

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### SELECT COMMITTEE - CORPORATE PARENTING

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Corporate Parenting held in the Wantsum Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 12 March 2015.

PRESENT: Mrs Z Wiltshire (Chairman), Mr R E Brookbank, Ms C J Cribbon, Mr S J G Koowaree, Mr B Neaves, Mr M J Northey, Mr R J Parry, Mrs P A V Stockell and Mrs J Whittle

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE

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

### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

**18. 2.00pm - Annabelle Taylor, Kahleigh Jenner and Matthew Roberts, Apprentices with VSK'**  
*(Item 2)*

(1) The Chairman of the Select Committee, Mrs Wiltshire, welcomed Annabelle Taylor (Bella), Kahleigh Jenner and Matthew Roberts (Matt), Apprentices with VSK', to the meeting.

(2) Bella, Kahleigh and Matt, the Members of the Select Committee and Officers introduced themselves.

(3) Bella, Kahleigh and Matt had received questions and themes that the Select Committee were investigating in preparation for the meeting.

#### **Please introduce yourselves**

(4) Bella advised that she was a VSK Apprentice and the Chairperson of the Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC). Matt said that he was a VSK Apprentice in the 16+ Service. He had been in the Army and had attended the OCYPC. Kahleigh advised that she too was a VSK Apprentice.

#### **In your view, how effective and beneficial are KCC apprenticeships?**

(5) Bella said that the opportunity to be offered a position working within such a large well known organisation was truly outstanding. She said that she was not able to achieve her potential whilst at school or college, so when she had the chance to apply for her current apprenticeship she went for it. She felt lucky to be able to study whilst earning, receiving vital experience and knowledge in the working world.

### **What are you doing?**

(6) Bella explained that she was providing children in care the opportunity they might not receive. As she had been in care she was able to build up trust with children in care as they knew that “she had been there”, being young helped too. Bella advised that the role covered the whole of Kent with 3 apprentices in West Kent and 3 apprentices in East Kent but they all worked as one Team. The Team helped with developing the Personal Education Plans and had been trained so that they could offer mentoring and counselling. There were also activity days. Bella said that she had run her first residential activity day and hoped to do more.

### **Who offers you support in your role?**

(7) The apprentices advised that they had support from Jo Carpenter, VSK.

(8) Matt advised that he had been volunteering before he applied for the apprenticeship. He was looking forward to applying for a position within the 18+ Services for people who live in care in the future and would continue to study for the Level 3 apprenticeship.

(9) The apprentices explained that the Level 2 apprenticeship, which they were all studying for at present, was for 12 months and the Level 3 apprenticeship was for 18 months.

(10) Bella said that she wanted to continue with her studies to achieve Level 3 as her aim was to work in children’s homes.

(11) Kahleigh advised that she was not sure what she wanted to do in the future.

### **What are the problems most often raised and how can Members help to resolve them?**

(12) Matt said that housing was an issue as there was often a lot of change and sometimes at short notice giving no time to adjust. He advised that frequent changes in Social Workers disrupted their lives too. He considered that children in care should be given notice to prepare if they were changing addresses so that they could say goodbye to friends. Bella said that some are given a choice but they lack experience of making choices and that is unsettling.

(13) Kahleigh advised that a lot of people did not understand what was meant by “Supported Lodgings” and many thought that they would be on their own with no support.

### **Do you help people to solve their problems?**

(14) Matt explained that it would depend on the problem but that they had an understanding of what they could deal with. Bella said that it was a unique Team and if one of them could not deal with a problem there was always one of the Team that could help or know who to direct them to.

## **Does KCC do enough?**

(15) Bella said that the OCYPS invited Philip Segurola, Acting Director for Specialist Children's Services, to speak at one of its meetings. It was not until he left the meeting that members of the OCYPS opened up and raised issues including the following:

- The change of Social Workers and schools were a real stress and was an important issue in transition work.
- The OCYPS agreed to invite a Social Worker to a future meeting to explain their role. The apprentices considered that the role of the social worker was not always understood by the children and the difficult decisions that they had to make were not fully realised.
- Peers, teachers and adults did not know what it was like to be a child in care. The apprentices stated that many children had to be adults as children. They also had to put up with jokes being made about them.
- A lot of children felt that their personal belongings etc were not treated with respect.
- Then felt labelled and less was expected of them
- Young people, 16+ and 18+, were worried about moving out of care. You were considered lucky if your Carers were supportive when you had to leave care but this did not apply to all.
- Many young people were unable to budget properly and needed to be taught.

## **Foster Carers and IROs mentioned that meetings during school time were disruptive. Did you find this?**

(16) Matt replied yes and explained that there was a lot of disruption to children in care's education. A lot of children in care said that they wanted a say in whether they moved to a new school or not and to be involved in their placements.

## **Was there too much switching of schools because of where the Foster Carers were based?**

(17) The response was unanimously, yes.

## **Does KCC need to do more to make it clear that care leavers are not on their own? What can KCC do?**

(18) Bella said that the support was good but it was needed most when moving on. Bella suggested that the best idea would be to go back to the beginning and start again. There were things that were working but equally there were things that could ruin lives. Bella advised that once a young person had an idea and they felt that they were not being listened to, they just do not speak. She considered that young people needed to speak out more and be encouraged to voice their views.

## **When Care Leavers leave Care how much help do they receive? How much help did you receive?**

(19) Bella reflected that she had a bad experience. Matt advised that when he was in supported lodgings the provider was not supportive and expected him to know everything but it took him time to find his feet. He considered that it was about educating young people on what moving out meant and how it was going to affect

them. He suggested that Foster Carers should be preparing the children in their care for when they leave care in such things as how to work a washing machine etc.

### **Is there support when you move there?**

(20) Bella shared that she was not ready to move out when she was told to. She reflected that when she was 19 years old if she was still in her family home she would not have had to move out. Her 26 year old sister was still living at the family home. She was grateful that her Foster Carer changed her dining room into a bedroom so that she could stay there until she was ready to be independent (The Foster Carer would have lost income if she had given up a bedroom to Bella). She refused to enter into supported lodgings and moved in with her then boyfriend. Bella mentioned the difficulty she had in raising the deposit and money for kitting out a flat. She said she managed to borrow £700 but lost the flat in the same week.

(21) Bella suggested that it would be helpful if there was an agreement for care leavers to have a package of white goods to support them in leaving care.

(22) Kahleigh stated that she lost her accommodation at Christmas as her rent account fell behind. She was evicted. She would have been on the streets but for her friend taking her in. Kahleigh had to borrow money to get back into her home.

(23) Kahleigh suggested that the term "Supported Lodgings gave the wrong impression.

### **How many placements have you had?**

(24) Matt said that he had been at 20 different addresses.

(25) Bella said that she had been at 31 different addresses since she was 7 years old, which worked out at 3 per year. She stated that she was quite an angry child. Foster Carers would not put up with her and she would be moved on. She said that she realise that if she "kicked off" she would be move on.

(26) Kahleigh said that she had lived nowhere for more than 1½ years since she was 13 years, she was now 21 year old.

### **Did you feel part of the Foster Carers' family?**

(27) Bella considered that there were good carers and those who did it for the money. In one placement she had the experience of the Foster Carers pointing out a cupboard that they had stocked with things only she would use and in another placement the Foster Carers went above and beyond in caring for her.

(28) Matt said that he did not want to insult anyone. He felt that a lot was dependent on the relationship with the Social Worker. Some Social Workers just did their job.

**You said that you would review everything, is that from the time you were taken into care?**

(29) Bella replied "Just in general".

**In your experience when the Foster Family went on holiday did they take you?**

(30) Bella advised that this did not always happen. She had been in good placements where it did but when it did not she would be placed in respite care, a strangers house, for the time the foster family was away. Most of that time was spent alone in her bedroom. She suggested that there were the odd cases, especially if you were young enough, when you would be placed with the same respite carer each time.

(31) Jo Carpenter, VSK, came to the meeting table. She advised that the apprentices acted as a support system coming in untrained and unskilled.

(32) Jo advised that in a previous role she managed an apprenticeship scheme. She stated that moving to independent living and getting a fulltime job was difficult and employers were oblivious to those facts. She considered that holding down a fulltime job, looking at flats and going to the housing benefit office etc was why some of the care leavers did not succeed. 15 apprentices had come through the scheme.

**What can be done?**

(33) Jo stressed that the assisted apprenticeship scheme was fantastic. Some apprentices may not have had a foot in the door otherwise. She said that some were real rough diamonds and they had to go back to the drawing board with them. They did not have the level of understanding that you would expect. Members could do more within the local community to encourage employers to see these vulnerable children as worthy of a chance.

(34) Matt mentioned the Gateways and Council Tax Bands explaining that some were not clear of the Band care leavers were in. They were saying Band D but it should be Band B. He felt that this should be transparent.

(35) The Chairman and Members complimented Bella, Kahleigh and Matt saying that they were inspiring and thanked them for attending the meeting.

**19. 2.50pm - Nick Wilkinson, Head of Youth Justice and Safer Young Kent, Kent County Council**

*(Item 3)*

(1) The Chairman of the Select Committee, Mrs Wiltshire, welcomed Nick Wilkinson, Head of Youth Justice and Safer Young Kent, KCC, to the meeting.

(2) Nick, Members of the Committee present and Officers introduced themselves.

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

**Please describe the roles and responsibilities that your post involves.**

(4) Nick advised that he was currently the chair of the Kent Criminal Justice Board, Chair of the Kent Out of Court Scrutiny Board and co-chair of the Kent Prevent Board. He was previously a police officer for over 30 years; retiring as an Assistant Chief Constable with Sussex Police. Nick was a member of the Association of Chief Police Officers Children and Young Persons Group, Regional Prosecution Service and Regional Director, Association of Chief Police Officers member of the Children's Interagency Group and National Participation Forum. He referred to the draft protocol that had been provided and said that his aim is to reverse the current situation where a former child in care is more likely to go to prison than to university.

(5) He advised that his role did not include looking at cases but taking an overview, picking up issues and bringing them back to negotiate solutions. He spoke about Youth Magistrates and the challenges there were as Youth Magistrates only saw what was put in front of them regarding the young person.

(6) He touched on the challenge in getting frontline Police to look at the issue of dealing with young people differently.

(7) Nick tabled a paper that showed slides from the National Institute of Mental Health Study. The slide showed normal brain development from age 5 to age 20 and demonstrating the effects of trauma in a young person's life on the brain.

(8) Nick referred to a case of a child placed with Foster Carers. The child had experience a significant childhood trauma – detachment. The child had been wetting the bed. An incident happened after returning from school when he went up to his bedroom and urinated on his bed. The Foster Carers called the police. This was recorded as a crime. The young person was arrested and was placed in a police cell. Nick said that his team intervened. There was a clear responsibility. This was cut off before it got in the justice system. If the issue had proceeded any caution would have to be declared in later life when the young person was completing an application form etc. He is working with the Police to encourage the use of proportional and appropriate methods to avoid burdening young people with a criminal record. We now work with the child and the family to curb behaviour. He advised that when he attends the Partnership meetings Police officers refer to these cases as a pain because police were always being called out to incidents involving them.

(9) Nick reflected that there are, and will be, occasions when the law option is appropriate.

**Is justice failing?**

(10) Nick said that the study of the brain and the effects of trauma should play its part in challenging mind-sets regarding young people in care.

**Are Children's Services Directorate signed up to the South East Protocol? Is there a way of reversing the damage to the brain from trauma in younger life?**

(11) Nick replied yes, the brain could be recovered with support and no the Directorate are not yet fully behind the protocol.

(12) There was some way to go with changes to frontline Police officers having to challenge back.

(13) Nick explained the 4 step approach. Foster Carers should deal with (via link Social Worker). If a child becomes aggressive, the police may need to be called. If the aggressive behaviour continued and did not calm down they could remove them from the home but this did not mean them being arrested. The proof of this approach working would be realised when the figures of children in care being arrested reduced.

(14) Part of the problem is that to make an insurance claim a crime number is needed and to get a crime number the incident must be reported to the police. One insurance company, Towergate Insurance, do not ask for a crime number to make a claim.

(15) Nick said that he had in the past worked with the Princes Trust when he attended in jeans and a t-shirt. When the young people were asked what they thought Nick did for a living they did not guess correctly and when he revealed that he was a policeman they said that they did not like policemen but they said they liked him.

**Do you have a number of children going missing in Care?**

(16) Nick advised that Maggie Blyth, Regional Director for the South East and also the Chair of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Safeguarding Children Board, had set up a group "Missing". There were now systems in place where reports go to a single point of contact who looks at the reports of all children that were missing. He clarified that his office received an email of all children who were missing so that all KCC systems could be checked to see if they are known to us.

(17) Nick considered that those children who were found should be offered a return interview and there should be an assessment of risk. He explained that his team pick up the measure as their responsibility.

(18) He reported that there were overall 270 episodes the breakdown of this was as follows: 154 young people, 34% were children placed by another local authority in Kent and 31% were Kent looked after children.

(19) Nick stated that other local authorities were contacted in their role as corporate parents and asked to complete a returning form. The returns were as follows:

- 10 episodes in West Berkshire
- 10 episodes in Suffolk
- 7 episodes in Greenwich
- 7 in Essex

(20) In Foster Care there were guidelines Nick said that reports are recorded on Liberi (Specialist Children's Services IT system) which has a pathway for social

workers to follow. There has been training provided on conducting the return interviews and understanding risk factors.

### **What can KCC do?**

(21) Nick stated that Members as corporate parents had a responsibility he advised that they needed to use their influence and knowledge to make the network links, they need to constantly challenge where a criminal judgement is made as this may not necessarily be the only way. Nick said that in his eyes they were children and it was getting that message across.

(22) He referred to the Corporate Parenting Group saying that there was no Police representation on the group.

### **25% of adult prisoners have been in care how can we address this?**

(23) Nick explained that this was part of what the Kent and Medway Joint Protocol for Children in Care was aimed at addressing. This would be challenging. The National Probation System did not record information on adult offender being brought up in care, when they become an adult offender research shows this up. He said that this would be challenged back to the Probation Service. Nick considered that the proof would show after 10 years with a reduction in the figures.

(24) Nick advised that he was planning to achieve, by late summer, a Direct Panel. This would be where every child that had been arrested would be discussed. The intention was to curb that early behaviour. This was going beyond Policy. Nick advised that Police Chiefs were signed up to this approach, to make a difference.

### **How can you tell if this is damage to their brain through trauma or whether they choose to do those things?**

(25) Nick explained that he was not an expert but there were a range of experts and organisations that would say that what was happening now was not right.

### **What age can you attend juvenile court?**

(26) Nick advised young people attended juvenile court up to 17 years old.

(27) Nick suggested that it was the role of the Corporate Parents to be informed and dispel myths about young people in care who were often labelled as “those problem children”. He referred to Lambeth London Borough Council carried out study on young people. He highlighted that one of the findings was that many of the children in care had not travelled to the centre of London.

(28) Nick considered that the issue of child sexual exploitation should be made a priority for all corporate parents. A review of the case for Operation Lakeland should be a priority for the organisation. A network of partners should be used to drive support for children in care. Members should agree on the priorities and what that means in terms of actions. The issue of placements away from home needs to be taken on.

(29) The Select Committee thanked Nick for attending the meeting.



**20. Interview with Yashi Shah, Interim Head of Adoption Service and Improvement, Coram/Kent County Council**  
(Item 4)

**Please introduce yourself and describe the main roles and responsibilities that your post involves.**

(1) Coram has worked in partnership with Kent since February 2012, to improve its Adoption service. I had expected to undertake the improvement work for six months but I am still here three years later! It has been a rewarding experience and I have learned much since being here. Coram is based in London and we are used to going to and working with small local authorities, but Kent is vast, and working in such a large authority has been a very useful learning experience.

(2) I manage the adoption service, which has 60 - 65 staff, and I take a lead in improvement work. Coram was commissioned after the County Council received an 'inadequate' rating for its children in care services in 2011. It was initially a 2-year contract but this has been extended and now finishes in February 2016.

(3) The Coram/KCC partnership will shortly move to a different arrangement, as a voluntary adoption agency (VAA), from July 2015. This will be called 'Coram Kent Voluntary Adoption Agency'. This voluntary agency will be separate from the County Council, although the Council will retain its responsibility and accountability for its corporate parenting role for children in its care. The driver for this move to apply to be a VAA was Kent's vision, and the VAA will be able to access funding from the Government that the County Council as a local authority cannot access. This way of working is innovative but Kent's will not be the first model of a VAA to be established. A VAA in Cambridge has recently been rated 'good' by Ofsted.

(4) Coram has a good track record in adoption in terms of delivering the best outcomes.

**Is there a problem with, and can you tell the committee about, children with special educational needs (SEN) who are seeking adoption?**

(5) Children having SEN is always a challenge but we have a good track record of placing them. For example, one child with SEN, health issues and disabilities has taken 13 months to place but has now been placed, so we know that persistence pays off. We have to hang on to the belief that we will find a family for such children. The adoption service needs to have the confidence of the local authority and Ofsted. It's not just a case of numbers – how many placements made in how much time; some children will take longer to place. Other children with similar combinations of issues have taken over a year to place; a deaf child who was eventually placed with a deaf adopter after over a year has had big benefits from the placement and has made progress with language development.

## Is there a long waiting list of children needing adoption?

(6) No. You have to look at a waiting list in the context of improving the journey for such children.

(7) In 2011/12, the year in which the County Council was given its improvement notice:

68 children were placed for adoption  
69 children were adopted  
67 new adopters were approved

In 2012/13,  
143 children were placed for adoption  
105 children were adopted  
87 new adopters were approved

In 2013/14,  
170 children were placed for adoption  
145 children were adopted  
167 new adopters were approved  
We are proud that this was the highest number of placements in the UK in that year.

In 2014/15, so far we are hoping for  
143 children to be placed for adoption  
180 children to be adopted  
135 new adopters to be approved

These figures tell an excellent story.

(8) Kent County Council has had two key challenges during its improvement journey:-

(9) Firstly, in September 2014, a key legal judgement was published that affected all adoptions in the UK. This was that any authority seeking formal legal agreement to an adoption would need to produce more robust paperwork to support an application before a placement order could be granted.

The number of children being granted placement has reduced as follows:

In 2013 – 190  
In 2014 – 164  
In 2015, so far – projected 82

This means that we are left with 58 adopters who have been approved and are waiting for a child, and only 14 children waiting for adoption. Most of these children have disabilities or are siblings, both of which are hard-to-place groups. We are undertaking a major piece of work this year to support adopters who are waiting for a child. Adopters can make a DVD to promote themselves to children who are seeking adoption, in the same way that children have been able for some time to make a DVD of themselves to show to adopters. These DVDs are made with the support of the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). In addition, we are holding

events at which approved adopters can view the profiles of children awaiting adoption.

(10) Secondly, some placements have been delayed due to challenges by a child's birth parents. Such a challenge can lead to a delay of six to nine months while the challenge progresses through the High Court.

**Why has Kent placed more children than other authorities? Is it because we have a large number of UASC?**

(11) No. Most UASC do not meet the criteria for adoption as they are older. Most adoption placements are of children under the age of 10.

**So are the children going for adoption all Kent's own children?**

(12) Yes. Kent had the highest number of children in care of any of the authorities of comparable size; Birmingham, Lincolnshire and Hampshire.

**Are girls or boys the easiest to place for adoption?**

(13) Nationally, girls are easier to place.

**What could the Select Committee recommend that would improve the adoption process?**

(14) There are two parts of the process which need improvement:-

(15) Firstly, a 'life story' book that is prepared for adopters, to tell them the back story of the child they are adopting, and, secondly, a 'later life' letter, which is prepared for the child, to help them understand, when they are older, why they came into care. Both of these are prepared by the child's social workers. Some adopters complain that they either do not get the 'life story' book or that what they are given is poorly prepared or of poor quality (for instance, children's names have been misspelt). We owe it to the children to do these things well. Adoption and children's social workers are working together to continue to improve this area of work. to help them prepare better material. In the past, we have monitored that the documents are given when they should be but we have not monitored the quality of what is given.

(16) Secondly, all children who come through the adoption process have some challenges to be addressed; for example, a baby coming into care who suffers the effects of a mother's drugs and/or alcohol misuse during pregnancy. Good multi-agency post-adoption services will support adopters to cope with the issues their adopted child has experienced and can prevent the child returning to care in the future. These support services are in place now but need further development. Previously, these services have had a poor reputation and adopters had lost confidence in them. Post-adoption support starts only after a formal adoption order has been granted, and there is a long period of time while the child is in an adoption placement prior to the granting of the formal order, during which the child still has looked after status and the prospective adopters cannot access full support services. During this period, access to services such as CAMHS support needs to be available to adopters and children in a timely way. I think we could support both better during this time, either by further improving the CAMHS service that is available to them.

The current CAMHS model requires further exploration as to how adopters and children can be supported. I think the relationship between schools, adoptive parents and adopted children has improved in recent years but can improve further. Schools are now taking adopted children more seriously than they used to but we need to continue to monitor and ensure that they give sufficient priority to adopted children when allocating school places.

(17) The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Yashi very much for giving her time today to help the Select Committee with its information gathering.