

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Swale 1, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 21 July 2017.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Ms H Carpenter, Mr G Cooke, Ms S Dunstan, Ms M Emptage (Substitute for Ms S Dunn), Mr D Farrell, Ms L Fisher, Mrs L Game, Mr S Gray, Mr S Griffiths, Ms S Hamilton, Mr A Heather, Ms N Khosla, Mr S J G Koowaree (Substitute for Mrs T Dean, MBE), Mr G Lymer, Mrs C Moody, Mr M J Northey, Mrs S Prendergast, Ms N Sayer (Substitute for Ms A Brett) and Mr J Wright (Substitute for Mrs S Gent)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough

IN ATTENDANCE: Lorraine Doran (Team Manager, Children, Young People and Education), Ms M L Hall (Commissioning Manager - Children Living Away From Home), Ms G O'Grady (Participation Co-ordinator, Specialist Children's Services), Mrs S Skinner (Head of Adoption Service), Ms C Smith (Head of Fostering Service) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

15. Membership

(Item 1)

The Panel noted that Alison Brett, Deputy Chief Nurse at the West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group, had joined the Panel as Bethan Haskins' temporary replacement.

16. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies for absence had been received from Teresa Carpenter, Trudy Dean, Sue Dunn, Sue Gent, Stuart Griffiths and Philip Segurola.

George Koowaree was present as a substitute for Trudy Dean, Marion Emptage for Sue Dunn and John Wright for Sue Gent.

17. Minutes of the meeting of this Panel held on 1 June 2017

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2017 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

18. Chairman's Announcements

(Item 4)

The Chairman announced that Teresa Carpenter, foster carer, had been awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List, having been nominated by one of her foster children. This honour was very well deserved and the County Council was very

proud, and the Chairman placed on record her congratulations and best wishes to Teresa.

19. Verbal Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)

(Item 5)

1. Ms Dunstan gave a verbal update on the recent work of the OCYPC, the Super Council and Young Adults Council and the participation activities arranged for the summer. *The text of the update will be attached to these minutes.* Ms Dunstan and Ms Khosla responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) young people were supported to manage their transition from being a looked after child to increasing their independence as they moved into adulthood. The specific areas in which young people and their social workers identified a need for support would be discussed as part of the child in care review meetings and from the age of 16 years the pathway plan would be completed. There were updates on transition to independence seminars throughout the year for carers and care leavers, so they would have an outline of the support available to them; key transition issues could be highlighted to ensure a positive move to adulthood. 18+ care leavers were allocated a personal advisor (PA) who supported young people to resolve their individual issues and progress the pathway plans. Young people were fully involved in their pathway plan which covered key areas, including housing, education and health;
- b) Ms Khosla reported a very successful day out at Westminster for the Launch by CenterPoint of research into housing and care leavers, 'From Care to Where'. A number of the participation apprentices attended and were able to provide feedback to MPs about the challenges with housing for care leavers. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 was also considered as positive as it increased the responsibility for councils to provide support to care leavers from age 21 years, as currently, to 25 years;
- c) a key area of work with district council partners was to review and re-negotiate community arrangements and establish a clear pathway for 16-25 year olds leaving care and efforts to prevent homelessness among care leavers. The Chairman added that the County Council could look at using any property it owned as a way of boosting the places available to care leavers. The numbers of young people leaving care and requiring independent accommodation was increasing, Ms Khosla explained that a large number of UASC would soon be turning 18 and thus would acquire care leaver status and be eligible for 18+ services. There was a comprehensive plan for managing the types of accommodation and the numbers of care leavers who would require accommodation. This detail was provided in the accompanying interim Sufficiency Strategy Report; and
- d) the VSK apprentices were thanked and praised for their work in engaging with young people in care and encouraging participation, and they were described as a great asset to the County Council and the Panel.

2. RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted, with thanks.

20. Corporate Parenting Challenge Cards

(Item 6)

1. Ms O'Grady introduced the report and asked the Panel to support young people taking part in the fundraising Virtual Triathlon on 26 October 2017, in National Care Leavers Week. The aim of the exercise was to draw attention to the experiences of young people in care and leaving care and to offer others a chance to 'walk a mile in our shoes' and better understand the experiences and issues. The Chairman commented that this was a very easy challenge to support and offered to provide some home-baked refreshments.

In response to questions, Ms O'Grady explained that:

- a) all the challenges which had been reported to the Panel had now been completed and she thanked the Panel for the prompt responses to these;
 - b) challenge cards which had been submitted were listed in the regular OCYPC newsletter. Challenges relating to issues which were general or related to many young people would be set out in full, and shared with the Panel, while those which were personal to a specific young person would not be publicised or shared;
 - c) social workers were aware of the challenge card process and should share news of it with children and young people and their carers and families; and
 - d) participation in the Virtual Triathlon could be sponsored online using the JustGiving page, and details of this would be sent to Panel Members.
2. RESOLVED that the Challenge Card progress to date be noted and welcomed.

21. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member

(Item 7)

1. Mr R Gough gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

Ofsted outcome, with particular reference to Corporate Parenting – since the last meeting of the Panel, the County Council had received an Ofsted rating of 'Good'. Its services for Looked After Children and permanence arrangements were particularly praised, the work of the OCYPC and the CPP in participation and engagement was highlighted as being particularly good, and services for care leavers, personal advisors and the VSK were noted as being good, although work with children in need and early protection needed improvement. Mr Gough said he wanted to do more work with district council partners on accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds and *suggested that this be added to the Panel's ongoing work programme.*

Queens Birthday Honours List award for Teresa Carpenter – Foster Carer Teresa Carpenter had been awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list, having been nominated by one of her foster children.

UASC and National Transfer Scheme (NTS) trends – there had been a small seasonal increase in new arrivals this year, but nothing like the summer levels of 2016 and 2015, and the NTS continued to take new arrivals away from Kent, leaving just the cohort of those who had arrived before the NTS and had remained in Kent as the responsibility of the County Council. This year, the number of UASC in Kent had decreased from 388 and was expected shortly to reach 230, which would be Kent's aggregate 'share' of the national UASC population. However, the number of UASC as 18+ care leavers was 771, and this figure would increase over time. The NTS was working well with the current level of new arrivals, but if arrivals had remained at 2015 levels, the NTS would not have been able to cope.

Adopter recruitment campaign – a recent media campaign to recruit new adopters had targeted particularly families willing to adopt sets of siblings and disabled children.

Children in Care events over the summer – a lively programme of participation and engagement would run over the summer months, and this had been set out in the OCYPC verbal update.

2. RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted, with thanks.

22. Review and Update of the Sufficiency, Placements and Commissioning Strategy 2015 - 2018

(Item 8)

Ms M L Hall, Commissioning Manager, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Hall introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) most UASC were young men, who would be placed in foster care if they were under 16, or at the Millbank centre if they were over 16. Female UASC would always be placed directly in, and would then stay in, foster care if they were under the age of 18 years.. Most UASC under 18 years and who then became care leavers (18+ years) would be placed in shared accommodation. Ms Khosla added that male UASC used to be placed in foster care but their numbers in 2015/16 meant many were being placed locally with in-house foster carers, and this impacted on local Kent children. It was easier for UASC to be placed out of area and with the independent sector as they did not have the same needs as citizen children to be placed locally for education and health continuity. UASC must acquire an immigration status before qualifying for social housing and so would enter shared accommodation. This arrangement worked well as many preferred to live with others with whom they shared nationality, language and culture;
- b) engagement between the County Council and district and borough councils varied but the relationship was improving over the last 12 – 18 months. There was work in progress to address the needs of 16/17 year old care leavers and those requiring housing-related support. Ms Khosla and Mr Segurola served on a housing group with district and borough council colleagues, which was allocating additional government funding which had been made available to support vulnerable young people. The aim was to achieve a consistent approach across the whole county, with priority being given consistently to care leavers, to seek to avoid the use of emergency

accommodation. The Chairman commented that those Members who also served on district councils could lobby locally to support this work. *A further report on this subject would be made to the Panel's next meeting in September 2017; and*

- c) in response to concern expressed about the reduction since 2014/15 in the number of children being adopted, Ms Khosla explained that this was partly due to the clearance of a backlog of cases which was evident in 2014/15 and partly to the frequent use of special guardianship orders (SGOs) by courts, often against the County Council's advice and wishes. The County Council would challenge such decisions and sometimes proceedings would end and they would have to be instigated a second or third time to ensure that children were safe.

2. RESOLVED that the proposal to review and update the Sufficiency, Placements and Commissioning Strategy 2015 – 2018, and the information given in response to comments and questions, be noted.

23. Looked After Children in the Criminal Justice System; a summary of the Taylor, Laming and Lammy reviews
(Item 9)

1. Ms Fisher introduced the report, summarised the key points of the three reviews and outlined the youth justice system in Kent and the challenges it faced, in particular the high number of looked after children in the system and the work being undertaken to address this. She responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:

- a) the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner had praised the work done in Kent to address the problems faced by children in care entering the criminal justice system, particularly in identifying young people with mental health problems, addressing the provision of CAMHS and establishing alternative locations in which young people with mental health issues could be held and questioned;
- b) Ms Fisher clarified that the figures given in the report referred only to Kent's resident population of children and young people in care; those placed in Kent by other local authorities were counted separately. This was welcomed by Panel members;
- c) the number of other local authorities' young people in care in the criminal justice system had decreased in the period examined by the reviews, while the number of Kent's resident care population in the system had not changed. To avoid large numbers of young people leaving care with the stigma of a criminal record, projects to avoid criminalising their behaviour and to use 'informal community resolution' in place of custodial sentences was proving to be very effective;
- d) one speaker commented that often the most effective way of deterring a young person from criminal behaviour was a stern police warning and the shock and anger of their family at having a police visit to their home.

Another speakers added that young people should be made fully aware that a police caution was not something to be viewed lightly as it counted as a criminal record;

- e) Ms Fisher confirmed that, although levels of knife crime and use of noxious substances among young people had increased nationally, this had not been the case in Kent;
- f) Ms Fisher explained that, under the ...Act 1998, health and education services in the criminal justice system were required to be provided via multi-disciplinary and partnership working. This was working well, attendance and inclusion figures were good and working relations between youth justice workers and young people were strong. Any young person in the criminal justice system was required to have 25 hours' education per week, up to the age of 16, which was delivered by formal multi-disciplinary working, to replace previous less formal arrangements. As a result of this, the number of NEETs in this cohort had been much reduced;
- g) a re-settlement programme, involving joint working between youth justice and social workers, aimed to reduce levels of re-offending. A young person's accommodation and education/training had been identified as key factors affecting their likelihood to re-offend once released;
- h) factors affecting the quality of service which could be delivered included relations between, and the extent of common working practices of, the professionals involved. Relations between the youth justice service and the Police were good, with good integration and consistence of approach. Work was ongoing to review charging decisions and explore alternatives. With Health, there were opportunities to improve working relations, particularly around provision of CAMHS and speech, language and communications. With the Probation service, working relations were good but staff shortages had had an impact;
- i) the positive picture of the service in Kent was welcomed and the team congratulated on the progress made and on the clarity of the information provided in the report, which allowed the Panel to have a full picture and understand the issues;
- j) the protocols for joint working had been reviewed and updated. Protocols covered all looked after children in Kent, including those placed by other local authorities. The support for care leavers and transition from youth services to adult services were being reviewed;
- k) it was important that expectations of the CAMHS service were realistic, as there was much work still to be done to develop the workforce and address other issues once the new provider took over, in the very near future. It would take some time for improvements to make a difference;
- l) the NHS? Transforming Care Programme now included children and would seek to ensure that health services were linked effectively, which would help the general effectiveness of the services and placement opportunities which could be offered to young people trying to move out of the criminal

justice system, as a large proportion of them had emotional health and wellbeing issues, for example eating disorders and behavioural problems. It was important that young people be placed as close as possible to their family so they could benefit from their support;

- m) asked if she was able to comment on the services received by young people in the criminal justice system, Ms Dunstan said she did not know any child in care who had experienced this. Ms Moody confirmed that Foster Carers received training in supporting any young person involved in drugs and knife crime and said she felt prepared, should she need to tackle such issues; and
 - a) Ms Khosla noted there was an ongoing review of casework that would assess the factors which influenced a young person becoming involved in the criminal justice system. It was important to look at the multi-agency response to a young person's care experience and what had led them into criminality. Ms Khosla reminded the Panel of the policies which supported looked after children in any situation, including the Independent Reviewing Officer and social workers and advocacy support. The number of young people leaving care currently serving custodial sentences was very small; 29 out of a total care leaver population of approximately 1,300.
2. RESOLVED that the information on the impact of the criminal justice system on children in care in Kent, set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions, be noted.

24. Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/2017 (Item 10)

Ms L Doran, IRO Manager, South East Kent, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Doran introduced the annual report and summarised the highlights of the work of the IRO service in the past year and plans for the future. She then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-
- a) the developments in the IRO role since the inception of the service, and the extent to which it had become part of a child's life, were welcomed, and thanks and appreciation expressed for the great amount of work which had gone into this development of the role;
 - b) asked how any action arising from a young person's last review before leaving care would be followed up, Ms Doran explained that an 18+ team member would attend the penultimate review meeting so clear tasks could be identified and agreed and would then attend the first review meeting after transition to provide a link and make sure that any issues identified did not get lost in transition;
 - c) any young person seeking urgent help to alleviate anxiety about transition or leaving care should be able to rely on their IRO for support and to 'fight their corner'. IROs were skilled at arguing for services and being persistent on behalf of a young person. Any issue raised which they saw had not been progressed would be escalated to the Area Assistant Directors

responsible for the line management of the case for action, although the need do this was not as great as it once had been; and

d) asked about staffing levels, Ms Doran confirmed that there were currently two locum IROs and that work was in hand to make permanent appointments. Permanence was important in allowing the team to build relationships and share and develop best practice.

2. RESOLVED that the Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/2017 and its findings, and the information given in response to comments and questions, be noted, and the Panel's appreciation and thanks for their work be conveyed to the IRO team.

25. Annual Report 2016-2017, Adoption Service

(Item 11)

Mrs S Skinner, Head of the Adoption Service, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Skinner introduced the report and said how pleased she was that the service had been rated 'Good' with some 'Outstanding' elements and said she hope that it would all be outstanding in a year's time. The development of the service had been good and it had exceeded its performance targets. The campaign to recruit more adopters sought to achieve more placements for sibling groups or, if it proved not possible for them to be placed together, to seek to achieve ongoing contact. Post-adoption support services were good and involved multi-disciplinary working with partners. The availability of this support would help to attract more adopters.

2. Ms Khosla added that the Ofsted inspection process had been intense and very thorough. Inspectors had spoken to Members, adopters and staff, including admin staff, and had examined case files, and had actively sought to find faults.

3. Mrs Skinner and Ms Khosla responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

a) a view was expressed that Kent's Adoption Service was already outstanding, and that targets and expectations should be realistic. Ms Khosla noted that Kent was meeting the national targets and, in some cases, exceeding them;

b) placement of siblings was a particular challenge, as some adopters were simply not able to take on two or three new children at once, particularly if those children had complex needs or behavioural difficulties. The Family Finding team managers held weekly meetings at which they would review every child; and

currently with an adoption plan and seek to make links with suitable adopters as soon as possible. This matching process was supported by adoption activity days, of which Kent was a pioneer. At these, children seeking adoption and adopters who had been approved, or were approaching the end of the approval process, would be able to meet and interact in a number of activities. In July 2017, five children had been placed for adoption as a result on one activity day.

4. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions, and the range of services provided and their suitability to meet the needs of adoptees and their families, in order to provide an 'Outstanding' service, be noted.

26. The Kent Fostering Business Plan

(Item 12)

Ms C Smith, Head of the Fostering Service, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Smith introduced the report and highlighted that a key area of work was the campaign to recruit more foster carers. The target had been 200 from September 2017 and 100 had so far been recruited. Further events in the summer would seek to attract more, including an informal event similar to the adoption activity days, at which children in care and prospective foster carers could meet. Use of social media as a contact tool was also ongoing.

2. Ms Smith and Ms Khosla responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) asked how the Corporate Parenting Panel could help recruit more foster carers, Ms Smith explained that elected Members could spread the word in their electoral divisions and could also support and nominate foster carers for the annual awards ceremony on 4 October. Due to its proximity to London, Kent was forced to compete with London Boroughs to recruit foster carers and adopters, and also to compete with independent fostering agencies, of which there were 70 in Kent and which were able to pay higher rates to their carers. Members were asked to advise Ms Smith and the fostering team of local events at which they could set up a stall to promote the fostering role;
- b) currently in Kent, 12% of all people expressing an interest in fostering would achieve final approval to become foster carers, a rate which was comparable to that of other local authorities. Applicants were checked very thoroughly, and some would prove unsuitable for a variety of reasons, including a lack of suitable accommodation (ie a separate bedroom for a fostered child), poor health or problems with debt. Employers were usually supportive of an employee who wished to foster and were often able to offer them flexible working hours and arrangements which would support the fostering role. Social media checks were also made, and any material accessed or posted by the applicant which suggested racism, homophobia or any unwholesome practice would exclude them from being considered. This vetting process was set out in/supported by the Fostering Regulations of 2011 and was necessarily thorough to ensure that any child placed with a foster carer would be safe and appropriately nurtured; and
- c) asked how the County Council could ensure that independent fostering agencies were as strict in their vetting, Ms Khosla explained that the Kent Fostering team would share its risk assessment tools and set out clearly the standards which it expected to see applied for all placement, whether they were with Kent foster carers or independent fostering agencies. For

some groups of children, for example, girls over 12, scrutiny would be enhanced. It was important that young people should feel safe and confident of being able to disclose any concerns about, or problems they had with, their foster carers, and Ms Khosla assured the Panel that investigation of such issues would be as thorough and as stringent as possible. *The final toolkit for assessing foster carers was currently being finalised and, when ready, would be reported to a future meeting of the Panel.*

3. RESOLVED that the information set out in report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, and the Kent Fostering Business Plan 2017- 2018 be approved.