special Guardianship Orders over Adoption Orders. Locally there appeared to be more children who remained with their birth families during the legal process than had been seen in previous years. This raised a number of practice issues in relation to the care planning process, and greater complexity for the family finding process. If this becomes more widespread during

2016/17 it has the potential to cause delay for children. The Service will need to monitor this carefully.

**3.2** The Service placed the majority of children with ESCC adopters. Of the 44 children matched this year; 36 were matched with ESCC approved adopters and 8 placed with interagency adopters. Of the 8; there were 2 sibling pairs, one sibling group of 3 children and a single child. Where children were not matched with ESCC adopters the main family finding organisations used were Linkmaker and ASE.

**3.3** ASE held one joint adoption event which took place on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2017. It was based in, and mainly set up by West Sussex. 25 households of adopters attended of the 32 households invited and 39 children were featured. West Sussex and Surrey had the largest number of children at this event, whilst ESCC had a higher number of adopters. It is intended that 4 events will be held each year, with ESCC and Brighton to host the next one.

**3.4** The recruitment and family finding elements of the Service continued to work closely together to identify adopters needed to match the children coming forward. It should be noted that there were a number of children who required genetic testing and/or had complex health needs. In addition many of the children had experienced domestic abuse, severe substance misuse and neglect within their birth families.

#### **4. Staffing**

**4.1** At year end the service was recruiting to a range of posts as 6 staff had moved on during 16/17. It is pleasing to note that this was largely for promotion, retirement or relocation. This meant that the service was more dependent on freelance Social Workers to complete some of the key tasks such as assessments whilst recruitment was underway. Nonetheless there was some impact on the overall service offer and delivery.

#### **5. Permanence**

**5.1** The Service has continued to target family finding for those children whose plan is permanent fostering. The permanence tracking workshop met regularly during 16/17 to closely monitor the timescale of permanence plans and matches. The number of children approved for permanence increased by 50% during the year to 32. There was specific targeted recruitment for a number of these children given the complexity of their needs and care plans. A number of 'in house' foster carers offered long term care to children already in placement with them, or were matched via the family finding newsletter. At year end there were 7 children with a plan for permanence for whom the service was actively family finding.

#### **6. Adoption Support**

**6.1** There was a significant increase in the number of adopters who requested adoption support during 16/17. The placement of children with complex needs, or who are older and part of sibling groups always poses more challenges in the context of adoption support. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 there were 56 requests for assessments of post adoption support needs, and of these 52 resulted in the provision of support.

**6.2** 'AdCAMHS' has continued to offer a dedicated therapy and consultation service during the year. It continued with its established unique partnership model, where clinicians and adoption workers 'think together' to consider the therapeutic needs of

children and their parents. The desired outcome for the service was to contribute to adoption stability, to promote positive attachments within adoptive families and ultimately to prevent placement breakdown. At year end AdCAMHS was working with an average of 65 families.

**6.3** The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was launched nationally in May 2015. The Government committed to ongoing funding of ASF for the duration of Parliament, originally being 2020. The ASF criteria was extended during this period, to be available to children adopted from care, intercountry adoption and children subject to Special Guardianship Orders. The remit of the ASF though continued to be based specifically for the provision of therapeutic support. ESCC has worked closely with the fund, and used this to complement the work of AdCAMHS.

**6.4** The Adoption Service worked closely with dedicated workers within the Virtual School. During the year they provided adoptive families with support for educational and school based issues, and offered training to schools in relation to the attachment needs of adoptive children in education.

**6.5** For some families exhibiting high levels of need, the Adoption Service worked closely with Locality colleagues to manage safeguarding risks, with the aim of preventing adoptive families from breaking down.

**6.6** During the year, the adoption service has held two social events for adoptive families. These were organised and supported by the service to enable adopters and their children to meet informally and have a fun day out. In addition, a number of support groups for children and adopters were facilitated by the service, and the contract with PAC-UK was maintained.

**6.7** The demands on the indirect/letterbox and direct contact services increased throughout 16/17 with 817 indirect contact agreements open at year end, and 312 direct contact arrangements being supported by the service. Furthermore, the service also worked with 81 adopted adults wanting to access their records, and commissioned CMB Counselling to provide an intermediary service to adopted adults and their relatives.

## **7. Adoption & Permanence Panel**

**7.1** The number of Panels reduced over the last 12 months due to the reduction in recruitment activity and the introduction of greater efficiencies across the county. The number of Panels held in 2015/16 was 32, reducing to 27 in 2016/17.

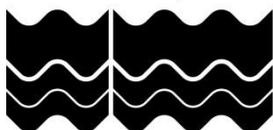
**7.2** The contract for medical advice to the panels transferred from Kent Health Care Trust to East Sussex Health Care Trust at the end of the year. This resulted in a greater level of consistency to both Panels, and also delivered a greater connectivity in relation to the paediatric needs of ESCC Looked After Children.

**7.3** The Panel venue moved permanently from The View Hotel in Eastbourne in July 2016 to the Bellbrook Centre in Uckfield. This proved to be a successful move and has led to significant savings.

**7.4** A successful Panel Training day was held in June focussing on disruption and fostering to adopt. This was well received by all.

## **8. Management Priorities 2016/17**

- To continue to target recruitment for ESCC children and to work towards regaining previously achieved targets.
- To continue to strengthen and build on ESCC's high national profile and to further expand into a regional service together with our partners in Surrey, Brighton & Hove and West Sussex.
- To update and revise policies and procedures in accordance with new regulations and strategy guidance.
- To maintain and extend adoption support developments including the revised CAMHS contract, close partnerships with the Virtual School and continue to use the Adoption Support Fund to good effect.
- To maintain and support the new Health Services contract to improve provision to children.
- To ensure ESCC's role in the Regionalisation Agenda brings added value and builds on success.



## **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report April 2016 – March 2017**

**This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative  
evidence relating to the IRO Services in East Sussex as  
required by statutory guidance.**

### **1. Purpose of service and legal context**

- 1.1 The IRO service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the Review process to a wider overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between Reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of Care Planning for Children Looked After (CLA) and for challenging drift and delay. One of the key tasks for IROs is to build relationships with children, young people and the professional and family network to enhance effective planning for positive outcomes.
- 1.2 The National Children's Bureau research 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers in England' (March 2014) provides a wealth of information and findings regarding the efficacy of IRO services. The foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson; makes the following comment:

The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing.

## 2. Key messages

### **Achievements and challenges for 16/17 included:**

- 3 half day workshops and audits focussed on Care Leavers, diversity and ethnicity and Voluntary Section 20 placements.
- Continued monitoring of Placement Orders and Placement with Parents.
- Development of new Issues Resolution procedure.
- Working together to improve the consistency and quality of pathway planning for care leavers.
- Improving the quality of outcome focussed care plans and using new data base.
- Increased quality assurance feedback activity for locality and children looked after teams.
- Continued challenge to the operational teams regarding care planning.
- Rising numbers of CLA and CP, decreasing staff numbers and pressure on operational resources.
- Long term professional relationships ending as young people turn 18.

### **3. Thematic Audit Feedback**

- 3.1 IRO/CPA's and managers undertook three half day audits focussing on children accommodated voluntarily (Section 20); Diversity and Pathway Plans.
- 3.2 **Care Plans and Pathway Plans - *Embedding new ways of working***
- 3.3 The single child's plan is now integrated into the whole system and is designed to be responsive and dynamic to the child's changing needs and environment. It is central to the IRO role and review process and has been the focus of audit and improvement over the last year, with a particular focus on pathway plans for young people over 16 who are preparing for independence.
- 3.4 The purpose of the new plans is to enhance collaboration with children, parents, carers and other professionals making the plans more accessible, relevant, specific, incremental and focussed on the identified outcome and the audit process has been measuring to this standard.
- 3.5 IROs have contributed to the improvement plan by auditing files with a subsequent report presented to senior managers, feeding back any issues to the relevant Operational Managers. This work is ongoing as new ways of working are embedded into the culture and practice of the service. The outcome of raising the profile of the plans and the joint work between the services has led to further training regarding pathway planning, using the new database and employing a temporary consultant to the Through Care Team. This cohort has also been the subject of audit across all levels of the service regularly across the year.
- 3.6 The new system has also presented challenges to the IROs who have changed their practice in recording the reviews. IROs support and training needs in this area continue to be further developed and reviewed.
- 3.7 **Ethnicity and Diversity - *Understanding the child's lived experience***
- 3.8 East Sussex is predominantly White British and an audit was completed to ensure the needs of the small cohort of black and minority ethnic children and young people are understood and addressed. Whilst statistical information is useful and important it is limited and so it is also important to be confident that children and young people are able to talk to those close to them about their religious faith/belief, sexuality, gender identity and/or any other feelings of being different. This means also understanding the messages that they are getting from their environment. This is also an area identified by Ofsted in the last inspection as in need of improvement.
- 3.9 IRO/CPAs undertook a thematic audit of 29 (38%) of CLA who are from different minority ethnic backgrounds. The first section of the audit focussed on recorded factual information and the second on the child's lived experience. Some of the questions were deliberately speculative to

stimulate thinking about seeking and recording more textured information. The hypothesis was that the information gathering and understanding of the needs of children and young people from ethnic minorities is inconsistent and general in nature.

### 3.10 Key findings:

- There were some examples of detailed consideration of needs but overall Information was generic, impersonal, at times inaccurate and confused.
- The environment of children and young people is not routinely explored or recorded so did not inform an understanding of their lived experience and therefore potential needs or relevant services.

### 3.11 Recommendations taken forward were as follows:

- Social Workers should be informed of opportunities offered by the new database and encouraged to record in more detail and always check out accuracy.
- Information about the environment including ethnic population of the school, knowledge about relevant support groups should be sought and recorded in the Care Plan part 1 and inform assessments.
- Greater specificity of recording of religion will enhance assessment and planning.

3.12 These findings were shared with the Looked After Children Teams and the equalities team who as a result formulated some systems and practice guidance for social workers to use.

### 3.13 **Children accommodated voluntarily - *Consent and drift***

3.14 East Sussex revised the practice guidance regarding children who become looked after voluntarily with the parents' consent (Section 20, Children Act 1989) to enhance the timeliness of planning for these children. The aim of this small scale audit was to measure compliance with the new guidance and the hypothesis was that these children will have up to date consent, the parent continues to understand his or her rights and is consulted as appropriate, there is a clear plan for the child to return home and the need for accommodation is reviewed.

### 3.15 Key findings:

- Out of the eleven audited only one did not have consent
- It was not always easy to find senior manager signed agreement on the system
- Nine had a clear plan, 2 did not.

## 4. Problem resolution and escalation

- 4.1 A pivotal role of the IRO/CPA is to raise issues affecting a child's care where, for example, performance issues, care planning and resources are affecting the child or young person's progress. IROs will always discuss issues with the social worker or their manager but if there is no resolution there is a formal process known formerly as a Dispute Resolution Process whereby the issue can be escalated to the attention of senior managers and ultimately the Chief Executive and externally to Cafcass for resolution.
- 4.2 The newly named Issues Resolution Process shifts the emphasis to reflect what happens in practice in building on the good relationships and collaborative approach at the earliest opportunity to resolve problems and differences.
- 4.3 IROs continue to advocate for timely planning and intervention for children and young people. Examples include:
- scrutinising the status and progress of plans for a number of children who are placed voluntarily (Section 20);
  - delay in agreeing resources for a Special Guardian Order (SGO) plan for a child;
  - delay in interventions and planning for timely contact;
  - scrutinising assessments;
  - chasing up the timely initiation and completion of statutory duties.
- 4.4 Specific examples include two young people who have been out of school for a considerable time. The two respective IROs involved have worked collaboratively with the social work teams and the Virtual School over many months to get these young people into school.
- 4.5 Over the last year there have been 2 formal challenges using the Issues Resolution Process. One involved a change in services for a young person with disabilities where his care plan of short breaks was affected by the pressure on the short breaks resources. The outcome of this was to raise the profile of the potential problem with the pressure on the resource but also to prompt an updating assessment of his care plan that concluded this needed to change anyway.
- 4.6 The second was the unplanned return of a child to his mother's care and the need for timely assessments and intervention. Support was put in place quickly and this has been resolved but remains a vulnerable arrangement.
- 4.7 IROs also raised concerns with senior managers about the impact of delay in the police service completing criminal investigations, length of time for Criminal Prosecution Service (CPS) decision making and timing of court hearings; on young people's emotional health as well as on planning, for their education for example. Some of these involved

children, both alleged victim and perpetrators, waiting for up to a year before these were resolved.

- 4.8 Good practice is also recognised and often escalated to senior managers so that it is acknowledged across the service. Examples of these include alerting senior managers to a young person who said of her social worker, “she was really kind and good at explaining things” and that she was “brilliant”. The excellent qualities of a child friendly care plan were highlighted (see the feedback on the following page for two social workers’ relationship based practice).

### **Feedback 1**

*“At H’s LAC review I was impressed to see and hear the easy relationship D (social worker) has built with H over a relatively, short and traumatic period of time. I am highlighting this as this young man can be so anxious he actually took his GCSE’s at home. He had his previous social worker for a number of years and the change of SW at the end of August 2016 was daunting. H was also seriously ill end November/ December 2016 - he was in intensive care – had a heart attack. He also suffers PTSD.”*

### **Feedback 2**

*“I just wanted to highlight the excellent SW intervention in this case. As you know it has been a rocky road but M’s thoughtfully planned intervention has in my view been pivotal in helping K turn the corner. K is currently accepting all interventions - I know things can change again but think this high standard of social work should be applauded.”*

## **5. Children and Young people leaving care**

- 5.1 Children and young people leave care for a variety of reasons but the majority are either placed permanently under relevant legislation including adoption or they turn eighteen.
- 5.2 It is well documented in research that one of the most consistent professional relationships with a young person is with the IRO. Currently 31% of our CLA are aged between 15 and 17 and most of these young people have had the same IRO for many years. Over the last year and in the coming years, IROs are saying goodbye to many young people they have known for a long time. There is a plan in the year ahead to look in more detail at these young people collectively as an IRO group and consider any feedback they have given and their individual outcomes to see what insights this offers to planning and practice.
- 5.3 A few young people have given their IRO hugs goodbye and have wanted to mark the ending in some way and IROs remember the following comments from two young people.

One felt “he would have benefited from a move to the Through Care Team at 14 years”.

And the other one said that he would always remember the paper planes the IRO made for him to help him feel more relaxed during his reviews when he was younger.

## 6. Quantitative information about the IRO/CPA service

**1,529 CLA review meetings for 684 children were held in the year compared with:**  
**1229 in 15/16**  
**1232 in 14/15**  
**1530 in 13/14**  
**1688 in 12/13**

6.1 Although THRIVE programme is no longer in place the targets for the year remained.

As at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2015	Thrive target	Actual figures
CP	502	469
LAC	522	548
<b>31<sup>st</sup> March 2016</b>	Target	
CP	469	459 (18.2.16)
LAC	522	548 (18.2.16)
<b>31<sup>st</sup> March 2017</b>	522	563

6.2 CLA numbers have risen steadily over the year ending on 563 and well above the target of 522 reversing the trend of previous years as more children and young people are being accommodated than leaving.

6.3 The table below indicates the gap between male and female CLA narrowed slightly last year and numbers of BME children and young people have increased.

31.3.17	18.2.16	31.3.15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 44% Female</li> <li>• 56% Male</li> <li>• 16% BME</li> <li>• 7% involved with disability teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 42% Female</li> <li>• 58 % Male</li> <li>• 14% BME</li> <li>• 7.5% involved with disability teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 41% Female</li> <li>• 59% Male</li> <li>• 15% BME</li> <li>• 6% involved with disability teams</li> </ul>

6.4 A closer look at the figures show that 31% of CLA are aged between 15 and 17 and 62% of this cohort are male.

6.5 Numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people have increased following the introduction of the dispersal scheme and account for 4.5% of the CLA population. Many of these young people are placed out of the county and in specialist residential placements in London. Two IROs have taken responsibility for chairing the reviews for the young people placed in London and identifying and raising issues that affect them such as sexual health treatment and guidance and financial support which is the subject of challenge and concern and has been raised with senior managers.

## 6.6 IRO caseloads

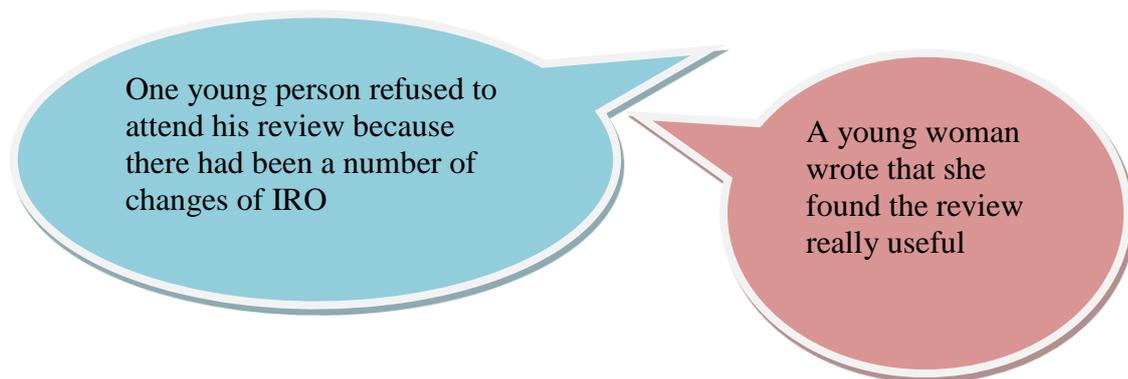
6.7 Overall across the service referral rates have increased over the year. In tandem with the increase in the CLA numbers, children subject to child protection plans has also increased, going from 448 to 477 and have escalated steeply so far this year to currently 551. However staffing in the unit has decreased in line with savings plans and this has consequently resulted in IROs and CPAs having caseloads in excess of 100 again. In East Sussex, IRO/CPAs have always carried higher than average caseloads compared with both their colleagues in other authorities and the DfE guidance 'IRO Handbook' of between 50 and 70. As with the whole of the service the increases have an impact on the pressures on IROs.

## 7 Children's Participation

7.1 Encouraging children and young people to take part in their reviews begins at an early age in recognition of the importance of this to his or her self-esteem and self-efficacy and the consequent impact on good

outcomes. Ways of engaging children are many, varied and highly individual and we try to measure this in a number of ways.

- 7.2 Our participation figures are consistently high and this year is no different. Twenty-two children and young people did not attend or contribute to their reviews. Out of these almost half were still very young and for others social workers were just beginning to build relationships with the children. In another a manager had to cover sickness absence and had not had the opportunity to meet with the children. The target for participation is 95% and the performance in this area exceeds this target given the very small number of children who do not participate (greater than 98%).



## 8. Late reviews

- 8.1 Services for CLA are highly regulated with specific timescales for reviews. The unit works hard to achieve this so that children's plans can be considered in a timely way, however due to the pressures on the service, the reorganisation of administrative support and the introduction of the new data base there has been an increase in the number of late reviews from 6 (0.4%) in the previous year to 17 (1%) this year. The majority of these were no longer than a week late.
- 8.2 The reasons vary and include errors by all those involved and also reflect the need to be responsive to events that happen in children's lives. Some young people for example had late reviews because they were part of the dispersal scheme and the handover from Kent was delayed. This is a target area for improvement this coming year.

## 9. Permanence Outcomes

- 9.1 A central function of the IRO role is to ensure timely planning for outcomes for permanence for children and to challenge any drift. IROs liaise closely with Children's Guardians when there are care proceedings and contribute their views to the final care plan. A permanence plan should be discussed and agreed at the second review, approximately 4 months after a child becomes looked after.
- 9.2 Looking only at children 12 and under, these plans were in place for 85% (78) of children in this cohort. The remaining 15% (12) who did not have a permanence plan agreed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> review reflect some of the complexities of care planning. An example is a baby who was allegedly being poisoned by his parents who are denying this. The evidence had

to be tested in a Fact Finding hearing to seek a determination; however the parents are now appealing the outcome of this hearing so it has not been possible to identify a permanence plan. Other examples include previously agreed family placements being withdrawn unexpectedly. In one case progress has been delayed due to staffing changes in the social work team and this was followed up by the IRO.

- 9.3 Following the making of a Placement Order by the court where the agreed plan is adoption, IROs also monitor drift in the process of making adoptive placements in a timely way and in the revocation of the order when adoption is no longer the plan. IROs challenge any drift in this process on an individual case by case basis but also by feeding back jointly to the Operations Managers in the Safeguarding and CLA services respectively who monitor progress. In past years this has been the subject of challenge and dispute but there has been improvement this year and this has not been necessary.

## **10. Professional Profile of the IRO and CPA Service**

- 10.1 The IRO service sits within the Performance and Planning Directorate of Children's Services and is managed by the Head of Safeguarding, Douglas Sinclair, and two operations managers, Sue McGlynn and Alex Sutton who have the leads for the IRO and Child Protection Adviser (CPA) role in Child Protection and LAC respectively. When the unit was created, chairing Child Protection Conferences (CPC) and LAC reviews were separate specialisms. These two roles are further separated by the different legislation and regulatory protocols underpinning them. Although in the main the roles are no longer separated the names have stuck and chairs have been referred to within this report as IRO/CPA.
- 10.2 The IRO/CPA team began the year with a complement of 9.6 full time equivalent staff at Practice Manager Level (LMG2). This equates to 10 IRO/CPAs, 8 working full time and 2 part time. In response to the reduction in CP Plans achieved during 2015/16, sustained during Quarters 1-2 2016/17, and efficiency savings required, it was agreed that the Unit would reduce by 1 IRO/CPA position at the end of November 2016 and the two Safeguarding Operations Managers would be allocated partial caseloads. An IRO/CPA took early retirement from the Local Authority after 33 years' service and this post was not replaced so the savings were made. Amanda Glover, Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), is also part of the Unit and has responsibility for managing allegations against people who work, care or volunteer with children. Operations Managers Sue McGlynn and Alex Sutton act as LADO when Amanda is on leave.
- 10.3 IRO/CPAs have continued to undertake a number of different activities although this is currently constrained due to their increased caseloads:
- permanent IRO/CPAs chair CP Conferences as well as CLA reviews
  - 3 IROs chair CLA reviews
  - IRO/CPAs quality assure all referrals for a CP Conference on a duty basis

- 1 IRO has specialist lead for children with disabilities
- 2 IRO/CPAs lead LSCB training
- 1 IRO/CPA is part of the Young People's Participation Group
- 1 IRO/CPA chairs PREVENT meetings
- 2 IROs lead on asylum seeking children and young people.

## 11. Conclusion and actions for the year ahead

11.1 Overall the Safeguarding Unit is performing well. The achievements and challenges over the last year have been managed by the team with characteristic willingness to go the extra mile and support each other. IRO/CPAs continue to play a significant role in advocating for timely care planning and alerting the organisation to issues affecting young people on an individual and collective basis. There are clear areas presented in the report to celebrate, such as high participation rates, timely challenge to care planning and highlighting the need to develop pathway planning. There are also clear areas to improve such as building on the quality of outcome focussed plans and ensuring more reviews take place on time. In addition further challenges ahead include reducing the risks to vulnerable young people from sexual exploitation, working with families where neglect is a factor and working within an increasingly pressured environment.

### Key messages

#### Improvement activities for the year ahead:

- IROs will have an increased focus on monitoring and reviewing statutory requirements e.g. Initial Health Assessments and PEPs
- IROs will continue to monitor children subject to Section 20 placements to address any drift in planning
- Half day workshops and audits focussed on Diversity needs, pathway plans and sibling contact.
- Improved performance for reviews being held on time.
- Improved quality of outcome focussed care plans
- Reduced IRO/CPA caseloads




Written by Alex Sutton 10.7.17

co-signed Sue McGlynn

Operations Managers  
Safeguarding Unit

