

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held remotely on 24 July 2020.

PRESENT Councillors Chris Dowling, Kathryn Field, Jim Sheppard, Colin Swansborough, Sylvia Tidy and Francis Whetstone

ALSO PRESENT Liz Rugg – Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care

Sally Carnie – Head of LAC Services

Beverly Moores – Strategic Lead – Children’s Disability
Social Care ISEND

Sally Williams - Operations Manager, ISEND Children's Disability Social Care

Adrian Sewell – Operations Manager, Fostering Team

Carole Sykes – Operations Manager, Adoption and Permanence

Helen Simmons – Registered Manager, Lansdowne Secure Children's Home

Heather Lomas - Assistant Head of and Designated Nurse,
LAC

Aaron Sams – Democratic Services Officer

39 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24TH JANUARY, 2020

39.1 RESOLVED: to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2020.

40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

40.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Charles Clark.

41 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

40.1 There were none.

42 URGENT ITEMS

42.1 There were none.

43 THE LAUNCH OF ADOPTION SOUTH EAST, THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY

43.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the launch of Adoption South East, the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

43.2 The Panel were informed about four main areas of work which have been taken forward since the launch of the RAA on 1 April 2020. These included:

- **Recruitment and Assessment of adopters:** The Panel were informed that initial data indicates that since the formation of the RAA there has been a significant increase in adoption enquires and an increase in the rate of these enquires leading to initial interviews. There have been 305 enquires, 11 Information sessions and 55 Registrations since the launch of the RAA.
- **Family finding and matching:** The linking and matching of children for adoption has been the responsibility of the RAA since April 2020. The current activity in this area includes 59 children with a plan for adoption, 38 Placement Orders in place and 50 approved adopters.
- **Adoption Panels:** The Panel were informed that in response to the Covid-19 national emergency, Adoption Panel meetings were conducted remotely via video conferencing technology. Members were also informed that both Panels and service users had provided positive feedback about the effectiveness of the technology and the benefits of having remote meetings.
- **Adoption Support:** Adoption Support services are a key part of the long-term development plan for the RAA and the Panel were informed that since going live during the Covid-19 national emergency, a key priority has been to ensure continuity of adoption support provisions. Another priority has been to ensure compliance on the part of all providers with the requirements of their accrediting bodies for the safe provision of virtual therapies. The Panel also heard that £350k of additional funding for Covid-19 specific support was secured for adopters and special guardians following a successful joint application from the RAA and the four local authority Special Guardianship Services.

43.3 The Panel sought clarification about the role of Medical Advisors within the new RAA structure. In particular, Members asked if the Medical Advisors for East Sussex would be required to work for other authorities within the Agency. In response, the Department informed the Panel that the Medical Advisors for East Sussex County Council would continue to work within the county. However, if there was an absence on a Panel in another authority within the RAA, a Medical Advisor from East Sussex could potentially be asked to assist if required and the reverse would also be true. The Panel were satisfied that this was a reasonable arrangement and welcomed the increased freedom and resilience this would bring to the service.

43.4 The Panel welcomed the positive developments within the RAA.

43.5 RESOLVED: to note the report.

44 ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT OF EAST SUSSEX ADOPTION SERVICE 1 APRIL 2019 - 31 MARCH 2020

44.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined the performance and progress of the East Sussex Adoption Service for the period 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020. Carole Sykes (Operations Manager – Adoption and Permanence Service), introduced the report and highlighted various activities such as: work on recruiting adopters, family finding and linking, adoption support, and the work of the Adoption Panels.

44.2 The Panel were informed that nationally there is a challenge with regard to ensuring sufficient numbers of adopters and that this was also the case in East Sussex. The total number of adopters approved in 2019/20 was 22 compared to 33 in the previous year. The decrease is representative of the national picture and is reflective of a rise in more complex applications which inevitably take longer to process.

44.3 The Panel asked whether future Annual Adoption reports for East Sussex would continue, given that the East Sussex Adoption Service has now been incorporated into Adoption South East, the Regional Adoption Agency. In response, the Department informed the Panel that future reports would provide an annual update on the work of the Regional Adoption Agency and these reports would continue to include information regarding services in East Sussex.

44.4 RESOLVED: to note the report.

45 ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT OF EAST SUSSEX FOSTERING SERVICE - 1 APRIL 2019 - 31 MARCH 2020

45.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined the performance and progress of the East Sussex Fostering Service for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. Adrian Sewell (Operations Manager – Fostering Service) provided further detail regarding some of the key activities undertaken by the service, including: recruitment & retention work, fostering panels, foster carer training, the Children in Care Council, and ongoing publicity campaigns to promote fostering in East Sussex.

45.2 The Panel were informed that 381 in-house fostering placements were made during 2019/20 and matching referrals to place children have risen from 532 in 2018/19 to 553 in 2019/20.

45.3 The Panel discussed the impact of Covid-19 on the Fostering Service. Members were informed that the preceding months had been a challenging time for the service. However, during the national lockdown period between 21 March to 17 June, there were 122 Matching referrals completed and 68 new in-house placements identified. The Panel thanked the service for its professionalism and resilience in response to the challenges it faced during the national emergency.

45.4 Members also discussed the challenges of securing supported lodgings. In response members were informed that, for example, the use of the Department's 'recruitment van' was continuing and that this offers the service another way to engage with local communities throughout the county, including in rural areas. It was confirmed though that the provision of supported lodgings for the more densely populated coastal strip of the county remains a priority for the Department.

45.5 RESOLVED: to note the report.

46 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

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

46.2 The Panel were informed that in comparison to other local authorities the numbers of LAC in East Sussex have remained relatively stable during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, there is pressure on the Fostering Duty system due to children moving between placements. The national emergency has also placed additional demands on many households and this in turn has caused a decrease in the number of internal placement options available, with external placement options also becoming more limited and more expensive during this period.

46.3 RESOLVED: to note the report.

47 ANY OTHER NON-EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED URGENT BY THE CHAIR.

47.1 There were none.

48 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

48.1 The Panel agreed to exclude the press and public for the next two agenda items on the basis that if they were present there would be disclosure to them of information considered exempt by virtue of Category 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to an individual.

49 THE IMPACT OF COVID- 19 ON CORPORATE PARENTING SERVICES

49.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Corporate Parenting services in East Sussex.

49.2 The Panel were assured that the Department have monitored a range of indicators to assess the impact of Covid-19. These include:

- **Front Door contacts:** There was an initial reduction in the activity of the front door teams, but referral rates have been steadily rising since mid-May. The Panel were informed that during May 80% of mandated health visiting contacts took place and 82% of children open to a Locality social work team have had contact with their social worker.
- **Child Protection Plans:** The Panel heard that in part due to Child Protection Plans not ceasing due to safety issues, the number of children on Child Protection Plans has increased from 542 in the week commencing 9 March, to 574 by 26 June, and that during the pandemic more than 90% of children subject to a plan have had contact with their social worker.
- **LAC (Looked After Children):** The numbers of LAC have remained stable during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Panel also noted a major improvement which has occurred during the pandemic with regards to Initial Health Assessments of LAC, with 89% of assessments being completed within 20 days and 100% being completed within 25 days during April.
- **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC):** There has been international concern regarding Covid-19 cases in the migrant camps in France and nationally there has been a significant increase in migrants making their way to the United Kingdom. This has been particularly impactful in Kent, but East Sussex has also seen a rise in

UASC, and the Department is preparing for these numbers to increase further during the year.

49.3 The Panel sought clarification on whether East Sussex County Council are accepting UASC from Kent County Council. In response, the Panel were informed that East Sussex have only accepted children from Kent where there has been capacity to do so.

49.4 The Panel also discussed the impact of the easing of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. In particular, Members asked the Department for detail about its plans for working with its partners to ensure it is well-placed to respond effectively to the developing situation. In response the Panel were informed that a virtual working group has been formed to help deliver a smooth transition, with the membership including representatives from schools, mental health teams and voluntary sector organisations.

49.5 RESOLVED: to note the report.

50 UPDATE ON RESIDENTIAL HOMES

50.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director for Children's Services updating members on how Residential Homes in the county have responded to the Covid-19 pandemic and the support provided by the Department.

50.2 The Panel thanked the Registered Homes Managers and all staff at the homes for coping so well in response to the unprecedented circumstances presented by the national emergency.

50.3 RESOLVED: to note the report.

51 ANY OTHER EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED URGENT BY THE CHAIR.

51.1 There were none.