

Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date of meeting: 29 January 2026

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Heading Home in East Sussex

Purpose: To update the panel on the development of a Heading Home Strategy and next steps for implementation.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the Heading Home in East Sussex update.

1. Background

1.1 The Heading Home Strategy reflects the local authority's commitment to ensuring that where possible and safe to do so we support children to live within their families.

1.2 The presentation draws on learning from national reform, evidence-based frameworks, local practice experience, and the voices of children, care-experienced young people and parents. It sets out a relational, child-centred approach to reunification and family support.

2. Supporting information

2.1 The Heading Home Strategy is underpinned by clear practice principles, including:

- Children at the heart of decision-making
- Connected and relational practice
- Recognising and managing risk as part of good social work
- A whole-system practice shift rather than a single service intervention

2.2 Valuing Care and System Readiness

- The local authority has strong foundations in place, including the adoption of the Valuing Care approach, Reunification Framework, Connected Practice, the Foundations Service, family time approaches and specialist support services.
- A stable and skilled workforce and positive partnership relationships across health, education, Cafcass and the judiciary support implementation.

2.3 Progress to Date and Measuring Impact

Key milestones include:

- Launch of the Heading Home programme in November 2025
- Re-launch of Valuing Care and establishment of Practice Leads
- Workforce development through training, practice drop-ins and learning events
- Family Justice Quality Circle established in December 2025

- Development of an accelerated pathway for discharge of Care Orders impact will be measured through:
 - Outcome tracking and thematic audits
 - Practice observations
 - Lived experience and practitioner feedback

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The Heading Home Strategy provides a coherent, evidence-informed framework to support children to remain with, or safely return to, their families, improving outcomes and reducing reliance on long-term care and unsuitable placements.

3.2. Members are asked to note the update and progress to date.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Heading Home report/presentation

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None.