

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 29 October 2021.

PRESENT

Councillors Bob Bowdler, Kathryn Field (Chair), Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood, Matthew Milligan, Colin Swansborough and Sam Adeniji

ALSO PRESENT

Alison Jeffery – Director of Children’s Services

Teresa Lavelle-Hill – Head of LAC Services

Beverley Moores – Strategic Lead, Children’s Disability Care ISEND

Nicola Scott – Operations Manager, Residential LAC Services

Mandy Lewis – Head of Virtual School

Ian Williams – Registered Homes Manager, Lansdowne Secure Unit

Sally Williams – Operations Manager

Janet Fairless – Registered Homes Manager, Homefield Cottage

Shirin White – Registered Homes Manager, Acorns

Karen Carty – Assistant Manager, Lansdowne Secure Unit

Steven Crowe – Registered Homes Manager, Brodrick House

Aaron Sams – Democratic Services Officer

13. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 JULY 2021

13.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2021.

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

14.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Johnny Denis.

15. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

15.1 There were no disclosures of interest.

16. URGENT ITEMS

16.1 There were no urgent items.

17. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

17.1 RESOLVED - to exclude the public and press from the meeting for items 9 and 10 on the agenda (see minutes 26 and 27) on the grounds that if the public and press were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as specified in category 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual. It was considered that the public interest in maintaining the exception outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

18. OFSTED INSPECTION REPORTS

18.1 The Panel considered Ofsted Inspection reports for the following Children's Homes:

- Acorns
- Brodrick House
- Homefield Cottage
- Lansdowne

18.2 The Panel welcomed the reports and received a verbal update from the Registered Homes' Managers (RHM) regarding their Ofsted report.

18.3 RESOLVED – to note the reports.

19. CHILDREN'S HOME REGULATIONS 2015, REGULATION 44: INSPECTION REPORTS

19.1 The Panel considered Regulation 44 Reports for the following Children's Homes:

- Acorns
- Brodrick House
- Hazel Lodge
- Homefield Cottage
- Lansdowne Secure Unit
- The Bungalow

19.2 The Panel received a verbal update from each of the Registered Homes' Managers (RHMs).

19.3 The Panel discussed a wide range of issues, including; the impact of Covid-19 on the Children's Homes', behaviour control techniques within the homes', recruitment, retention and staff changes and building improvements within the homes

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

20.1 There were none.

21. VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT - 1 SEPTEMBER 2020 - 31 AUGUST 2021

21.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which highlighted the work of the Virtual School for the period 1 September 2020 – 31 August 2021.

21.2 Mandy Lewis, Head of the Virtual School, introduced the report and provided the Panel with a detailed overview on the work of the Virtual School, including: supporting 419 children who were looked after (LAC), and a total of 732 children and young people including Care Leavers (CL), a focus on educational support with literacy and numeracy, continued partnership working between the Virtual School and local providers, including Eggtooth and the Education Futures Trust and funding of a 10 week training programme for foster carers, amongst other work.

21.3 The Panel sought assurance that Looked After Children (LAC) were not being excluded or suspended from school disproportionately compared to the general school population. Mandy Lewis confirmed to the Panel that exclusion of LAC is a significant national issue, but that in the previous year locally there were no permanent exclusions of LAC. The Panel further heard however, that a slightly higher proportion of LAC were suspended from school but that this may be a reflection of the fact that the majority of LAC were in school full time during Covid-19 restrictions while the majority of the general school population were at home. The Panel were assured that the Virtual School works with all schools to support children that were in crisis to avoid exclusions, this includes working with the Education Support Behaviour and Attendance Service (ESBAS) and educational psychologists.

21.4 RESOLVED - to note the report.

22. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN'S ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2020-21

22.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the annual performance of the Looked After Children (LAC) Service for 2020-21.

22.3 The update provided detail about the achievements of the LAC service and the ongoing challenges it faces. This update included:

- **Increase in Looked After Children (LAC):** There was an increase of children in care compared to the previous year. The Panel heard that this was partly due to an increase of an additional 22 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) in the care of ESCC and also due to more children entering care than leaving care.
- **Adoption South East (ASE) Regional Adoption Agency:** East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Surrey and Brighton and Hove launched ASE on 1st April 2020 and meets weekly to consider all children and available adopters in order to identify potential links.
- **Fostering Recruitment and Retention:** There were 20 fostering households approved during 2020/21 offering 30 placements and 277 initial fostering enquiries. 2 fostering households transferred from agency foster carers to become East Sussex foster carers.

- **Education of LAC:** School attendance remained high for LAC during the Covid-19 lockdowns. There were no permanent exclusions of LAC in 2020/21. Educational assessments and regulated tests were determined by teaching staff, this data will not be published but will be used to identify patterns and trends.

22.4 The Panel discussed the development of the corporate grandparenting role and sought more information on this project. Teresa Lavelle-Hill, Head of Looked After Children's Services, informed the Panel that many of the care leavers become parents themselves and that the corporate grandparenting project is the Department's way of ensuring that these young people have the support and guidance in a similar way to that a grandparent would provide.

22.5 RESOLVED – to note the report.

23. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

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

23.2 Teresa Lavelle-Hill, Head of LAC Services updated the Panel on the latest data regarding LAC in East Sussex. Members heard that in the last quarter there has been a slight decrease in the numbers of children from 625 in June to 622 on the last day of September. A total of 343 children were in foster care at the end of September, with 269 of these children living with East Sussex County Council carers and 74 children living with agency carers. There has been an increase of 6 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in the quarter bringing the total to 59 at the end of September.

23.3 RESOLVED - to note the report.

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

24.1 There were none.