

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE - CORPORATE PARENTING

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Corporate Parenting held in the Stour Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 27 February 2015.

PRESENT: Mrs Z Wiltshire (Chairman), Mr S J G Koowaree, Mr M J Northey, Mrs P A V Stockell and Mrs J Whittle

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr G Romagnuolo (Policy Overview Research Officer), Ms K Sanders (Business Intelligence Officer), Miss L Adam (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Ms C A Singh (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

10. 10.00am - Andrew Ireland - Corporate Director of Social Care, Health and Wellbeing, Kent County Council
(Item 2)

(1) The Chairman welcomed Andrew to the meeting and invited him to introduce himself before answering questions from Members.

(2) Andrew stated that he had been the Corporate Director of Social Care, Health and Wellbeing at Kent County Council for three years. He had previously worked for Kent County Council for 18 years prior to 2005. He had been a qualified Social Worker for 35 years. He held the statutory functions of Director of Adult Social Services and Director of Children's Services. He explained that due to the complex structure of directorates at Kent County Council, he was responsible for any children's services including those within the Education and Young People's Services directorate. He reported that he had full accountability for Kent's 1300 children in care and 700 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Q – How does the elected Members' responsibility differ from your responsibility for Corporate Parenting?

(3) Andrew stated that he had direct accountability for Corporate Parenting with the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services. He noted that there was a looser set of responsibilities on individual Members. Individual members were able to promote and take into account children in care through a variety of fora within the Council with the aim of enabling children in care to have the same outcomes as other children.

(4) He noted that the Council was able to make special provisions for children in care such as prioritised school admissions. He argued that a specific proportion of Kent County Council apprenticeships could be allocated to care leavers to enhance their employment opportunities and life chances.

(5) He stressed the importance of supporting older children in care in securing appropriate placements to meet their needs; facilitating easier access to the same services as other young people; enabling them to access the best schools; and

ensuring the Pupil Premium is used to support their specific needs. He stated that there were too many examples in Kent County Council and other local authorities where this was not happening.

Q – Through your involvement with the Association of Directors of Children's Services, have you been able to identify best practice which could be implemented in Kent?

(6) Andrew stated that he had recently been part of a peer review team evaluating another local authority's children's services and there were some very specific ideas that would be implemented in Kent as a result of participating in that review. He reported that Kent County Council had made significant strides since the 2010 Ofsted inspection which found services for children in care were inadequate: the numbers of adoptions had increased; there had been a reduction in the number of care proceedings; and there had been an improvement in the number of reviews being held within the set timeframe with increased multi-agency participation.

(7) He noted two examples of best practice: ensuring greater choice in placements and improving educational outcomes for children in care. He praised the innovative work of Tony Doran in developing Virtual School Kent.

Q – How do we stop young people coming into care?

(8) Andrew stated that there had been a reduction in over 100 children leaving care over the last year; this figure did not include unaccompanied asylum-seeking children where there had been an increase.

(9) He reported that when Kent County Council was inspected in 2010 there were a large number of unassessed cases which may have resulted in avoidable admissions into local authority care if they had been responded to more rapidly. He stated that since 2010 there had been an increase in the number of adoptions and there had been a stable number of referrals and children on Child Protections plans. He explained that children were no longer staying on Child Protection plans for long periods of time; if there was no sign of improvement on the plan, Kent County Council would begin legal proceeding as part of the Public Law Outline (PLO).

(10) He stated that the overall management had stabilised even in Thanet which was the area of highest demand and pressure. He noted that his biggest area of concern was young people, over the age of 14 (particularly over the age of 16), coming into care as the outcome was unlikely to be positive. He explained that intensive range of resources and interventions were required, at a point of crisis, to avoid admission into care. He reported that these young people were often disconnected with education and had become alienated from other services. He noted the importance of having access to additional services such as CAMHS which had been widely debated in many of Kent County Council's committees.

(11) He reported that Kent County Council had not been helped by the Southwark judgement and the separate views, on 16 and 17 year olds who had become homeless, by Kent's 12 district councils. He noted that some districts were more willing to engage with Kent County Council than others. He stated that from his experiences of working in both unitary and two-tier authorities, there had been much better communication in unitary authorities.

Q – Has there been an increase in children in care being excluded from academies?

(12) Andrew stated that he was not aware of a disproportionate number of exclusions of children in care from academies in comparison to local authority schools. He explained that it would be a useful question to put to Mr Doran.

Q – What was the Southwark judgement?

(13) Andrew stated that the Southwark judgment was a case involving Southwark Council in which the judge ruled that 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless must be provided with accommodation and support by children's services. He explained that in reality, homeless 16 and 17 year olds were unwilling to submit themselves to the local authority as they were trying to escape from family life and did not want to be placed with a substitute family.

(14) He reported that Kent County Council was looking to develop a package of support for these young people to enable them to propel themselves forward and have a sensible version of independence. He noted that some of these young people were very vulnerable and it was appropriate for them to remain in a care environment. He stated that Kent County Council was working with the district councils to provide accommodation as part of the package of support but noted that some districts were much less willing to engage.

Q – Do district councils' have corporate parenting responsibility too?

(15) Andrew stated that arguably all public services had corporate parenting responsibility but explained that the duty sat with upper tier authorities with caring responsibilities. He noted that it was easier for unitary authorities to manage, as all the different services including housing and children's services were part of the authority. He reported that any change to the statutory duty would require an amendment to government legislation.

Q – How well are elected Members and Officers carrying out their corporate parenting duty?

(16) Andrew stated that a core group of Members were very committed and involved in corporate parenting. He noted that with a large number of new Members following the last election, further awareness of the corporate parenting duty was required. He reported that Officers outside of Children's Services did not consider corporate parenting as part of their role and responsibility.

Q – What can be done to address this issue?

(17) Andrew stated that there needed to be a continual process of awareness raising to both elected Members and Officers. He noted that the Local Government Association was developing a piece of work on supporting Members to carry out their corporate parenting responsibility. He explained the importance of raising the profile of corporate parenting in a way that did not put off Members becoming involved. He gave an example of a positive outcome of corporate parenting: Members' contributions could lead to improved life chances for a young person who had a

difficult background by diverting them away from an inevitable consequence of entering the youth justice system. He added that young people, who came into care late and entered the youth justice system, did not enter the system as a result of being in care; it was due to their difficult and challenging background.

Q – Are Members allowed to visit care homes?

(18) Andrew explained that there were no Kent County Council care homes so there was no visiting regime. He noted that there were young people placed in independent residential care homes.

Q – What could Members do to improve the lives of children in care?

(19) Andrew stated that it was important, as an authority, to more consistently and effectively listen to children in care in order to hear about their experiences and make improvements to issues raised such as placements, education and leaving care opportunities.

Q – One of the apprentices who attended Corporate Parenting Panel in February said it was difficult for a placement to be found for them whilst completing their apprenticeship. What can be done to improve this situation?

(20) Andrew stated that there had been significant recent changes for children in care. He explained that local authorities traditionally worked on a 16+ model. At the age of 16, they moved to a Leaving Care team and worked with a new social worker. He reported that there had been a change in legislation which entitled children in care to stay in their placement beyond the age of 18. He noted that, following the 2013 Ofsted inspection, it was clear that the independent provider of 16+ children's services was not up to standard. He reported that Kent County Council is now responsible for the casework of 16+ children's services and the independent provider is only an accommodation supplier. He stated that he hoped the introduction of an 18+ model would bring real improvements. He noted that asylum services were included in 18+ model to improve the quality of the work.

Q – Can Kent County Council require local authorities, who place children in Out of County Placements in Kent, to commission sufficient placements within their own areas?

(21) Andrew stated that Kent County Council had lobbied for many years to make the 20 miles guidance a regulation. The Council had the ear of previous Children's Ministers but they did not have the same traction with the current minister. He noted that there had not been a dramatic change to the overall pattern of Out of County Placements. He reported that Out of County Placements frequently reflected poor practice; they often lacked the appropriate package for the child including schooling. He stressed the need for district planning authorities being able to prevent or limit the number of independent children's homes being located in their area. He expressed his frustration in Out of County Placements not being reported in the Ofsted reports of local authorities who had high numbers of these types of placements.

Q – What else can Kent County Council do about Out of County Placements?

(22) Andrew stated that he had written to the Department of Education about Out of County Placements. He noted that whatever the nature of the incoming government, following the 2015 General Election, there was an opportunity to start the lobbying process again with the new Children’s Minister.

Q – Can Kent County Council raise a challenge to those authorities who knowingly place children in Out of County Placements in Kent?

(23) Andrew stated that Kent County Council had an opportunity to report to local authorities, on a case by case basis, when failings to provide a suitable placement to meet the need of the child were identified. He reported that Out of County Placements in Kent had a wider impact on other agencies such as the Police and Health Service. He noted that Kent County Council cannot formally hold other local authorities to account. He explained that local authorities were required to provide Kent County Council with a notification of an Out of County Placement in Kent when the child arrives and departs. He reported that some authorities do not routinely inform children’s services of Out of County Placements in Kent.

**11. 11.00am - Foster Carers - Catherine Atkins, Janet Latter, Janetta Sams and Nicki Bailey,
(Item 3)**

(1) The Chairman of the Select Committee, Mrs Wiltshire, welcomed Catherine Atkins, Janet Latter, Janetta Sams and Nicki Bailey, Foster Carers, to the meeting.

(2) Catherine Atkins, Janet Latter, Janetta Sams and Nicki Bailey, Members of the Committee present and Officers introduced themselves.

(3) They had received questions and themes that the Select Committee were investigating in preparation for the meeting.

How long have you been foster carers for? Why did you decide to become foster carers? How many children have you cared for?

(4) Janetta advised that she had been a carer for 17 years. She became a Foster Carer because she wanted to offer the same opportunities to children in care that her own two children were given. Over her 17 years as a Carer she had cared for 30 children for different periods of time.

Do you still have contact with those children after they left your care?

(5) The Foster Carers agreed that they did have contact with some of the children although contact was dependent on where they had moved to and whether their parents wished them to remain in touch.

What kind of support have you received from Kent County Council?

(6) The Foster Carers advised that they had been through the selection process many years ago which they understood had now changed.

(7) Janet advised that she had been fostering for 13 years and had the same social work assistant support for 8 years of that time.

(8) Nicki said that she had a similar experience. She advised that when she had adopted a child that she had fostered (ex TRP Child) upon going back after an 18 month break, there were no available Social Workers and then it was compounded by a boundary change in the service and she then came under West Kent. It was a further 6 months before a Social Worker was available (one year in total without a regular Social Worker)

(9) Nicki also advised that she was doing the odd respite too with no support and when support was assigned it was a Locum who came from a London Borough and was not up to speed with Kent policies.

(10) Catherine said that she had been well supported for 10 ½ years (since September 2004) of being a Carer and had three Social Workers in that time.

(11) Janetta advised that she had received valuable support although sometimes it was not good. Having a Social Worker was essential when fostering so that you can off load when necessary.

(12) Nicki said that the Social Worker she now had was wonderful.

(13) It was suggested that when you have a Locum you immediately think “When will I see them again, what’s the point? The Locum is not going to be there in three to four years down the line”.

(14) Catherine explained that the Social Worker had a statutory duty to visit every four to six weeks and that happened in her experience.

(15) Janet concurred advising that it was the Fostering Social Workers that supported the Foster Carer and the Children and Family Social Workers were there for the children. She said that it was a chance to have a rant and off load. The Fostering Social Worker learnt if it was ranting or a real issue. She said that it was about them understanding that we need to rant and offload, we need to have confidence that it will be seen for what it is. We all have fleeting moments when we ask ourselves “why are we doing this”.

What are the main challenges faced by foster carers?

(16) Nicki said that this was a long list. She began by saying that so many things were done well. She treated the child in her care as a member of the family. However, this broke down when wishing to take the child on holiday as the child did not have a passport. She considered that if she was willing to pay up to £700 from her own pocket to take the child on holiday the local authority should organise the child’s passport. [Members of the Select Committee stated that this was part of the Kent Pledge].

(17) Nicki advised that she had paid to get a passport for a child in her care but had not been refunded.

(18) Janet explained that Foster Carers were encouraged to make the children part of the family but in the past had to ask permission for everything to do with the child

including having their hair cut. There were still issues regarding getting permissions for school trips. Nicki suggested that the Delegation Authority Forms (DAF) could be signed at the beginning of the child being placed into a families care or at the Child in Care Review. She advised that having the DAF signed earlier in the process would require the Social Worker to have a good rapour with the parent. Nicki stated that this was not an aim for the Foster Carer to take over the role of the parent. Having the DAF signed would prevent a child from missing out on school trips etc which is often the case as acquiring permissions for each event took time.

(19) Nicki advised that she has had a child with her for 3 months and the Social Worker said to her “why don’t you meet up with the parent”. Nicki did not consider this appropriate or her role and that it was the parent’s role to sort out the responsibilities.

(20) There was an inconsistency in advice especially with older children. They talk with one another and find out what the other is being allowed when they are not. They feel unfairly singled out.

(21) Accessing services was an issue. It was advised that a child had to wait for 2 years before receiving therapy.

(22) There was often no “package” around the child a lot of the time regarding the school, health service, Social Worker and Carer. The package should be in the form of a regular, at least, monthly network meeting.

(23) Often the child can just have adolescent problems and it is not necessary for counselling with CAMHS all the time.

(24) Nicki suggested that some of the many meetings could be amalgamated. The child in her care was losing hours of school time. She suggested that more meetings could be just after school. Foster parents have to arrange for doctor and dentist appointments outside school hours.

(25) A suggestion was made for weekend clinics.

(26) Nicki advised that the working day for child in care was 24 hours. A Foster Carer could be called on at any time.

(27) Janet advised that she met with CAMHS workers to discuss how she could do things differently, to help the child in her care, as the child was with her all the time. She had now gained experience in this. She gave the example of a child that had been with her for many years, who was not included in meetings. She took back what worked and what did not for the child. This worked for some children. She advised that some children were unable to talk to a therapist which had led to the therapist saying that there was nothing that they could do. She considered that the therapist should be saying “what can we do, there is a need”. When they say that they cannot do anything the Foster Carer is left with the mess and possibly the placement breaking down.

(28) Foster Carers receive a lot of training when they first start fostering this could be extended, when they had gained experience, to more specific training eg therapy.

(29) Nicki advised that after adopting a child that was in her care she had received training that would be useful to Foster Carers. She said that she learnt a lot at the

Network meeting where questions were asked and it was like light bulbs going on. Nicki stated that Foster Carers were not included in the professional meetings. In the past she had the opportunity to look through the file of a child in her care which helped her a lot. She gave the example of the child having an issue with tin foil which she was not aware of until reading the file and realising that it was used in a negative way by her mother for drug use. She had been wrapping the child's sandwiches in tin foil. She was able to address the issue by showing the child the positive ways of using foil in craft etc.

(30) The foster carer is looking after the child 24/7 and should be seen as a professional, part of the team and views listened too.

What types of meeting do you attend?

(31) The Foster Carers advised that they attend the Children in Care Review or Placement Planning meetings. The PEP is done as long as the IRO is ok. The Foster Carers asked for the PEP to be done at same time as the review, they felt that they should always be involved in the children's PEP. The Foster Carers asked whether this rule could be changed.

(32) Janetta asked for flexibility regarding the child's school schedule when the child does not need to be take part of the whole meeting. She gave an example of a long distressing meeting a child in her care attended which resulted in the child missing her break so had no lunch and on returning home fainted.

(33) Nicki gave an example of a child in her care for two weeks who had a hearing difficulty. She took things in her own hands and had the child's hearing sorted out straight away, which she said if that was your own child you would do. The problem being that the child had multiple moves and so missed appointments or changed hospital and records went missing. This looked to be a set pattern and the child had gradually lost hearing in both ears.

(34) The Foster Carers stated that there were constant changes in staff. New Social Workers did not have the time and issues regarding a child can be lost in time when a child "hops about" from one carer to another.

(35) The Foster Carers referred to the Dandelion Trust as being less intrusive and where children were able to relax, unlike CAMHS which was a 40 minute session in which a child was asked about the whole of their life. The Foster Carer considered that this would be difficult enough for an adult to do. The child would be left traumatised and would not answer questions. The Foster Carers said that the children in their care often talk to them when they were out for a drive as it was less confrontational.

(36) A suggestion was made that there should be network meetings and something like the Dandelion Trust.

(37) It was stated that "you need the voice of the Foster Carer".

(38) The Foster Carers stated that training for new Carers was excellent.

(39) Foster Carers got to know the children in their care and considered that they could contribute to the life story work. It was advised that adoption does great work on this. Janet advised that she was allowed to do the life story work when she was asked for her help by an Assistant Social Worker with the aid of the Social Workers notes.

(40) Nicki said that often photos were missing from the file and she took it upon herself to take pictures of homes where the child had lived.

(41) Catherine advised that the Training Steering Group had been considering using experienced carers to deliver workshops on areas in which they have a particular expertise, such as life story work.

What more can Kent County Council do to help deal with all these issues?

(42) The Foster Carers advised that they were self-employed but employed by KCC. They stated that they could not say when they last received a pay increase. They do not receive a pension. They were often not paid or received very late payments and gave examples. Examples given included; waiting six months to receive a payment for respite; and the case of two children from Tunbridge Wells being placed in a foster placement in Maidstone and although a taxi was promised no taxi was provided to get them both to school in Tunbridge Wells. The children had to travel by bus, a two hour journey to school in Tunbridge Wells. There was a lengthy wait for reimbursement. The Social Worker refused to reimburse for the shoes she bought the children as their shoes were too small and totally worn through, you were able to see the soles of their feet. There were fewer issues regarding payments for a child that was in your care long term.

(43) The Foster Carers stated that there were a lot on inconsistencies. If a child moans/complains about their Foster Carer the Foster Carer is not treated as part of the Team and not included in any discussions regarding the issue. The Social worker will go to the head of the Team and the head of the Team will address the issue with the Carer and it is like we are being told off for what is sometimes a trivial matter told by the child, the example given was that the child complained that they were not allowed tomato sauce.

(44) A reference was made to the loss of Catch 22 or the 16+ Team that worked solely with adolescents which was a great loss. It was questioned that social workers were expected to have too wider knowledge from birth onwards.

(45) The Foster Carers referred to adolescents aged 18 years that entered into supported lodgings but who had to fend for themselves. They considered that the adolescents were expected to achieve more than what would be expected from their own children at the same age and they often went back into chaos.

What support do Foster Carers receive?

(46) Janet advised that Foster Carers have to attend a monthly meeting within our areas [Attendance was required at 75%]. It is difficult to attend those meetings if you had babies/toddlers. Catherine said that her area was very good. Janetta considered that it was about having good leadership, with everyone working the

same way. With regards to Locums it feels it feels like there is not the same commitment.

How much does it cost to find and pay a locum?

(47) A Foster Carer advised that a lot of the Locums are open about their position saying that they are paid more and they can stick to the hours.

(48) A suggestion was made by the Foster Carers that there should be a tie in with the Social Workers training where they would be required to remain in the employ of local authority for a minimum of 5 years. [They were advised that this would need to be a national policy]. There was a suggestion that the local authority could have a policy that no more than 5% of the workforce would be Locums, this would need to be looked at as Social Worker vacancies were at an all-time high. This would save KCC money as huge amount is spent on training. Should be more recruitment through schools and local universities. Also there is a large cost to train foster carers, Retention is very important for both social workers and foster carers. There needs to be a more sustainable policy throughout.

(49) A Foster Carer suggested that it was a great expense for one local authority to care for so many unaccompanied youngsters.

What are the most rewarding aspects of being a foster carer?

(50) The Foster Carers said that they loved their job and seeing the children in their care becoming members of the community and that it was rewarding. A Foster Carer stated that "One person does make a difference" and another reminisced about a child calling her after some time to say thank you.

(51) A plea was made for apprenticeships for practical young people.

The Chairman and Members present thanked the Foster Carers for attending the meeting.

12. 12.00 noon - Christine Liggins, Kim Keen and Neil Foad, Independent Reviewing Officers, Kent County Council *(Item 4)*

(1) The Chairman of the Select Committee welcomed Christine Liggins, Kim Keen, Maggie O'Donaghue and Neil Foad, Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO), Kent County Council, to the meeting.

(2) They had received questions and themes that the Select Committee were investigating in preparation for the meeting.

(3) Christine Liggins, Kim Keen, Maggie O'Donaghue and Neil Foad, Independent Reviewing Officers, Members of the Select Committee and Officers present introduced themselves.

What are the functions of the IRO in Kent?

(4) The IROs took turns to state functions of the IRO as follows:

- Monitor the progress of care plans
- Drive up standards and outcomes for young children
- High responsibility for case work and children's needs
- Have a knowledge of what was being provided in a multi-agency environment
- Able to pursue issues and raise issues

It was explained that IROs were employed by the local authority and line managed separately from mainstream.

Are there any other issues with the relevance to the review which you would like to raise with the Select Committee?

(5) An IRO gave the example of a young child, aged 7, who had been living in care in the South East of the County for two to three years. The child had been out of school for 9 months. The child had already been seen by three CAMHS workers and had changes in Social Workers. The majority of problems that had arisen were not directly the responsibility of the Social Workers. The IRO explained how she was working to resolve the issue by personally speaking to all the relevant teams within KCC. The assistant director then scheduled a meeting with all agencies involved. The nearest schools were full and the school the child's sibling was attending was considered unsuitable as this would be a two hour taxi journey and the IRO was not happy with how the sibling was being cared for at that school.

How would the issue of the school not being suitable for the sibling be resolved?

(6) The IROs role would be to raise the issues with Virtual School Kent (VSK) but they do not have the statutory power to make the school do what they should, which was frustrating. [Members requested that Mr Leeson be invited to meet with the Select Committee].

(7) The IRO suggested that many services are struggling and sometimes focused only on work within their individual professional boundaries. This leads to a limit in joined up partnership working.

(8) Neil advised that the IRO had the opportunity to be a constant person for the child, and was well placed to make a difference.

(9) Maggie considered that the benchmark would be "What would I accept for my own child regarding their Education and Health". The IROs have a good overview to drive through the standards. Maggie said that she was frustrated with the lack of collaboration between services.

(10) Children's mental health services were a concern. They were not meeting the needs of our young people. If a child moved out of one area and into another the process started again, there was no continuity. If we were starting today we would design the service differently.

How can this be improved for the wellbeing of children in care?

(11) Missing young people were a concern for all of us. We need corporate parenting sessions where we ask “what are we doing?” It was not acceptable to say that they have been missing for a long time” as the response.

(12) Kim suggested that there was an need to share common themes for those children that were missing as there may be links that we were not aware of that may help us to look at prevention.

(13) Neil advised that young people go missing all the time for many reasons, but they also include sexual exploitation and trafficking. Sharing information was key.

(14) Christine suggested that with better training we could raise awareness.

(15) Christine considered that through service restructures the practise can take a backward turn. Changes in allocated workers in all the agencies; and in the SW teams, tended to lead to delay and lack of knowledge of the situation, and a ‘start again’ approach. The IRO’s help reduce this through being a consistent person and through raising disputes.

(16) It was suggested that the Missing Person’s Policy should be higher in awareness.

(17) There was good practise in some areas “Who’s Missing”

(18) [Mrs Whittle suggested that Members consider the Safeguarding Board capturing this].

(19) The Chief Constable needed to be held to account. It was considered that the Police’s attitude to missing children often left a lot to be desired.

(20) Christine advised that young people were drawn into different influences things they enjoy, not recognising risks as anything more than excitement and fun. She considered that it was about how we put in special resources to turn that influence around. The intervention needs to be timely and geared to direct work acceptable to the adolescent, taken to them, in their environment.

(21) Maggie added that we were not always going to have responsive children.

What as an organisation can we do to collaborate?

(22) A suggestion was made for accountability starting with services asking “Have you followed that through”.

(23) Maggie reflected that over recent years less focus was on working with families. The focus should be about getting the young person back to their family and keeping the birth family engaged.

(24) It was advised that this may have occurred through Social Workers being pressured with job case loads and becoming risk averse.

(25) Neil explained that the way social work teams were set up can result in changes of social worker, particularly when a child comes into carer resulting in a loss of continuity, but also that there needed to be more focused and resources aimed at planning for children to return home where possible.

(26) Neil considered that sometimes Foster Carers see their role as being to care which can act as a barrier in preparing the child and getting them ready for life at 18+. There is preparation for independence programmes but he is not sure how far these are always implemented.

(27) Maggie said that you would prepare your children for life as they are growing up. You cannot leave this until they are 16 years old.

(28) Christine considered that we have to question how we were guiding young people in how to take responsibility for themselves and acknowledge they will make mistakes. Many 14 to 15 year olds run back home, we work with that risk. Young people's lives were lived through the internet, SMS and text. She questioned that as Corporate Parents, where did the Local Authority lie in monitoring those mediums? She considered that Foster Carers did not know how to manage this. Foster Carers often asked themselves "How do I keep them safe"?

(29) Kim considered that Foster Carers were often risk averse and did not feel that they would be backed. The most successful cases were those where the parents stayed close to the Foster Carers.

(30) It was advised that Newton Europe were appointed by KCC. They had been looking at the points of transfer. The IRO said that this was about making sensible choices. If you were going to deliver a good service the answers lay with the young people themselves. The question that needed to be asked of the young people was "what would make the difference for you now and in the future?" KCC's role was to engage with young people to get their views.

What could the IRO do?

(31) Christine explained that the IROs were already working extensive hours per week. The IROs go that extra mile and still struggle to meet each child. IROs have to see each child between each review but this was not always possible, therefore they had to prioritise and the extent of auditing, accountability and data recording has greatly increased.

(32) Maggie advised that efforts were in place to reduce the IROs case loads. Three new IROs had recently been recruited.

(33) The IRO's would like to have continuity and the ability to follow up with and make relationships with the young people. The IRO had to make sense of the child.

(34) Christine mentioned that the IROs had to prioritise key cases/high risk cases. She referred to a case of two children at risk of sexual exploitation within their birth family. She met with them away from their foster homes asked them whether they would tell their Social Worker if anything was going on, they replied no. She said that IROs need time to know what risks young people were facing and their wishes and feelings.

What should the Select Committee recommend?

(35) Kim highlighted that with regard to CAMHS a lot of young people would not engage in those meetings. She suggested that there was a need for commissioning different services such as drop in or outreach. She stressed that the window was small to engage the young people and it could not wait especially in sexual abuse cases. There was a need for a whole range of services. Dandelion services worked. A lot of young people say "I'm not mental". Young people needed a service without a label. Children in Care were already under a microscope.

(36) Maggie stated that there was a need to ensure that KCC's services were all accountable and collaborative. The focus should be on the young person and not the computer. There was a need to be creative with what we already have. There was a need to be flexible with young people. She said that we had to question whether we were giving the best to the young people. The Assistant Social Worker was important to them but they did not have that resource within the Care Team.

(37) It was suggested that County Councillors, as Corporate Parents, could meet with young people, throughout the year, to hear from them directly about what was important to them.

(38) Christine suggested that there was a need for multiagency coordination including CAMHS and schools.

(39) A reference was made regarding young people with learning disabilities and the difficulties there were in transition. Kim said that she would like to see a Vulnerable Adult Team and the 18+ Team established as a huge number of young people still required support. They did not fit into the Adult Services. Those 18 year olds could fall through the gap.

(40) A comment was made that the Service Teams needed to be kept stable and supported.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers

(41) Advice was given on what would happen to an unaccompanied asylum seeker. If they claimed to be over 16 years it was explained that they would be assessed at Millbank Immigration Centre and if assessed to be 16 years old they would be placed in the community, this would not happen if they were indigenous children. It was not known whether they were assessed that they were able to be on their own. The quality of the accommodation they were allocated was poor. There was experience that these children could not cope in the community. They did not speak English and their ability to access education was poor. It was suggested that if you let teenagers loose in the community they would do what teenagers do. The IROs had a shared role with the Social Worker and County Councillors as their Corporate Parents. It was advised that when they visit them they can be living with no hot water etc. It was considered that if Ofsted were to look at their care there would be concerns. It was stated that there were improvements being made.

Who are the providers of these young people's accommodation?

(42) It was advised that the accommodation was privately rented. It was managed accommodation, managed by the accommodation officers. Kim considered that young people were not given the support that they needed.

The Chairman and Members present thanked Christine Liggins, Kim Keen, Maggie O'Donoghue and Neil Foad for attending the meeting.