

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 21 January 2022.

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

ALSO PRESENT Alison Jeffery – Director of Children's Services
Liz Rugg – Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care
Sally Carnie – Head of Looked After Children Services
Teresa Lavelle-Hill – Head of Looked After Children Services
Jill Nwokedi – Practice Manager, Care Leavers Service
Sally Williams – Operations Manager
Roy Noble – Deputy Registered Homes Manager, Homefield Cottage
Shirin White - Registered Homes Manager, Acorns
Nicola Scott – Operations Manager, LAC Services
Scott Lipa – Registered Homes Manager, Lansdowne
Georgia Carty – Residential Homes Manager, Hazel Lodge
Steven Crowe – Registered Homes Manager, Brodrick House
Susanne Beesly – Chairperson, East Sussex Foster Carers Association

25. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 OCTOBER 2021

25.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2021 were agreed as a correct record, with one amendment to include a personal, non-prejudicial disclosure of interest from Councillor Matthew Milligan in that a close family member is an East Sussex County Council Foster parent.

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

26.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Johnny Denis.

27. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

27.1 Councillor Matthew Milligan declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest that a close family member is an East Sussex County Council Foster parent.

28. URGENT ITEMS

28.1 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel agreed it would be beneficial to have an opportunity to discuss in more detail their role as corporate parents and the work of the Panel. The Children's Services Department therefore undertook to liaise with Member Services over related arrangements for a discussion to take place at the appropriate time.

29. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

29.1 RESOLVED - to exclude the public and press from the meeting for items 6 and 7 on the agenda (see minutes 30 and 31) 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.

30. OFSTED INSPECTION REPORT FOR LANSDOWNE SECURE CHILDREN'S HOME

30.1 The Panel welcomed the report and received a verbal update from the Registered Homes Manager (RHM).

30.2 RESOLVED – to note the report.

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

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

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

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

31.3 The Panel were updated on and discussed a wide range of issues, including: the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on Children's Homes, the Christmas period at the homes, building works and recruitment and staffing changes.

31.4 RESOLVED – to note the reports.

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

32. There were none.

33. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EAST SUSSEX FOSTER CARE ASSOCIATION (ESFCA) 2020-21

33.1 The Panel considered a report by the East Sussex Foster Care Association (ESFCA) which presented an update on the work of the charity. The Chair of ESFCA presented the report, highlighting the key activities undertaken by ESFCA and their plans for future development. These included:

- **Covid lockdown survey:** The Covid-19 pandemic, which led to a rise in the use of technology, home schooling and working from home, created challenges for fostering families and also provided opportunities for development. The ESFCA and the ESCC Fostering Service therefore created and distributed a survey to gather information from foster families on their experience of Covid-19 lockdowns. The survey sought information on continuance of contact, placement support, home schooling, and the financial, welfare and wellbeing support provided by the local authority. The information gathered has provided helpful insights into the impact of Covid-19 on East Sussex foster carers. The outcomes were also collated into a report and presented to the ESCC

Children's Services Department.

- **Suitcase initiative:** The ESFCA has continued its suitcase initiative, distributing over 200 suitcases to children that have had to be moved as an emergency or travelling for respite. To help ensure they have a feeling of dignity, the initiative ensures children do not pack their belongings in plastic bags when they are required to move.
- **Book Club:** The ESFCA, along with charity patron and children's author, Jacqueline Wilson, launched their virtual book club on Christmas Eve 2021. This book club takes place every two weeks on a Friday and each month the ESFCA sends small gifts to the book club members.

33.2 Alison Jeffrey, Director of Children's Services, also informed the Panel that she and Councillor Bob Bowdler (Lead Member for Children and Families) attended the ESFCA Annual General meeting and were impressed with the important work the charity undertakes.

33.3 RESOLVED – to note the report.

34. STRENGTHENING THE LOCAL OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS IN EAST SUSSEX

34.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the progress of the Local Offer for Care Leavers and options for the next steps in developing this offer.

34.2 Sally Carnie, Head of Looked After Children Services introduced the report and delivered a presentation to the Panel. The Panel were informed that Department for Education (DfE) guidance from 2018 required all local authorities to develop and publish a Local Offer, which ESCC subsequently published in 2019. Since then ESCC has undertaken the Coram Brightspots survey of care leavers regarding their views and experiences and have also used an audit tool developed by the charity Catch 22 and the National Care Leaver Benchmarking Forum to explore this area further. It is now proposed that ESCC use this information to review options for strengthening the Local Offer.

34.3 The Panel heard that in developing the Local Offer the Department are planning on holding a series of meetings with all departments of the Council and partner agencies to explore where further support could be provided to care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Panel will also be consulted and given opportunity to consider development options as the new Local Offer is developed.

34.4 The Panel welcomed the development of the Local Offer and discussed a number of points, including:

- **Involvement from the Care Leavers Council:** The Panel discussed the importance of ensuring that care leavers themselves play an active role in the development of the Local Offer and sought assurance that the Care Leavers Council would be involved. The Department confirmed that the views and ideas of the Care Leavers Council will form a key part of the engagement process when developing the new offer. The Panel further heard that one positive outcome of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has been the increased use of technology to convene meetings of the Care Leavers Council. This has allowed the Department to have more regular conversations with the group to discuss elements of the new offer.
- **Budget implications for the proposals:** The Panel asked the Department whether ESCC is able to fund proposals which might be included in the strengthened Local Offer. In response the Panel were informed that the Department will, where possible, seek to ensure new proposals have 'no cost or low cost'. The Department may also have to

moderate its aspirations if the budget for the service comes under pressure. Members were also assured that the financial implications and any budget constraints will be carefully considered as the proposals evolve.

- **Education and employment for care leavers:** The Panel asked the Department for more detail regarding the steps being taken to ensure suitable education and employment opportunities are provided for care leavers within the new offer. Jill Nwokedi, Practice Manager for the Care Leavers Service, assured the Panel that these were key areas of focus and highlighted the important role that the Virtual School has had in ensuring that education is at the forefront of the support for care leavers. The Panel also heard that the role of apprenticeships and work experience for care leavers is already embedded within the offer, but that the role of mentoring, in particular for young men, is a new area which the Department will be taking forward alongside local employment groups.

34.5 The Panel highlighted the importance that they feel Members can play in supporting all LAC and Care Leavers.

34.6 RESOLVED – to note the report.

35. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

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

35.2 Liz Rug, Assistant Director for Early Help and Social Care updated the Panel on the latest data regarding LAC in East Sussex. Members heard that in the last quarter there has been a slight increase in LAC with 618 children in September and 620 on the last day of December. A total of 344 children were in foster care at the end of December, with 267 living with East Sussex County Council (ESCC) carers and a further 77 children living with agency carers. The number of UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) was down 4 over the reporting period, taking the total number at the end of December to 60.

35.3 RESOLVED – to note the report.

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

36.1 There were none.

Chair