

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Darent Room - Sessions House on Thursday, 22 March 2018.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mrs T Dean, MBE (Vice-Chairman), Mr M A C Balfour (Substitute for Mrs S Gent), Mrs T Carpenter, Mr G Cooke, Ms S Dunstan, Mr D Farrell, Ms L Fisher, Mr R Graves, Ms S Hamilton, Mrs S Hammond, Mr A Heather, Mr G Lymer, Ms C Moody, Mr M J Northey, Ms N Sayer and Ms C Smith

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Dunkley CBE (Corporate Director for Children Young People and Education), Ms J Carpenter (School Bursar and Project Officer, Virtual School Kent) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

61. Membership

(Item 1)

It was noted that Bethan Haskins had re-joined the Panel in place of Alison Brett.

62. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies for absence had been received from Tony Doran, Lesley Game, Sue Gent, Stephen Gray and the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, Roger Gough.

Matthew Balfour was present as a substitute for Sue Gent.

63. Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 29 January 2018

(Item 3)

1. It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2018 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman.

2. The Chairman added that she had sought again to have the Panel's minutes included on the agenda for meetings of the full County Council, to raise the profile of the Panel's work.

64. Chairman's Announcements

(Item 4)

The Chairman announced that she had recently provided a written foreword for the draft **Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers Strategy 2018-22** and suggested that the final strategy be considered by the Panel at a future meeting. The **Adoption Conference** would take place on 23 March and several members of the Panel would be attending.

65. Verbal Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)
(Item 5)

1. Ms Dunstan and Mr Graves gave a verbal update on the work of the OCYPC, the Super Council and the Young Adults Council. *The text of the update will be attached to the final version of these minutes.*

2. The update included the list of forthcoming participation and engagement events, to which Panel members were invited, and it was agreed that *the text of the update be circulated after the meeting so all members had the details of the dates and venues.* A flyer and invitation to the Virtual School Kent Talent Showcase on 1 June had also been tabled, and *a copy of this would be sent to all Panel members.*

3. Ms Dunstan, Mr Graves, Ms Carpenter and Ms Smith responded to comments and questions from Panel members, including the following:-

a) plans were in hand to film the talent showcase on 1 June so that any Panel member unable to attend could view it later. However, it was hoped that as many as possible would attend to support the young people taking part;

b) the County Council's communications team had been involved in the production of a film addressing the stigma of being in care, and it was hoped that this could be shown to the Panel at a later date, and possibly to the full County Council. Participants in the film would be aged over 16 so would be able to give consent for the completed film to be shown in public and placed on YouTube. Mr Dunkley added that a filmed interview with Lemn Sissay, celebrating the good things about being in care, *could also be shared with Panel members;*

c) support groups for boys would be starting shortly, following the success of the pilot project of girls' groups;

d) a scheme in which the County Council could offer or arrange apprenticeships for Kent's care leavers was once again suggested, as this would be a very tangible way for the Council to support its young people into work; and

e) having struggled in the past, the Thanet area was now served by a good Children In Care Council (CICC) and this was welcomed.

4. It was RESOLVED that the update be noted, with thanks.

The information referred to italics above was circulated to all Panel members after the meeting.

66. Corporate Parenting Challenge Card Update - "KCC acting as a guarantor for Care Leavers"
(Item 6)

1. Mr Dunkley introduced the report and, with Ms Hammond and Ms Smith, responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) the establishment of a guarantor scheme was welcomed as it placed the County Council as a corporate parent in the same position as a natural parent in supporting a young person into independent accommodation;
- b) more detail of the pilot scheme was requested and it was agreed that an overview of it be included on the agenda for the Panel's 1 June meeting;
- c) the guarantor scheme would be offered to young people who were sufficiently mature and ready to take on the responsibility of independent accommodation but would benefit from having a financial safety net. The presence of the guarantor scheme would not mean that anyone considered unready to take this step would be helped into it if it were not the right thing for them. Focussing on the suitability of young people would help the County Council to manage and minimise the risk element of the scheme;
- d) a pilot guarantor scheme had been run successfully by Devon County Council for one year, starting with a small cohort of young people, renting mainly private sector and university accommodation, and then opening up to include all care leavers. The overview report of the Kent pilot scheme would include an example of application and other paperwork and assessment criteria used in Devon, and a report of the findings from their pilot scheme;
- e) the development of the guarantor scheme had highlighted the issue of local authorities using their own housing stock to accommodate care leavers. Some local authorities exempted care leavers from paying council tax. Both of these issues could be investigated with housing partners in district councils;
- f) it was pointed out that care leavers continuing in full time education were exempted from paying council tax, while those in apprenticeships were not. This disparity should be addressed;
- g) asked about the potential costs of the scheme, if young people were to default on payments and require the County Council to cover their costs, and how anyone defaulting would continue to be supported, Mr Dunkley explained that, if a young person were not taking up a private rental and needing a guarantor, the County Council would need to pay to accommodate them in some other type of housing, at greater cost. Ms Hammond added that the guarantor scheme could benefit both the local authority and the young person. She offered to supply some estimated figures on the potential for defaulters and the likely costs;
- h) foster carers on the Panel confirmed that they had received training in helping young people to prepare for adulthood and access independent accommodation. This included a booklet on transition, of which all foster carers should be aware, as a resource. The advent of the guarantor scheme offered a way of supporting young people which was simply not possible for a foster carer to take on individually; and

- i) Mr Dunkley was thanked for revisiting the challenge and persevering with the concept of a local authority guarantor.

2. It was RESOLVED that:-

- a) the challenge card progress to date, and the implications for the County Council acting as a guarantor, be noted; and
- b) the County Council acting as a guarantor for care leavers, with a proposal to undertake a pilot scheme to inform a wider policy change, be supported in principal.

67. Verbal Update by the Deputy Cabinet Member

(Item 7)

1. As Deputy Cabinet Member, the Chairman gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

Statutory guidance regarding children in care and care leavers – recent new statutory guidance from government regarding section 4 of the Children and Social Work Act 2014 included an expanded role for the Virtual School Kent head teacher in support of children in care and previously in care and an extension of the personal advisor role for young people in care up to the age of 25. County and district councils would need to work closely together to better support care leavers, particularly in housing.

National review of fostering services – the Government had commissioned Martin Narey to undertake a national review of fostering services. Several key reports on the service had been published recently, to which the Government was expected to respond shortly. Issues raised in these reports included a challenge to the role and effectiveness of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service and the potential to establish a national database to link children seeking to be fostered to a full range of fostering options.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) – There were currently 244 UASC and 872 UASC care leavers in Kent, a total of 1,116. Only 23 new UASC had arrived in Kent since January 2018.

2. Ms Hammond added that, as it had dropped dramatically in recent months, the number of UASC in Kent was approaching the number (231) which would be Kent's 'share' of the UASC in the whole of the UK, a figure which had been identified when the National Transfer Scheme was established.

3. Panel members made the following comments:-

- a) the challenge to the role of IROs caused concern. What was needed was more IROs, but it was feared that a review might lead to a reduction in numbers or a diminution of their role. Ms Carpenter advised that a meeting on 21 March with the Children's Minister had included appreciative contributions from young people about the value of their IROs as a long-term support. Ms Fisher added that the IRO service was also a vital support for young people in custody; and

- b) Ms Smith said that work was continuing on the form of an extended Virtual School Kent head teacher role in respect of young people up to the age of 25. The Chairman added that it would be most helpful for the Panel to have a set of bullet points setting out the different aspects of the new statutory guidance.

4. It was RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted, with thanks. *Reports on the new statutory guidance and the national review of the fostering service would be added to the work programme.*

68. Performance scorecard for Children in Care

(Item 8)

Mrs M Robinson, Management Information Service Manager, was in attendance for this and the following item.

1. Mrs Robinson introduced the report and highlighted the inclusion, with the usual scorecard, of details of target setting for the 2018/19 year. Targets were a combination of national and local key performance indicators (KPIs), and the County Council had more control over the latter. There were three areas of change:

- one KPI had been removed: the number of adoption cases in which it had taken longer than four months to reach a decision. Few took longer than this time, and those which did took only a little time longer than the target;
- two new KPIs had been introduced: i) the percentage of Education and Health Care Plans issued within 20 weeks for children in care, and ii) the overall number of interviews undertaken with young people returning from being missing, not just those completed within 72 hours of return;
- The target for one KPI had changed: the number of initial health assessments for children coming into care. The County Council target of 90% would be reduced to match the NHS target of 85%.
- Some minor changes to the red, amber and green (RAG) bandings had been applied for 2018/19.

2. Mrs Robinson and Ms Hammond then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) Panel members were reassured that, although an unusually large number of social workers had taken maternity leave at the same time, this did not mean that young people were without a social worker; they had simply had to move to a new social worker. The children in care service continued to show a good level of stability; and
- b) a restructure of the Disabled Children's Service had coincided with the above. Any such change always carried a risk that it would cause some disruption to service.

3. Mr Dunkley advised that the Corporate Parenting Panel needed to see more detail of performance than was reported to the Children's, Young People and

Education Cabinet Committee, and was being asked to give a view on the quantity and helpfulness of the information reported. He assured the Panel that all data relating to the existing KPIs would continue to be collected by officers as a matter of best practice, but reporting it all to the Panel may not be desirable or necessary.

4. It was RESOLVED that the performance data in the children in care scorecard and the target setting document for 2018-19 be noted and welcomed, and that the reporting of the above continue as at present.

69. Quarter 3 Health Initial Health Assessment Data Overview *(Item 9)*

1. Ms Sayer introduced the report, which had been prepared at the request of the Panel, and summarised the data presented. Ms Sayer and Mrs Robinson set out how the information collected by the NHS related to that collated on the County Council's Liberi database and how they would work together to make this reporting as clear and coherent as possible. As a result of joint working, a weekly report of any outstanding requests for health assessments was sent from the Council's management information unit to NHS colleagues. Ms Sayer responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) arranging health assessments for young people in secure accommodation was a challenge. Ms Sayer clarified that they would only qualify for a health assessment if they were already in care before entering custody. If they entered care as a result of entering custody, they would be subject to a different process. Ms Sayer and Ms Fisher confirmed that they would work together on the health issues arising for young people in secure accommodation;
 - b) the methods of recording health assessment by the NHS and on the Liberi database did not currently match exactly; Liberi recorded the date on which the request for the initial health assessment was made but did not record if the request was returned by health. Health data recorded each time a request was returned to Specialist Children's Services, if the request was not complete, leading to multiple requests for the same assessment;
 - c) Ms Smith added that a dedicated officer was now employed in Specialist Children's Services to undertake joint working with the NHS to address the issues highlighted above; and
 - d) foster carers were given advice about helping a young person to sign up with a new GP, dentist, sexual health clinic, etc, when they moved to a new placement. Some young people did not want to have a regular health assessment as it marked them out as being different from their peers. However, as such assessments were a statutory requirement, and must be undertaken by a medical practitioner or a specialist Looked After Children's nurse, options for making these less formal were limited.
2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted.

70. Proposal to develop a Regional Adoption Agency

(Item 10)

Ms S Skinner, Head of Kent Adoption Service, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Smith and Ms Skinner introduced the report and advised that funding had now been secured and the next step was to appoint a project manager. Ms Smith and Ms Skinner responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) the establishment of the regional adoption agency was welcomed as it formalised the joint working arrangement which had always existed between neighbouring authorities to accommodate difficult-to-place children. However, the previous arrangement was broader and could involve more partners, whereas the regional adoption agency involved only two other partners. Ms Skinner advised that the existence of the regional adoption agency would not preclude Kent from seeking placements with other authorities or from 'exporting' its own adopters, via a national register, if they were not first matched with children from Kent, Bexley or Medway; they would simply seek to place children with regional adoption agency partners before trying elsewhere. Mr Dunkley added that the establishment of the regional adoption agency was Kent's answer to the Government's push to address the need for adopters;
- b) asked about the possibility of elected Member involvement in the new arrangement, as with the former adoption panels, Ms Skinner explained that Member support and involvement was crucial and elected Members of the three authorities would be part of the work stream;
- c) the workload of the former adoption panels had been enormous, and some Members had withdrawn their involvement in the past due to the onerous workload of reading and preparing sufficiently to be able to consider the decisions which those panels were asked to make, and because some felt they were not qualified to make such decisions. There had also been advice given by Barnado's that this role was not appropriate for elected Members;
- d) concern was expressed about the extent to which Kent would benefit from the regional adoption agency, compared to the two partner authorities, which were much smaller; surely they would benefit more from the economies of scale of being able to attract adopters by partnering a large authority. Ms Skinner advised that Kent would be able to charge other local authorities to use its adopters, and an agreement of the financial arrangements between the three partners would form a major part of the discussions which were to start shortly;
- e) Members would need to be given more detailed information about the arrangements as the project developed, which Ms Skinner advised could take 12 to 18 months, and would need to be able to comment on the proposals in order to achieve meaningful input. They should also be able to monitor the performance of the new body, once established; and

- f) asked about Kent's relationship with its other neighbour authorities, and how the number of adopters and children seeking adoption compared across the region, Ms Skinner advised that East and West Sussex were in the process of forming a regional adoption agency with Surrey and Brighton and Hove, which would cover a population of the same size as that of Kent, Medway and Bexley. Authorities such as Oxfordshire and Berkshire had already gone live with their regional adoption agencies, and Kent could learn from the development work they had undertaken.
2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, and an update report on the proposed development of a Regional Adoption Agency with the London Borough of Bexley and Medway Council be submitted to the Panel in six months' time.