

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held at Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes on 24 April 2024.

PRESENT Councillors Bob Standley, Anne Cross, Penny di Cara, Kathryn Field (Chair), Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood, Matthew Milligan and Colin Swansborough

ALSO PRESENT Carolyn Fair - Director of Children's Services
Alison Jeffery - Director of Children's Services
Kathy Marriott - Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care
Fiona Lewis - Head of Looked After Children Services - Provider Services
Sally Carnie - Head of Looked After Children Service - Operations
Michael Coates - East Sussex Housing Partnership and Lead
Laura Knight - Young Persons Housing and Accommodation Manager
Belinda Trunfull - Governance and Democracy Officer

35. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2024

35.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2024.

36. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

36.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Johnny Denis (It was noted that Councillor Anne Cross was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Denis).

36.2 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bob Bowdler (It was noted that Councillor Bob Standley was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Bowdler).

37. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

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

38. URGENT ITEMS

38.1 There were no urgent items.

39. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

39.1 RESOLVED to exclude the public and press from the meeting for items 6 and 7 on the agenda (see minutes 40 and 41) on the grounds that if the public and press were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as specified in paragraph 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.

40. REGULATION 44 QUARTERLY SUMMARY REPORT - QUARTER 4 (JANUARY - MARCH 2024)

40.1 The Panel considered the Quarterly Registered Children's Home reports for the following Children's Homes:

- Brodrick House
- Homefield Cottage
- Hazel Lodge
- Silver Birches
- Lansdowne Secure Children's Home
- Acorns; and
- The Bungalow

40.2 The Panel considered Ofsted Inspection reports for the following children's homes:

- Homefield Cottage
- Lansdowne Secure Children's Home
- Hazel Lodge
- Acorns; and
- Silver Birches

40.3 Fiona Lewis, Head of Looked After Children Services informed the Panel that reports for 4 of the homes were not included within the report due to the timing of the Easter break.

40.4 All homes received monthly visits from their Regulation 44 Independent Person including unannounced visits. In-person visits have resumed at Lansdowne Secure Children's Home following it's reopening in January 2024.

40.5 Comments from the Independent Person continue to remain positive in relation to the care and protection that children receive, with all recommendations made being considered and ratified quickly.

40.6 There was a key highlight on education and the positive work undertaken by the homes to ensure that all children have access to educational provisions and a range of activities. There has been a high focus on ensuring all children are afforded the opportunity of a holiday or short break.

40.7 The Panel discussed staffing and recruitment and were updated that staff training will be an area of focus for the next quarter. The Service has adapted job descriptions and approach to recruitment to enable a consistent market presence and a broad employment offer, as a result, recruitment has been positive in the last quarter.

40.8 In response to a question about testing for Legionella disease the Panel were was updated that testing has been completed to a high standard, and currently is well managed and highly monitored.

40.9 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

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

41.1 There were none.

42. ACCOMMODATION PATHWAYS FOR CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

42.1 The Panel welcomed a video shared by Jill Nwokedi, Operations Manager which was viewed by the Panel before the meeting was reopened to the public and press. The video was viewed in exempt session since young people shared their housing testimonies and therefore contained information relating to individuals. The video included a mix of young people who are currently in care, and those that are now care leavers including some who now have their own children. The Panel was pleased to hear views from a mix of young people as this gave a flavour of the positives as well as highlighting areas where extra focus is required.

42.2 The Panel received a joint presentation by Michael Courts, East Sussex Housing Partnership Lead and Luara Knight, Young Persons Housing and Accommodation Manager on the Accommodation pathways for care experienced young people.

42.3 The Panel heard how the service is working in collaboration with other organisations to meet its corporate parenting responsibilities to ensure appropriate accommodation pathways for care experienced young people and those at risk of homelessness. This responsibility is met through effective joint working between Children's Services, East Sussex Housing Partnership Board and Public Health. Public Health and Children's Services jointly fund posts to support young people to access accommodation pathways, they work in partnership with local housing authorities, housing providers, adult social care, health and criminal justice services and the voluntary sector.

42.4 The young person's housing and accommodation pathway involves multi-agency collaboration which focuses on reducing homelessness, providing assistance and support to help with transition towards independent living for young people. Existing challenges across the system will be addressed through a refreshed partnership arrangements with multi-agency partners, which will also enhance cross sector working and aim to deliver a reduced reliance on temporary accommodation as well as support sustainable housing and accommodation options.

42.5 The Panel welcomed the presentation and requested more information regarding the varying approach to priority housing banding for care experienced young people across the Districts and Boroughs (Ds and Bs) Housing Authorities. In response, the Panel was informed that the varying approach has been driven by high demand on housing leading to a shortage of suitable housing accommodation. In addition, most Ds and Bs have downgraded the priority banding for care leavers.

42.6 In response to a question about care leavers being a protected characteristic, the Panel was informed that work was currently underway to develop this and a report will be considered by the Equalities and Diversity team ahead of being presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

42.7 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

43. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

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

43.2 Sally Carnie, Head of Looked After Service updated the Panel on the latest position for LAC in East Sussex. The Panel noted a correction to the figures at paragraph 2.2, noting it should read '96 children were living with agency carers, this has increased by 5 since the previous quarter'.

43.3 Since the previous quarter, the overall number of LAC has decreased from 671 to 655. The decrease in numbers resulted from strenuous focus on reunification work with children and their birth families, and discharges from care into Special Guardianship, Adoption and Child Arrangement Orders. The sufficiency of placements in-house and in the independent sector

continues to pose a challenge. In particular, the national shortage of fostering placements has shown no sign of improvement, however, the improved financial offer that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has made to support the recruitment of local foster carers is showing early signs of success with 16 new applicants currently being processed.

43.4 The total number of children living in foster care increased by 9 to 338. The number of young people living in supported housing options, homes or hostels decreased by 5 to 95. This was as a result of the introduction of a new Ofsted regime for the regulation of this type of provision in October 2023 which appears to have bedded down locally with very little loss of provision.

43.5 The number of children who were living with kinship foster carers, decreased significantly from 77 to 67. The number of children living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order to ESCC, also decreased from 30 to 27.

43.6 At the end of March 2024, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes decreased slightly to 108, a total decrease of 3 in the quarter. Exhaustive attempts are made to place children in our in-house provision prior to referring out to an agency.

43.7 The number of children in ESCC placed in external Secure Units increased by 2 bringing the total to 3. There were no children remanded into youth detention accommodation. There was 1 child placed in a Family Centre or Mother and baby unit.

43.8 The Panel discussed recruitment of foster carers and were pleased to hear that there has been an uplift with a total of 16 new applications. The Service informed that the recruitment process takes up to 6 months and efforts made to target those who are able to support children with complex needs.

43.9 The Service further updated that following the introduction of the new Ofsted regime, Ofsted has been invited to speak to the Children's Services team to provide an overview of their role. It is expected that this will ease staff anxiety around future Ofsted inspections.

43.10 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

44. INSPECTION OF EAST SUSSEX LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES

44.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the outcome of the Council's Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in December 2023.

44.2 Kathy Marriott, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care updated the Panel that The Council's Children's Services has been judged to be good overall and outstanding for the experiences and progress of children in care. This is a good outcome for the service and for the Council which has made keeping vulnerable people safe, a priority outcome. It is a very welcome recognition of all the hard, determined, and high-quality work the service has done since the last inspection, through a time of pandemic, its continuing effects, and cost of living pressures.

44.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

The meeting ended at 12.06 pm.

Councillor Kathryn Field
Chair