

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 29 July 2022.

PRESENT Councillors Bob Bowdler, Kathryn Field (Chair), Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood, Johanna Howell, Matthew Milligan and Colin Swansborough

ALSO PRESENT Kathy Marriott – Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care
Teresa Lavelle-Hill – Head of Looked After Children Services
Nicola Scott – Operations Manager, Residential LAC Services
Sally Hodson - Operations Manager, Children’s Disability Service, Residential and Directly Provided Services, ISEND
Adrian Sewell - Operations Manager, Fostering Team
Dawn Price - Operations Manager, Safeguarding Unit
Thea Synnestvedt – Governance and Democracy Officer

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 APRIL 2022

1.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2022.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies were received from Councillors Sam Adeniji, Johnny Denis and Alison Jeffrey, Director of Children Services. It was noted that Councillor Johanna Howell was substituting for Councillor Sam Adeniji.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

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

4. URGENT ITEMS

4.1 There were no urgent items.

5. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

6. OFSTED INSPECTION REPORTS

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

- Brodrick House
- The Bungalow

6.2 The Panel welcomed the reports and received a verbal update from the Operational Managers.

6.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

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

7.1 Kathy Marriott, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care updated that Panel that going forward, a summary paper would be brought to the Panel with an update on each of the Children's Homes, this would highlight any progress or cautions noted through regulation 44 reports, it is hoped that this approach would ensure best use of time and resources in future. Ofsted reports will be provided separately to the Panel.

7.2 The Panel discussed the proposed changes and fed back that direct contact with the Registered Homes Managers remained important for the Corporate Parenting Panel and as such, should not be lost.

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

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

7.4 The Panel received a verbal update from Operational Managers.

7.5 The Panel discussed funding for residential care homes and the cost associated with the specialist care provided. It was noted that the local authority does not receive child benefits. Child benefits are awarded to parents once the child returns to their care. This differed from the Adult Social Care sector where care homes for elderly residents received some of the additional benefits for providing care. It was agreed that this matter would be investigated.

7.6 The Panel discussed residential home visits and agreed that it would be beneficial for Panel Members to visit Lansdowne Secure Unit and that a visit would be arranged in autumn for Members to visit the homes two at a time.

7.7 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

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

8.1 There were none.

9. FOSTERING SERVICES ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

9.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined the performance of the Fostering Service between 01 April 2021 – 31 March 2022. Adrian Sewell, Operations Manager – Fostering Service provided further detail regarding the key activities and work of the service, including updates on recruitment and retention, foster carer training, diversity & equality, the placement support service, and the current pressures on the service both nationally and locally, with significant difficulties finding appropriate placements.

9.2 The Panel discussed the report including:

- Children in Care Council (CiCC) meeting – a meeting with the CiCC was due to take place in autumn, with options for dates having been circulated to all Panel Members.
- The East Sussex County Council's Fostering Service's summer picnic – the Fostering Service picnic was due to take place and it was noted that all Panel Members were invited to attend this event. The picnic was due to take place on Wednesday 3 August and it was agreed that Adrian would send information regarding the event to Democratic Services for this to be circulated to Panel Members following the meeting.
- Foster carers application dropout rates – the Panel noted the high initial dropout rates for the foster carer assessment process and asked if there were any specific barriers identified causing this. Adrian fed back that the high rates were unusual but that there was no specific reason why people were dropping out. As the application process was around 4-6 months, dropouts were largely due to changes in the applicant's circumstances.
- Respite – the Panel discussed the current situation regarding respite carers, recognising that due to significant pressures within the service many respite carers were asked if children could remain with them over a longer period due to the lack of options available. It was noted that despite pressures, respite remained an incredibly important part of the service and provided a much needed break for longer-term foster carers. Teresa Lavelle-Hill, Head of Looked After Children Services updated the Panel that ESCC continued to welcome many new respite carers and recognised the importance of their role providing respite to longer term foster carers. The role also provided opportunities for people interested in fostering to gain an initial insight into what fostering entails before committing to longer term arrangements.

9.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

10. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2021/2022

10.1 The Panel received an update from Dawn Price, Operations Manager - Safeguarding Unit on the contribution of the Independent Reviewing Officers to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for Looked After Children. This included details on My Voice Matters, participation, the minority and ethnic population, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) profile leaflets and training.

10.2 The Panel discussed the procedure for bringing in an Independent Person to sit on the Secure Accommodation Review (SAR) Panel. Dawn Price updated the Panel that the Independent Person does not work for the local authority but would have a background working in Children's Services.

10.3 The Panel discussed participation rates of the review process and the mechanisms used where children had specific needs or were not engaging with their IROs. Dawn fed back that an advocacy service was in place, with staff trained to work with children with disabilities. For the small percentage of children that do not engage, alternative techniques were used by IROs to

encourage participation, such as suggesting alternative venues to talk where the child may feel more comfortable. Social Workers were also asked to provide observations on the child's behalf and all children were encouraged to use the Mind of My Own app.

10.4 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

11. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

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

11.2 Kathy Marriott, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care updated the Panel on the latest position for Looked After Children in East Sussex. During the last quarter, a total of 638 children were living in care, a rise of 11 LAC. This was a reflection of the challenges faced by the sector both locally and nationally, with placement sufficiency being extremely challenging. Increased complexities in behaviours were also recorded, following families having been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. A Senior Management Review of care plans is scheduled for August/September.

11.3 One young person was remanded into youth detention accommodation in this quarter. The Panel noted that for an area the size of ESCC, this figure was low and a testament to the strong work the council undertakes to where at all possible prevent escalation into custody.

11.4 The Panel discussed current media announcements regarding lack of support for kinship carers in the UK. Teresa Lavelle-Hill, Head of Looked After Children Services assured the Panel that this is not the case for ESCC. ESCC have a number of approved kinship foster carers who have access to everything an approved foster carer would. Special Guardianship Orders are in place to ensure carers receive Special Guardianship allowances. ESCC recognised the important role of kinship carers and are working to boost support for families providing kinship care.

11.5 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

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

12.1 There were none.

The meeting ended at 12.12 pm.

Councillor Kathryn Field
Chair