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Date: 11.03.2020

Dear Member

COUNTY COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 19 MARCH 2020

ITEM 9 - Corporate Parenting Annual Report - 2018-2019

Appendix – Corporate Parenting Annual Report (Pages 1 – 26)

Given the size of this appendix it has been published on the County Council's website alongside the [agenda](#) and is available via the modern.gov app. A hard copy of the appendix is available on request from Democratic Services (democratic.services@kent.gov.uk)

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Watts', is written over a faint circular stamp.

Benjamin Watts
General Counsel

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CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Making Kent a county that works for all children



SEPTEMBER 2018 – SEPTEMBER 2019

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL
Corporate Parenting
Integrated Children's Services

Forward

Ann Allen, MBE Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Chairman of Kent County Council 2019



Welcome to our corporate parenting annual report, which details the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel and our services to children in care.

The contribution from our children in care council and our apprentices is invaluable and indeed I could not fulfil my role as a corporate parent or the chair of the panel without their guidance and support.

As parents we all want the best for our children. We are proud of their achievements and create opportunities to celebrate with them as families.

As corporate parents it is our responsibility and duty to treat our children in care and care leavers as we would our own children.

I am proud of all our young people and their achievements and it is a privilege to work with them. As elected members in our role as a corporate parent we must take every opportunity to champion for them.

In that work, the Corporate Parenting Panel is vital, bringing together a wide range of partners but above all giving voice to the children and young people who this is all about.

Caroline Smith, Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting



On 1st April 2019, it was with great pleasure that I took on the permanent role as Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting. The focus in the last year, has been to widen the responsibility of being a Corporate Parent to all those who work for Kent County Council and staff in our partner agencies.

Our annual report outlines our key services that support our children in care and care leavers and a summary of the work presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel between September 2018 - September 2019.

The support and encouragement from the members of the Corporate Parenting Panel is invaluable to our children and young people. I am proud to be a Corporate Parent to over 1,600 children and over 1,600 young people whom are care experienced and be able to share with you the work of my services.

Our annual report is a celebration of the success and achievements of both our staff, children and young people, with the highlight this year being our first ever Corporate Parenting Panel Takeover Day.

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An introduction to Corporate Parenting

The government have introduced clear corporate parenting principles that require all departments within a local authority including staff, elected members and partner agencies to recognise their role as a corporate parent and encourage them to look at the support and services they provide.

Kent County Council work to be the best corporate parents to our children and young people by following these key principles:

- To act in the best interest and promote the physical, mental health and wellbeing of those children and young people;
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- To help those children and young people to gain access to, and make the best use of, the services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for those children and young people;
- To ensure those children and young people are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships, education and workplace;
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Corporate Parenting Panel and services

Our Corporate Parenting services are overseen by the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting and comprise of four key services: Kent Fostering, Kent Adoption, the Total Placement Service and the Care Leavers 18+ Service. In April 2019, Integrated Children's Services were restructured as part of the Change for Kent Children programme. The Virtual School Kent now report directly to Sarah Hammond, Director of Integrated Children's Services (East), whilst maintaining close working relationships with the Corporate Parenting services.





Corporate Parenting services work closely with our children's early help and social work teams, health, education, youth offending and our key partners including the Young Lives Foundation (YLF) and Kent Foster Carers Association (KFCA).

The services report into the Corporate Parenting Panel who meet 6 times per year and alongside elected members, the panel has a wide range of independent members including foster carers, the designated nurse for children in care, YLF, KFCA and our participation apprentices. Following a previous challenge that children and young people wanted to attend the panel, without having to miss out on their education, for the last year 50% of our panel dates were planned around school holidays to facilitate children's attendance.

Each Corporate Parenting Panel includes a Cabinet Member update and performance scorecard that enables the panel to monitor our key targets and statutory requirements. This year has seen significant improvement across children in care services achieving a majority of GREEN ratings across our key performance indicators.

The voice of our children and young people is represented at all panels by our Virtual School Kent apprentices and participation workers. Members of the panel are invited to attend celebration events which this year included the Virtual School Kent Awards, activity days, fund raising events, Adoption and Fostering Conferences and the Kent Fostering Awards ceremony.

Corporate Parenting Panel Takeover Day

On 29th May 2019, we were proud to host our first Corporate Parenting Panel Takeover Day. The takeover day consisted of our children and young people chairing the panel, creating the agenda and leading discussions. For each child and young person attending, they were linked with a member of the panel, shadowing their work for the day and presenting reports, whilst also enjoying some activities and lunch together. The day was extremely beneficial and following the positive feedback, our aim will be to make this a yearly event.



**FOSTER
FOR
KENT**



In April 2019 a new Kent Fostering Service structure took effect bringing the area Fostering Support Teams and Centralised Fostering Teams under one area of accountability within the Corporate Parenting management structure as part of the Change for Kent Children Programme. The aim of the restructure is to improve the support offered to children, young people, foster carers and their families, improving placement stability and our recruitment and retention of carers.

As of 31st August 2019, Kent County Council had 670 approved foster carer households, including Connected Person foster carers (An arrangement where children are living with a family relative or friend under an Interim or full Care Order). Our foster carers were caring for 911 Kent children and young people in care, 51 of these children through a Connected Person arrangement.

Transformation Funding

Kent Fostering have been awarded £500k transformation funding for service development, focusing on improving our recruitment and retention of foster carers. The service is using part of this funding for targeted recruitment for:

Parent and Child foster carers: Carers who can support parents and their child within a home environment, to assess their parenting capacity and with the aim to support a return to living in the community.

Hub Family foster carers: A foster carer who supports 3-4 children or young people who are in care, providing a package of support to the main foster carer and directly to the child, through day care and overnight stays.

The transformation funding is also being used to identify and pay for foster carers to undertake sessional work to support other foster carers in crisis and aid placement stability for these children and young people. In addition, the transformation funding is helping our fostering service to update branding on materials, alongside the fostering website, as well as increasing the use of social media.

Fostering Support Teams

We have five fostering support teams, one in each of the areas within the North, South and West and two in the East district. Their aim is to provide high-quality support to a range of family placements within a child or young person's local area, to enable them to maintain placement stability, attendance at their existing school and continuing contact with their family and friends.

Our fostering support teams also promote permanency for our children and young people through early care planning to ensure that they are in a family that can offer them permanency through to staying put as they transition into adulthood. Children and young people should be supported to achieve a sense of belonging within their foster family and our fostering support teams are key to establishing this.

Placement Stability Team

Under our service restructure, a new team has been established to provide additional support to maintain fostering placements, this includes our Sense of Belonging team which was established in September 2017. The team provide support to foster carers and professionals at times of crisis and when the foster home is at risk of disruption. There have been 99 referrals to the Sense of Belonging team between 01 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 and 62% of these referrals were due to a potential placement breakdown. Of the completed 75 cases, 68% remained with their foster carers and only 32% had a planned move to an alternative family.

Disabled Children Fostering Team

This is an area of excellence, with experienced fostering staff supporting foster carers to provide both full-time care and Short Breaks for disabled children and young people.

One of the main challenges for us is to ensure that our disabled children and young people's thoughts and feelings do not go unnoticed or unheard. Our aim is to ensure we give every opportunity to a disabled child or young person to have their thoughts and voice heard, providing each social worker with a Widget communication tool to aid communication regarding all aspects of the child's care. The Widget communication tool is a symbol-based form of communication commonly used with children, young people and adults with a disability.

The team continues to ensure that disabled children have positive, inclusive activity events, taking into account their individual needs. Throughout the year various events have taken place across the county to promote this.



Training and Learning

Kent Fostering looks at innovative ways to equip our foster carers to support our children and young people. In 2019, we held conferences that delivered joint training to both foster carers and social work staff.

The aim of the conferences was to inform, support and update our foster carers and social work staff on themes and new research within the fostering field and to introduce our Reflective Fostering programme.

“The Fostering in Today’s World Conference” took place on the 5th and 11th March 2019 and outlined the aims and purpose of Reflective Fostering which would provide our foster carers with practical ways to help build and maintain supportive relationships with our children and young people in their care, following a “Reflective Parenting” model of practice.

Kent Fostering sought feedback from our Foster Carer Advisory Group and have commissioned new training for 2019 on:

- Allegations and how to safeguard against these
- Child trafficking, exploitation and modern-day slavery
- Caring for children with sexualised behaviour
- Online and Internet Safety

Moving forward Kent Fostering Service will work alongside VSK to hold a conference in November 2019 delivered by our young people on “Growing up in Care”. In January 2020, there will be two further conferences on “Building the Bond of Attachment” which will look at caring for children and teenagers who have experienced developmental trauma.

Foster Carer Recruitment



FOSTER FOR KENT

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kent.gov.uk
03000 420 002

The recruitment of new foster carers remains a challenge in the current competitive market in Kent. The focus on recruitment has led to several developments which include:

- The implementation of a comprehensive recruitment strategy and marketing plan;
- Changes in fostering images and branding;
- Continual development of the Kent Fostering website;

- Increase in social media usage and engagement, including Facebook;
- Bespoke and targeted advertising and profiling events for our children and young people with more complex needs.

The service has increased the use of social media to ensure Kent Fostering has a greater presence within the local community via social media platforms. As a new initiative, a 'Carer's Career Fair' took place in October 2018 which included Kent Adoption service, Shared Lives, Supported Lodgings, Young Lives Foundation and Medway Fostering. Links with local community events have been strengthened to encourage applications from the wider community.

In the period September 2018 - August 2019 Kent County Council approved 78 new foster carers.

Fostering Review Team

Our fostering review team have been in place since September 2016, senior practitioners within this team have taken on the chairing of our foster carers annual reviews to give independency and consistency to the review process, including clear recommendations balanced on both achievements and areas of continuous learning and development.

This has provided the level of independence required for the assessment of foster carers and a quality assurance function for the service. The Review Team support the service with completing exit and follow up interviews, post approval to ensure the service can learn from carers feedback in relation to both recruitment and retention.

There has been an increased focus on outcomes for our children and young people within the review period and feedback on foster carers practice, including their development and training needs for the future year. Our fostering review team are well-established and continue to maintain the completion of a high number of annual reviews across the county, completed within the statutory timescale.

Kent Foster Care Association (KFCA)

The Kent Foster Care Association is a small registered charity which aims to work alongside our service to provide support for our registered foster carers. The chair of the KFCA is a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel.



This charity was set up and is currently ran by our foster carers with a desire to help all foster carers in this rewarding, but sometimes challenging role. They protect and preserve the wellbeing of our foster carers, their household family, and the children and young people in their care, by providing advice, information, services, events, facilities and equipment.

During the last year, they have organised and funded training opportunities, annual conferences, and social events for our foster carers. The very successful events have

included trips to Chessington, a training production for Chelsea's Choice, an Autumn Ball and Dragon Boat race.

The Kent Foster Care Association and committee are extremely supportive of our service and contribute to the recruitment of foster carers and staff. They ensure that the voice of our foster carers is heard.



Dragon Boat Race Ashford 2019

Corporate Parenting Panel received reports on:

- Kent Fostering Annual Report and Business Plan 2019
- Performance scorecard evidencing achievement across our key targets;

Kent Adoption Service



The work of Kent County Council's Adoption Service is governed by the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Adoption Agencies Regulations and Guidance 2013, and the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000).

Kent County Council is committed to ensuring that children and young people can remain in the care of their parents and birth families wherever possible. However, where it is not possible to achieve stability for the child or young person within the birth family, our Adoption Service work to achieve alternative permanent arrangements for the child or young person within a family setting and these include adoption.

What our children and young people can expect from our Adoption Service

The purpose of our Adoption Service is to provide a comprehensive service to meet the needs of our children and young people who have been or may become adopted, birth families, and adoptive parents.

This will include services in relation to those children and young people in our care with an adoption plan, and in relation to the non-agency adoption service. To achieve it aims our Adoption Service will ensure that the needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.

We will welcome those people, who are interested in becoming adoptive parents without prejudice, respond to them promptly and provide them with clear information about recruitment, assessment and approval.

Kent Adoption Service achievements 2018-19

Corporate Parenting Panel received reports on:

- Proposal to develop a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)
- The Adoption Annual Report 2019
- Performance scorecard evidencing achievement across our key targets

Kent has consistently been amongst the highest local authorities in terms of adoption numbers. In 2017/18 Kent was the 1st of all authorities in England, and Kent's 2018/19 figure

would also put Kent 1st if comparing to national 2017/18 data. The average time from the child being placed to adoption order granted in 2018/19 was 204 days. This was a 5% reduction compared to 2017/18, when it was 215 days.

The performance of the Adoption Service in relation to progressing children’s plans of adoption is good and exceeds government targets.

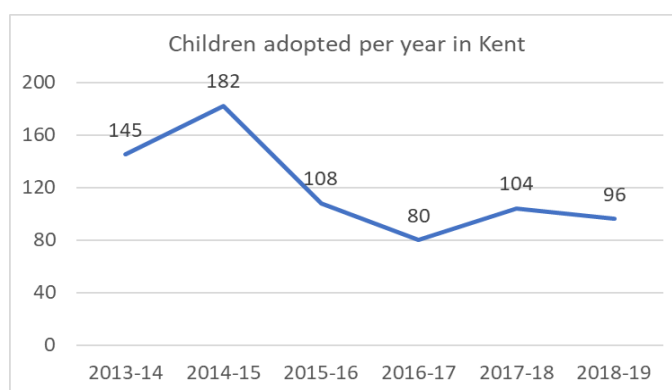
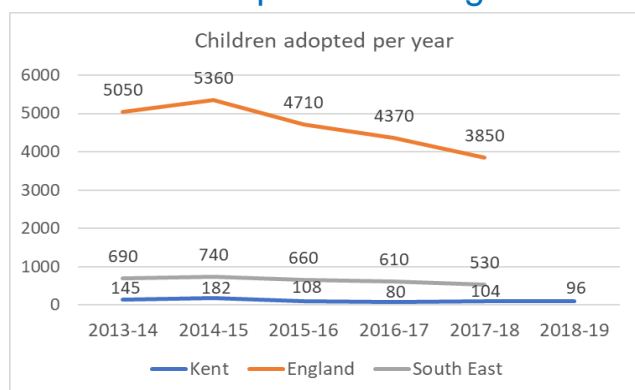
There are various stages involved in the adoption process for a child and these are outlined below:

| Indicator | 2014/15 | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Agency decision makers best interest decisions | 93 | 111 | 118 | 112 | 77* |
| Placement Orders | 79 | 90 | 92 | 86 | 81 |
| Matches approved | 145 | 84 | 89 | 107 | 80 |
| Children placed | 143 | 89 | 84 | 107 | 80 |
| Adoption orders granted | 182 | 108 | 80 | 104 | 96** |

* includes 1 who did not become a looked after child

** includes 1 private adoption

Number of adoption orders granted



Adopter’s Journey Data

The Adoption Service’s performance in relation to completing assessments of people wishing to become adoptive parents is outlined below. There are two stages involved in the adoption process:

- Stage 1 – Which is adopter led;
- Stage 2 – Which includes the actual assessment.

The progression of adopter assessments is good and exceeds government targets.

| Adopter activity | Number of families in 2016/17 | Number of families in 2017/18 | Number of families in 2018/19 |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Enquiries in year | 261 | 275 | 281 |
| Stage One starts in year | 90 | 82 | 93 |
| Stage Two starts in year | 74 | 86 | 77 |
| Stage Two ends in year | 50 | 88 | 81 |
| Adoptive families matched in year | 54 | 77 | 73 |
| Adoptive families with placements in year | 53 | 77 | 71 |
| Adoptive families with adoption orders in year | 68 | 70 | 77 |

Adopter Sufficiency

The latest data on the Adopter gap indicates that Kent had more Adopters waiting for a match than children with a placement order waiting to be matched. There were 12 children with a placement order waiting to be matched and 44 adoptive families approved and waiting for a match, adopter gap of -32.

Kent's performance has improved despite a negative trend nationally. Adoption leadership board data indicates that nationally the adopter gap had increased as there were 1,600 approved adoptive families waiting to be matched at 31st March 2018 and 2,630 children waiting to be placed for adoption with a placement order.

Post Adoption Support Team

The Post Adoption Support Team's (PAST) vision is to ensure families in Kent have access to excellent adoption support and to ensure that the support offered to families at every stage of the family life, is informed and tailored to their needs.

Threaded throughout the work is a developing therapeutic network which supports the family to thrive. The team values a service delivery that can provide layers of support to families both pre and post order.

Of significance, is that the Kent approach was noted as a practice example in the RAA Adoption Support Audit undertaken by an Independent Adviser to the DfE. His report highlights “In particular, the audit found that multi-disciplinary teams like Kent are best placed to draw on both social work and clinical perspectives when assessing and meeting adoption support needs effectively and without delay.”

The Kent Post Adoption Support Team is a unique partnership between a statutory and a voluntary agency, led by a social work Team Manager, who is employed by a local authority (KCC) and a Clinical Lead, employed by a voluntary agency (Coram). There are three (full time equivalent) Social Workers and four clinical posts within the team.

The team is funded primarily by the local authority but also utilises government funding via the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) to support the costs of the clinical staff and any therapeutic intervention offered by the Social Workers. This enables creativity and the ability to provide a range of therapeutic provisions, dependent on the support needs identified during assessment and therapy.

Kent was visited by officers from the Department for Education earlier in the year to share information about its use of ASF and the multi-disciplinary service model of the Post Adoption Support Team.

The multi-disciplinary model allows for swift problem solving on a case work level as well as at aggregate level - which then allows us to think about how to shape the service moving forwards. This includes frequent liaison with commissioning and senior managers in KCC and Coram (and in turn their combined resources).

Data is collected and collated to identify needs and inform service design and delivery. If gaps in the skill set of clinicians and Social Workers are identified, a strategic approach is taken and training is accessed to develop staff and enhance their skill set, or the work force expands to include other disciplines.

The aim is for the team to meet the needs of adopted children and their families internally as much as possible, but if this is not possible, external providers of services will be commissioned.

- 285 requests for assessment for post adoption support were received from families
- 442 interventions were funded via the adoption support fund
- 90 training days for adopters were held
- 314 cases open to the team



18+ Care Leavers Service



Kent Care Leavers 18+ service is based in West Malling and Dover. We work closely with our young people who are from or in care, aged 18-25 years' old. The service includes Personal Advisers who will support care leavers with their journey to living independently and have a legal obligation to support all children and young people in our care until their 25th birthday.

There are currently 1,637 care leavers being supported by our service; 890 of these are unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, with 747 United Kingdom citizen young people.

What our young people can expect from our service

Our service can assist Kent County Council's young people in accessing housing, education, training, work experience and health services; whilst being there to support them to make the most of leaving our care to continue their journey on to independence and adulthood. Personal Advisers are there to assist our young people by providing advice, encouragement and financial guidance to help them to take every opportunity whilst in our care.

Care Leavers 18+ Service achievements during 2018-19

Corporate Parenting Panel received reports on:

- Corporate Parenting pilot scheme: Kent County Council acting as a guarantor for our care leavers;
- Report on the types of accommodation for our children in care and care leavers;
- Performance scorecard evidencing achievement across our key targets;

Care Leavers 18+ Performance 2018 to 2019

| Action | Target | Achieving |
|--|--------|-----------|
| Personal adviser to have contact with all their allocated young people a minimum of once every 6-weeks | 85% | 89.2% |
| Care leavers in suitable accommodation | 90% | 90.5% |
| Young people in education, training or employment | 65% | 65% |
| Pathway plans to be updated and reviewed every 6-months | 90% | 92.8% |
| Those receiving their health history records at aged 18 | 100% | 100% |

Key new developments and initiatives

Transition

From 01 April 2018, the service extended its statutory duty to support young people up until the age of 25-years old, (formerly this was up to 21-years old), following the implementation of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

In December 2018, the service published the Local Offer which sets out the entitlements and services for our young people. The service is now working on the first review of our Local Offer, ready for an updated publication in December 2019.

Our service is now allocating a personal advisor earlier, at 17-years old and actively support them through their transition to adulthood and into our service. This allows joint working with our children in care colleagues which includes: a joint visit, joint pathway planning, attendance at the 17.5-years old looked after child review and ensuring any financial commitments beyond 18-years old are agreed.

Supported employment

Our service has recently identified 5-young people over the age of 18-years old who may be suitable for our upcoming pilot. This would allow our more vulnerable care leavers to have

an opportunity to experience a work environment with the additional support this schemes provides.

Drop-in service

We have structured a drop-in service in the North and West of the county, in four locations. The main purposes of our drop-in service are:

- To offer networking opportunities for young people;
- To provide access to advice for education and careers for those who are not in education, training or employment;
- To maintain constructive contact with our isolated and vulnerable care leavers;
- To promote re-engagement with care services.

Mental health social workers

We have recruited two Approved Mental Health Practitioners (AMHP) to the Service to provide specialist support to our Personal Advisors who work with Care Leavers with Mental Health needs. Secondly the role is to support the Care Leavers access appropriate support from Adult Mental Health.

Young parents

We have a programme in place to support and interventions across the spectrum of care leavers who become parents. These would include young mother, young fathers, parents who need additional support due to their own learning needs, parents where there are child protection concerns and parents who might have had their child(ren) removed.

Care leavers vulnerable to becoming homeless

We have been given funding that has enabled us to provide extra support to our most vulnerable care leavers. We have employed 3-specialist personal advisers to provide intensive support to care leavers who are judged to be at the highest risk of rough sleeping and homelessness.

Young Inspectors' Scheme

We are developing a young inspector's scheme to provide opportunities for care leavers aged between 18-25-years old to inspect our shared accommodation.

It is their role to inspect as well as experience services that impact our care leavers.



Floating support

We have recruited four floating support workers to offer additional support to a targeted vulnerable group of care leavers within a geographical area by joint working with their personal advisers and carrying out focused support within the community.

Care Leavers in custody

We have continued to work with our care leavers in custody, through our specialist custody officer.

This role ensures that all our care leavers in custody have appropriate support and plans in place for them.

Care Leavers missing policy

In 2019, we have published a missing persons policy for the Care Leavers 18+ Service. Kent County Council recognise and acknowledge, that our care leavers are young adults and therefore are entitled to make informed decisions about their lives. This includes the freedom to come and go as they wish without an obligation on their part to inform their Personal Adviser of their whereabouts. However, when we are concerned for their safety and whereabouts, it is important to share information and act in our role as their corporate parent to check on their safety, sharing any concerns with partner agencies.



Care Leavers survey

In October 2018, we undertook our first Care Leavers survey and plan to do this yearly, each October in Care Leavers week. This Survey is undertaken independently through our business intelligence unit and a report of the outcomes will be presented to the Corporate Parenting panel.

Kent Total Placement Service



The Total Placement Service is part of strategic commissioning, working for our children and young people in care to find them safe and appropriate homes.

Our team is managed by a Service Manager and there are 2-elements to our service: placement finding and business, which enables our service to not only identify and match placements, but to ensure foster carers and providers are contracted and paid correctly, in a timely

manner.

Our service has 3-Placement Managers, 16-Placement Officers, 1-Business Manager and 4-Business Officers.

Our service has grown from being a small team that dealt primarily with external placement requests, to its current formation which is a service that is responsible for sourcing the majority of placements for our children and young people. There are a few exceptions to this, such as, residential special school placements and mental health hospital placements.

We source a range of homes for children and young people, including in-house fostering, independent fostering agencies, residential children's homes, supported accommodation, semi-independent accommodation, secure accommodation, shared accommodation and manage the referrals for staying put arrangements.

Our service is compliant with Ofsted and the Quality Care Commission requirements and our work is governed by a range of legislations and regulations, including the Children's Homes Regulation 2015, Fostering Services Regulation 2011 and Children's Act 1989.

Total Placement Service Priorities

- Ensuring referrals are of a high-standard and provide a balanced and contextualised view of our children and young people for our providers to make informed decisions regarding placement options;
- Providing detail and clarity regarding the matching process for children and young people with carers and providers to promote placement stability and ensuring needs are met;
- Ensuring all business aspects such as the commencement and ending of placements, contracts and payments are managed in a timely manner.

It is an exciting phase in development for our service, providing a one-stop shop for social workers and personal advisers to access good quality homes for the children and young people in our care.

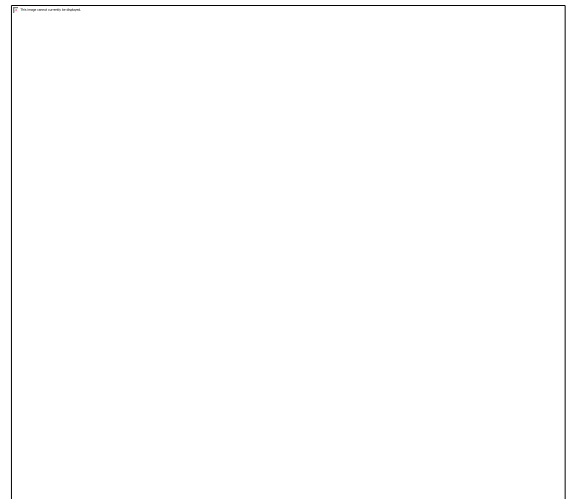
We will be hosting our first managers awayday in September 2019, where we will be focussing on the processes used in working to continually ensure these are efficient and purposeful.

Work is also commencing on the redesign of the placement plan referral which will include participation from our Virtual School Kent apprentices and our children in care council to ensure the referral is child and young person focused.

In addition, we are currently working with the adult service, Shared Lives scheme, to broaden this scheme to provide placements for our young people who are 16-years old and over that require additional support. This scheme will be called **Stepping Stones** and is very similar to that of Catch22's supported accommodation in a family environment. We will be piloting the initial 5-placements in November 2019.

In June 2019, we produced and facilitated the assessment and planning for the Placement Stability Seminar. This was well received by those attending, including foster carers, social workers, personal advisers, external providers and health and education colleagues.

On 10 September 2019 we co-produced and facilitated the Placement Pressures Seminar, this looked at pressures across the children, young people and education directorate and commissioning relating to placement availability with a significant focus on solutions.



Future Aims for the Total Placement Service

- Focus on securing the best possible homes for our children and young people;
- Continuous building of effective working relationships with colleagues and key stakeholders through brief secondments, service day events and by offering induction days to the work we do to a range of business professionals, including social workers;
- Re-design of the placement plan referrals to ensure the voices of our children and young people is central and there is clarity regarding the purpose and standard of the referral;
- Continued inclusion in the South East regional complex looked after children project to consider future commissioning options.



Virtual School Kent including the Participation and Engagement Team

The Virtual School Kent acts as Kent County Council's champion to promote the progress and educational attainment of its children and care leavers, with its main objective being to support the children and young people to achieve educational outcomes comparable to their peers. Our Virtual School Kent ensures our children and young people receive high-quality education, as we believe that it is the foundation for improving life-opportunities and fulfilling career aspirations.



The Virtual School Kent ensures that the children and young people that it educates have their voice heard in all the school does whilst in return, providing their listening skills and producing positive service development and responses.

Our Virtual School Kent has been successful since its development in 2011; this has been recognised in their successive Ofsted inspections. It also has a duty, which came into effect in September 2018 to promote the education of previously looked-after children, providing information, advice and guidance.

Virtual School Kent Participation Team and Apprentices

Our Virtual School Kent Participation Team continues to offer young people apprenticeship opportunities, should they wish to work within the service. The apprenticeship model has been expanded in 2019 to offer opportunities to other young people who come under the Corporate Parenting umbrella as well as to care experienced young people. The team now also employs young people who are the family members of foster carers and young people with adopted siblings.

All are employed as Apprentice Participation Workers, studying for a Level 2 or 3 qualification in Business Administration or Public Service Operational Delivery. One day each week is set aside to allow the apprentices to study and complete coursework in a supportive environment. This programme allows VSK to ensure that the apprentices gain a good qualification and have a better chance at finding employment in the future. This year Corporate Parenting has been working with other KCC departments to encourage them to offer entry levels jobs for young people who have successfully completed their apprenticeship.

The apprentices' role is to raise the profile of the importance of hearing the voice of Children in Care and Young Care Leavers. They help to ensure that children and young people's views, experiences and opinions are kept at the centre of all working practices. The Participation Team's remit has recently been extended to include the importance of hearing the voices of other young people who have involvement with Integrated Children's Services,

including those who have been adopted, or are on the edge of care. The team works hard to create young person friendly versions of key documents and ensures that information is easily accessible and understood by young people – they do this in a variety of ways using social media, websites, create films, vlogs and leaflets as well as facilitating focus groups, workshops and other meetings and events.

One of the key roles of our apprentices involves supporting a broad range of participation activities and events. Our VSK apprentices support participation training events for KCC staff and partner agencies. During 2019, they have been involved in Co-production Workshops for the newly set up Adolescent Service, awards ceremonies for children, young people and foster carers and a variety of conferences.

They have also helped to support the Corporate Parenting Panel ‘Takeover Day’ where more than 25 young people were involved in a unique experience to step into the shoes of senior council staff and councillors as part of an initiative to put young people at the heart of decision making. It was Kent County Council’s first ever Takeover Day that saw children in care, care leavers and adopted or young people from fostering families take charge of the Corporate Parenting Panel, make big decisions and have their voices heard.



The voice of our children and young people being heard is important to all the Corporate Parenting Services; as a result of this shared passion, our Virtual School Kent has the responsibility for developing and supporting Kent County Council’s children in care councils.

These consist of 3 strong, well represented groups of children and young people: our young adult council (YAC) for ages 16-25, children and young people council (OCYPC) for ages 11-16 and the super council for ages 7-11.



This year has seen the introduction the OCYPC Extra which are satellite children in care council groups for young people who are unable to attend the main meetings in Maidstone, this means the Councils are accessible for all. Young people meet to discuss things that affect them and others who share similar experiences to them. They also get the chance to meet with many senior officers of Kent County Council to discuss their views and opinions about the services they receive.



The children and young people councils provide a forum for all our children and young people to allow their voice to be heard and be a part of the most essential changes within Kent County Council’s care system.

The Challenge Card system has been an innovative concept that holds Corporate Parents to account and is a really powerful way for young people to challenge their Corporate Parents on key issues and improvements they want to make to the care system. A successful challenge this year has been



the rent guarantor scheme that now means care leavers can apply for KCC to be a guarantor for them if they wish to rent privately. The most recent challenge from the Young Adult Council is a request for council tax exemption to be considered for all Kent Care Leavers up to the age of 25.

Work has started this year to raise awareness of the importance of KCC officers and elected members understanding that we all have a Corporate Parenting role to play to support our children in care and care leavers. Using the key message of 'what that be good enough for my own child?', the apprentices have supported the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting to deliver presentations and training updates to colleagues in other services and directorates.

Our Virtual School Kent Participation Team continue to run a varied programme of activity days during the school holidays to promote a safe and fun environment for children and young people to meet other children in care and care leavers, establish friendships and hear about the children and young people councils and the process of getting their voice and experiences 'heard'.

What our children and young people can expect from our Virtual School for Kent

Children and young people can expect our Virtual School for Kent to provide them with:

- A service that has the highest aspirations for the children and young people that it educates and listens to their voice, to enact positive change.
- A service that prioritises participation and academic progress;
- A service that provides additional support and aid to the children and young people's progress;
- A service that works effectively with the network of professionals around the children and young people.

What our Virtual School for Kent achieved during 2018-19

Corporate Parenting Panel received reports on:

- Verbal updates from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC) on our events for children, including activity days, The Takeover Day, and awards ceremonies;
- Verbal Updates and films from the Participation Team and apprentices showcasing the teams work and young people's involvement in work steams:
- Virtual School Kent Overview Report 2016-2017 (validated results) and 2017-2018 (un-validated results):
- Challenge cards from children and young people on:
 - KCC acting as Rent Guarantors for care leavers:
 - The timings of service user interview panels and Corporate Parenting Panels to ensure they are accessible for a wider cohort of young people to attend and be involved:

- KCC exempting it's Kent Care Leavers (up to the age of 21 from paying council Tax.)

Our Virtual School for Kent have assisted our children and young people with their individual educational needs, leading to exceptional exam results, as laid out below:

| Key stage/year | Exam results 2018 |
|----------------|--|
| KS1 | <p>In line or above both Regional and National average in all indicators for children in care with the exception of Reading. This positive outcome was achieved with a cohort which had significant SEND needed including 18.4% above National Average for Child In Care (CIC) with Education Health Care Plan's. (EHCP)</p> |
| KS2 | <p>Although attainment levels this summer have fallen this is due to the level of need of this cohort. It is important to note that the 2018 Year 6 cohort had a very high level of need in relation to SEN – 41.3% of the children had an EHCP (with additional children in process of statutory assessment) compared to 23% in 2017. Additionally, 30% of the cohort were educated in specialist provisions compared to just 8.2% in 2017.</p> <p>Despite this Reading, Writing and the Combined Reading Writing and Mathematics were still all broadly in line with the National Average for Children in Care.</p> <p>The percentage of our young people achieving the higher standards is above the National and regional average in all indicators except GPS.</p> <p>In addition to this this cohort made more progress than the 2017 cohort and more progress in Reading and Writing than Children in care nationally and in the South East Region.</p> |
| KS4 | <p>Attainment is up in all Key Stage 4 indicators on last year. English Grade 5 and above is up 10.6% on 2017, with Mathematics seeing an 8.4% improvement. English and Mathematics combined also saw a 2.2% improvement on 2017.</p> <p>Most significantly, the progress made by this cohort was outstanding. The progress measure indicates an average score of 0, which means this cohort equalled the progress expected for all learners (not just CIC). Furthermore, Kent CIC made a full point more progress than CIC regionally and nationally.</p> |
| KS5 | <p>We currently have 65 young people who are currently attending Higher Education and currently 8 about to enrol. We have also seen our NEET (Not in Employment Education or Training) data has reduced significantly and is currently at 15.4% this evidences a reduction of 72% over the past 5 years.</p> |

Additional Reports to the Corporate Parenting Panel

For the period September 2018 - September 2019, the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel has also included attendance and reports covering the following:

- Young People Missing;
- Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report;
- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People – Introducing our Peer Champions
- Review and update of the Sufficiency, Placements and Commissioning Strategy;
- Safeguarding and update on young people in custody and youth justice;
- Video's from our children and young people's councils including the experience in education from an adopted child, activity days video and new animation package, used to promote the young person's voice;
- Health overview for Children in Care and Performance data;
- Life Long Links;
- Children's Celebration Events

How can our elected members get involved?

All our Corporate Parenting services welcome visits from elected members and ask for their ongoing support for our children and young people. Whether this is through sharing in the children's achievements at our celebration events such as the VSK award ceremonies or through more formal training events such as our yearly conferences.

The children and young people welcome meeting their corporate parents at activity days, this helps them to understand the role of a Corporate Parent and be able to speak openly about their experiences.

Members are essential in being champions for our children and young people in care, to ensure their voice is heard. We also ask our elected members to promote the recruitment of foster carers for the Kent Fostering service and assist our vision to have more Kent families, to care for our Kent children and young people.

Thank you to all Kent County Council staff, partner agencies and elected members who have contributed over the last year, in supporting Corporate Parenting to make a difference to the lives of the children and young people in our care.



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