

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held at Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes on 17 July 2025.

PRESENT

Councillors Kathryn Field, Colin Belsey, Bob Bowdler, Anne Cross, Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood and Colin Swansborough

ALSO PRESENT

Carolyn Fair – Director of Children’s Services
Kathy Marriott – Assistant Director of Children’s Services
Fiona Lewis – Head of Looked After Children Services – Provider Services
Deborah Ennis – Assistant Director of Children’s Services
Sally Carnie - Head of Looked After Children Service – Operations
Adrian Sewell – Operations Manager, Fostering Team
Dr Isabelle Hodgson – Designated Doctor – NHS Sussex
Summer Kelly – Governance and Democracy Officer

1. ELECTION OF THE CHAIR

1.1 Councillor Field was elected Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 APRIL 2025

2.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 02 April 2025.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

3.1 Apologies were received for Councillor Georgia Taylor.

4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

4.1 Councillor Colin Belsey declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest that a close family member is an East Sussex County Council (ESCC) CiCC officer.

5. URGENT ITEMS

5.1 There were none.

6. REPORTS

6.1 Reports referred to in the minutes below are contained in the minute book.

7. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

7.1 RESOLVED to exclude the public and press from the meeting for item 7 (see minute 8) 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 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual.

8. CHILDREN'S HOME REGULATIONS 2015, REGULATION 44: INSPECTION REPORTS FOR JANUARY - MARCH 2025 AND RECENTLY PUBLISHED OFSTED INSPECTION REPORTS

8.1 The Panel considered the Quarterly Registered Children's Home report relating to all East Sussex County Council Children's Homes, including updates from Regulation 44 reports and relevant Ofsted reports.

8.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel:

- 1) All Registered Children's Homes relating to East Sussex County Council are now rated 'good' following recent Ofsted inspections.
- 2) Recruitment and staffing for larger homes, such as Acorns and The Bungalow remains challenging, this has been addressed through invested resource in a dedicated recruitment strategy, including a new advertising strategy.
- 3) Area of focus for the next quarter will include:
 - Opening Seaside Short Breaks (previously Acorns)
 - Embedding digital case management across all our homes
 - Focus on the experience of staff in our homes and building resilience
 - Drive towards Outstanding across the homes
 - Working with Education colleagues to ensure that all children in our homes are in school or receiving an education which best meets their needs

8.3 Following discussion, the Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

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

10. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

10.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services regarding an overview of quarter 1 data for Looked After Children.

10.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel

1) There has been gradual increase in the rate of looked after children in East Sussex over the last five years. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) does have a slightly higher rate than that of its statistical neighbours. Despite this, ESCC performance remains below the national rate for England. There has been a total of 56 children admitted to care in Q1.

2) A refreshed reunification framework has been developed, based on nationally recognised best practice, to support the operational service in maximising arrangements to enable children to live at home or within family networks.

3) The improved financial offer that ESCC has made to support the recruitment of local foster carers has made a significant impact on Fostering Service's recruitment.

4) ESCC fully participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for separated children. The number of separated children who were looked after was 67 at the end of Q1, a reduction of 4 from the previous quarter. In addition, there were 151 asylum seeking young people who were Care Leavers aged over 18 during this period which is a decrease of 2 from the previous quarter.

5) The number of looked after children has remained relatively constant over the past 12 months. The number of children living in fostering and family placements has seen a slight decrease to 61%.

6) There will continue to be a focus on managing demand through earlier support and interventions.

10.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

11. FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT

11.1 The Panel consider a report by the Director of Children's Services, regarding Fostering Annual report.

11.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel

1) There have been a number of successes within the Fostering Service during 2024 – 2025. Including a high rate of inquiries, payment uplifts for East Sussex County Council foster carers in line with National Minimum Allowance in April 2024.

2) A 'Mockingbird Constellation' was recently launched, this is a hub for fostering families, allowing for greater practical and emotional support and advice. There is ambition to open two more constellations by end of 2026/27.

3) There will be a greater focus on recruitment and development of foster care resource and training and development. This will also improve response to the unique needs of Connected Carers.

11.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the update on the performance of the East Sussex County Council Fostering Service.

12. ADOPTION SOUTH EAST ANNUAL REPORT 2024/5

12.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services regarding the Adoption South East annual report 2024/25.

12.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel:

1) In 2024/25, Adoption South East (ASE) placed 82 children with adoptive families, including 22 sibling groups and 20 early permanence placements during 2024-2025. Of these, 95% were placed with ASE-approved adopters, reflecting strong internal sufficiency.

2) Recruitment efforts led to 537 enquiries and 64 adopter approvals. ASE also launched the 'Becoming a Family' pilot, enhancing early placement support.

3) ASE secured nearly £4 million from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund to provide therapy for 1397 children. The Advice Hub handled 637 enquiries, and the Keeping in Touch team managed over 3000 letterbox exchanges and 80 face-to-face meetings.

4) ASE has recently demonstrated resilience and adaptability through its restructure and continued service improvements.

12.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the Adoption South East 2024/25 annual report as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

The meeting ended at 3.30 pm.

Councillor Kathryn Field
Chair