

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held at Priory, Room 2F Centre Block, County Hall - County Hall, Lewes on 16 October 2025.

PRESENT

Councillors Kathryn Field, Colin Belsey, Anne Cross, Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood, Colin Swansborough, Georgia Taylor and Penny di Cara

ALSO PRESENT

Carolyn Fair – Director of Children’s Services
Fiona Lewis – Head of Looked After Children Services – Provider Services
Sally Carnie – Head of Looked After Children Service – Operations
Dr Isabelle Hodgson – Designated Doctor – NHS Sussex
Roxanne Clark - Practice Manager – UASC Team
Alex Eves - Practice Manager – UASC Team
Summer Kelly – Governance and Democracy Officer

14. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 JULY 2025

14.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2025.

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

15.1 Apologies were received for Councillor Bob Bowdler. Councillor Penny di Cara was in attendance as substitute.

16. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

16.1 Councillor Colin Belsey declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest that a family member is employed at Broderick House.

17. URGENT ITEMS

17.1 There were none.

18. REPORTS

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

19. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

19.1 RESOLVED to exclude the public and press from the meeting for item 7 (see minute 20) 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.

20. CHILDREN'S HOME REGULATIONS 2015, REGULATION 44: INSPECTION REPORTS FOR APRIL- JULY 2025 AND RECENTLY PUBLISHED OFSTED INSPECTION REPORTS

20.1 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.

20.2 The following points were highlighted to the Corporate Parenting Panel:

1) Silver Birches and Lansdowne Secure Children's Home were inspected by Ofsted during August and September 2025. Both homes received a judgement of 'Good'.

2) All Homes received visits from their Regulation 44 Independent Person.

3) There have been positive developments in recruitment activity for the quarter. This has been particularly relevant to Lansdowne. East Sussex County Council continues to invest in a dedicated recruitment strategy. This has included Employer Branded advertising on Indeed and a rolling programme of Open Days at Lansdowne and The Bungalow.

4) Areas of particular focus for the next quarter will include:

- Opening additional bed capacity at Lansdowne Secure Children's Home
- Opening Seaside Short Breaks (previously Acorns)
- Achieving CQC Registration for the Children's Disability Homes
- 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

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

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

21.1 There were none.

22. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

22.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services regarding an overview of quarter 2 data for Looked After Children.

22.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel:

1) Following a consultation with foster carers, it was agreed that the term, Looked After Children would be updated to Children We Care For.

2) There has been a total of 49 children admitted to care in quarter 2, which is a decrease compared to quarter 1 of 7 children. This is an increase of 11 separated children since the last quarter. The overall reduction can be attributed to new initiatives, particularly from the Connected Family Intensive Practice service.

3) A total of 48 children were discharged from care during quarter 2.

4) East Sussex County Council participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for separated migrant children. The number of separated migrant children who were looked after was 70 at the end of quarter 2, this is an increase from quarter 1.

5) Ultimately, the investment made by East Sussex County Council into initiatives to support children and their families has had a positive impact. This is evidenced in the overall reduction in the number of children we care for, the reduction in children being admitted to care and the increase in children being discharged from care and further increases in children returning to live at home or with family.

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

23. SEPARATED MIGRANT CHILDREN

23.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services, regarding Separated Migrant Children.

23.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel:

1) Separated Migrant children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) under the age of 18 who arrive in the United Kingdom without a parent or legal guardian and seek asylum in their own right. East Sussex County Council Children's Services have adopted the term Separated Migrant Children in place of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children to align with the Language that Cares agenda.

2) East Sussex County Council has a specialist Separated Migrant Children's Team which was established in 2017/2018. The team operated as part of the Through Care Service and consists of 5 full-time social workers, 7 personal advisors, 2 case workers and 1 education lead. The team has strong partnership and links with Sussex Police, exploitation team and missing persons teams.

3) Referrals into the service come via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), this was established to support Kent County Council in distributing responsibility for separated migrant children across the UK.

4) Currently separated migrant children represent 11% of East Sussex County Council's Children We Care For and 33% of the care leaver cohort.

5) There are a number of projects to ensure that Separated Migrant Children feel welcome in the UK, one example being Welcome to UK day.

6) During initial health assessments Separated Migrant Children are signposted to a wealth of further information and advice, such as sexual education and understanding consent.

7) The national discourse surrounding migration has had impact on the wellbeing of some young people within East Sussex, despite this there has also been positive and encouraging examples of community and public support. Partnerships with the police and safer communities teams have helped to strengthen local support strategies.

23.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the Separated Migrant Children report.

24. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

24.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services, regarding Looked After Children Service Annual report.

24.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel:

- 1) During 2024-2025 a total of 908 children were looked after by East Sussex County Council, an increase of 20 compared to the previous year. At the end of the year there were 688 children in care, 31 more than the previous year.
- 2) Initial and Review Health Assessments remain an area of focus alongside improvement in dental care. Health outcomes for children in care are known to be poorer than for their peers.
- 3) The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Council continue to offer valuable challenge and represent the Council at regional and national events.
- 4) There has been a focus on Heading Home (reunification within the family network) and building creative care plans in order to help mitigate a pressure on the budget with regard to increased agency residential placements and high-cost placements for children with complex needs.

24.3 The Panel RESOLVED to:

- 1) Receive Annual Engagement Self-assessment reports in place of the Looked After Children Service annual report going forward.
- 2) Note the Looked After Children Service annual report.

25. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT

25.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services regarding the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual report.

25.2 The following points were highlighted to the panel:

- 1) All permanent posts to the Safeguarding Unit were successfully filled, which has eliminated a need for agency staff.
- 2) In order to avoid introducing a new IRO for a single review, some My Voice Matters meetings were cancelled, these were child-centered decisions and Children supported the approach.
- 3) Audits conducted during the review period included a thematic audit on the Effectiveness of the Missing Children Process showed that most children were offered return home interviews. Safeguarding Managers audited the impact of Midway Reviews, finding positive outcomes and prompting improvements.
- 4) The Safeguarding Unit has strengthened ties with Bede's School in Eastbourne, where several children are boarders. The team also visited the school to better understand the Boarding School project and how the school meets the children's needs.

5) Quality Assurance Monitoring and independent challenge are statutory requirements. 134 Issue Resolutions were raised over the year and 100% were resolved by 31 March 2025. 91% were resolved within 20 working days.

6) Over the year the IRO service has been able to increase the progression of children having their permanency secured through long-term fostering. Review the timeliness of My Voice Matters meetings. Support children staying in contact with people that are important to them. Promote reunification.

25.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the contents of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual report.

26. OFSTED FOCUSED VISIT REPORT

26.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services regarding Ofsted Focused Visit report.

26.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel:

1) Ofsted undertook a focused visit under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework, with particular focus on arrangements for children in need and child protection planning.

2) Ofsted found strengths including, strong senior leadership and corporate support, integrated multidisciplinary support for children and families, a stable and committed workforce and a well-embedded model of practice.

3) One area for improvement included the timeliness of child protection strategy meetings.

4) Ofsted will consider the findings in planning future inspections.

26.2 The Panel RESOLVED to note the update on the Ofsted Focused Visit.

The meeting ended at 11.26 am.

Councillor Kathryn Field

Chair