

Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date of meeting: 16 January 2024

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Update on IMPOWER work with East Sussex County Council

Purpose: To update the panel on the work of IMPOWER with Children's Social Care since May 2023

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the update.

1. Background

1.1. IMPOWER is a consultancy that works exclusively with the public sector with a focus on improving outcomes for people by transforming public services. IMPOWER works with frontline staff across the system to identify opportunities to enhance outcomes. Over the last five years IMPOWER has worked with over thirty local authorities to improve outcomes for children and families and reduce costs, working across Children's Services, with 12 authorities specifically using the Valuing Care approach.

2. Supporting information

2.1 IMPOWER started working with East Sussex County Council in May 2023 focusing on placement sufficiency and enhancing our ability to secure the right care for the right child for the right length of time. The first phase of work focused on better understanding the needs of looked after children in East Sussex and associated pressures in the system and identifying opportunities to do things differently to enhance the existing offer in East Sussex.

2.2 IMPOWER presented a detailed analysis of children and young people's needs in East Sussex and associated placement cost pressures in July 2023, as well as the identification of opportunities within a first cohort of children and young people with complex needs using the Valuing Care approach. IMPOWER worked closely with teams and individuals within Children's Services to develop a set of proposed interventions which can realise the opportunities identified to reduce cost and improve outcomes for children. The proposed interventions included needs-driven changes to care and support using the Valuing Care approach, a coordinated drive to improve foster carer recruitment and retention, and enhanced market management and commissioning to match the current market reality.

2.3 The work with IMPOWER from August to October 2023 (Phase 2) and November 2023 to January 2024 (Phase 3) has focused on progressing the opportunities identified in the first phase of the project.

2.4 A multi-agency panel has been established that is taking a strength-based approach to the opportunities identified in the first cohort of children including reunification with families, step down from children's homes to foster placements, and permanence - all where this is appropriate and the right plan for the individual child. Two home matching events have been held in October and December, which trialled taking a more proactive strength-based approach to finding family based (foster) placements for children and young people matched to their needs. A second larger cohort of children was identified in Phase 2 to continue to roll out the Valuing Care approach and social workers were trained to complete Valuing Care profiles for this additional cohort of looked after children. The opportunities identified in this second cohort of children are currently being progressed. Rigorous tracking has been established to closely monitor the associated financial impact of any placement changes.

2.5 Extensive engagement has also taken place with foster carers and the Fostering Service during August and September 2023 to identify and prioritise opportunities that will have the most impact on foster carer recruitment and retention. These opportunities are being progressed in the current phase of the project, including: the identification and training of Foster Carer Ambassadors to take a key role in a word-of-mouth recruitment campaign; refreshing and improving the East Sussex fostering website; enhancing the buddying scheme for foster carers; and introducing the Valuing Care approach to foster carers to support with identifying strengths and development areas for foster carers, and to support the utilisation and matching of in-house foster carers.

2.6 Work is currently focused on developing clear plans to embed the Valuing Care approach across process, practice and commissioning in East Sussex.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the update.

ALISON JEFFERY
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Kathy Marriott
Tel. No. 07517 466 601
Email: Kathy.marriott@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None