

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Darent Room - Sessions House on Friday, 1 June 2018.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mr I S Chittenden (Substitute for Mrs T Dean, MBE), Mr G Cooke, Ms N Cruickshank (Substitute for Mrs S Hammond), Mr T Doran, Ms S Dunstan, Mr D Farrell, Ms L Fisher, Mrs L Game, Mrs S Gent, Mr S Gray, Ms S Hamilton, Mr G Lymer, Mr M J Northey, Mrs S Prendergast and Ms C Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough, Ms C Goodwin and Ms E Ewence

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Dunkley CBE (Corporate Director for Children Young People and Education) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

##### 71. Introduction

The Chairman opened the meeting and explained that the first part of the meeting would be attended by a party of young people who would address the Panel about their experiences of being in care and leaving care.

##### 72. Motion to exclude the Press and Public for Exempt Business

It was RESOLVED that, under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

#### EXEMPT ITEM (open access to minutes)

##### 73. The views of Young People in Care

*(Item 1)*

1. A party of six young people aged between 9 and 19 attended the first part of the meeting to talk to the Panel about their experiences of being in care, particularly their experiences of the Lifelong Links project and their involvement with Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC), Super Council and Young Adults Council. *They are identified in these minutes by their initials: R (19), J (18), B (16), V (13), RB (10) and RM (9).* They were accompanied by Jo Carpenter, VSK School Bursar and Project Officer, Chelsea Goodwin and Sophia Dunstan, VSK Apprentices.

Everyone around the table introduced themselves.

2. Chelsea introduced the session by explaining that the VSK Apprentices had hosted the launch of the Lifelong Links project on Friday 11 May. This project aimed to help children and young people in care up to the age of 16 to make links and find

supporters and friends who were happy to help them, for example (but not necessarily) from members of their birth family with whom they might have lost touch or not previously known. The approach could come from either side and the link would continue for as long as the young person wanted it to. The Lifelong Links project had received much good feedback from young people and support workers.

3. B said he had been the first young person to take part in the Lifelong Links project. He said it was a great support for children in care who did not wish, or were not able, to return to their birth families but still wanted to keep contact with some family members. He said the response from the project had had been quick and helpful and that he had been able to direct at all times whom he wanted to contact and whom he did not. The project had been designed to allow optimum input from young people. He had been able to contact his Dad and find a new section of his family tree, thus trebling the size of the family he knew. His Dad's side of the family had brought him new aunts and uncles, with whom he had now been in touch for the past few months. These new relatives now had a role in his life, alongside his foster family. In the project, the links and commitments being made were set out in writing and agreed by the young person and the other party. B said that the tireless work of the Lifelong Links project team and the support of his foster family had made the project a good experience and a success for him.

4. Chelsea added that many other young people in care could benefit in the same way. Our Children and Young People's Council had committed to promoting the Lifelong Links project as an excellent way to support children and young people in care, and had presented it at the launch as a Challenge Card. Matt Dunkley had accepted this and would respond shortly. Mr Dunkley added that B had spoken very well at the Lifelong Links project launch event and said that plans to take the project forward would be reported to the Panel, after first being shared with young people for their comments. Chelsea said she thought the Lifelong Links project should be extended to cover young people up to 18, to allow more flexibility for those who may feel ready to seek such links when they were slightly older, and that project could be helpful if a child wanted to trace their family in the future. Mr Dunkley undertook to look into the costs of extending the project to the age of 18.

5. The Chairman asked RB and RM what they would be doing at the Talent showcase in the afternoon of the Panel meeting. RB said she enjoyed Morris dancing.

6. R and J were both in Year 13 at school. R said he had two exams still to take and then planned to work with the VSK Participation team as a new Apprentice, once his DBS checks had gone through. He had spent a while working with the team in the summer of 2017 as a work experience student. J said she had seven exams still to take and then hoped to go to university in Newcastle in the autumn. The Chairman said what good news this was and that more young people in care were now going on to university, whereas, a few years ago, this would have been more unusual. Asked about how she would finance her studies, J said she was as yet unsure of the details but understood Newcastle to have a bursary scheme so felt that she would be OK. Ms Smith explained that the County Council would shortly be embarking on a pilot of a guarantor scheme under which it would stand as guarantor for rental payments of privately-rented or university accommodation for care leavers. Mr Dunkley added that this scheme had grown out of a Challenge Card raised by the

Young Adult Council as a result of feedback from care leavers who had had trouble renting accommodation.

7. Asked about how young people could be helped to find a way of communicating, Chelsea said that the MOMO (Mind Of My Own) app could be used by someone who was not confident of speaking face to face about their feelings and problems. MOMO offered a chance to post views and feelings as and when a young person felt able to and wanted to express them.

8. In response to a question about the number of young people engaging with the VSK participation team, Jo explain that the team was currently working with more than 400 children in care and care leavers, some of whom might find it difficult to engage. The team would always work with as many young people as possible and would always seek to raise the profile of its work.

9. RM said she liked going to the Super Council because she could make new friends there, have fun and build confidence. The group had cakes at their meetings and sometimes baked cakes, which was fun. RB added that she also liked going there to meet new friends and because she did not feel like 'the odd one out' there as everyone else was also in care. There was lots to enjoy there, and the people were easy to talk too. RM added that she felt able to trust them. Both agreed that the Super Council was good for children in care who wanted somewhere they could express their feelings and take part in fun activities in the school holidays like other children. In the half-term holiday they had done some baking and been climbing at the Arethusa centre. They learned things from the activities they had done. The activities would vary depending on the season; they had made 'mud pie' chocolate puddings for Halloween and decorations for Christmas. The Chairman agreed that this sounded like a very good club to belong to. Sophia advised the Panel that the Super Council, which was for children aged 7 to 11, encouraged children to chat about their views and opinions informally while they were enjoying an activity. Their views would then be reported back to the Panel as part of the verbal update at each meeting.

10. V talked about her involvement with Our Children and Young People's Council, which was for children aged 11 to 16. She said she had started there at 12, after attending the Super Council with her foster sister, RM. She had been introduced to the MOMO app there, which was an excellent tool for children in care to use to express their views and feelings in a safe and comfortable way. Our Children and Young People's Council did the same sort of activities as the Super Council but adjusted for a more mature audience. The meetings and activities were attended by fewer people but were still fun. The Chairman said how helpful it was to have young people being part of these groups and feeding back their views and opinions to the Panel.

11. R and J talked about their experience of attending the Young Adult Council. This aimed to help young people to develop the range of skills they would need when leaving care, including job interview skills, food budgeting and managing a household. This Council was also involved in fundraising and submitting Challenge Cards to the Corporate Parenting Panel. Also, much pizza was consumed at meetings, which was very popular!

12. RB told the Panel that when she was older she wanted to work with the VSK so she could help other children in care, as she knew what it was like. RM said she wanted to be a foster carer and work with younger children in care so she could help them know that people cared about them. B said he wanted to go to university and then possibly train as a paramedic. He said that he was not clear about the guidance available on the options open to care leavers. Ms Smith explained that the County Council's 18+ service worked with young people up to the age of 25 and covered advice on accommodation, including university accommodation, pathway planning and entitlements to benefits and support. It was suggested that the County Council could prepare an App which would contain all this information, which young people could log into and return to as and when they needed to. B was asked if he could make use of his IT skills to assist with this. Jo added that the 'Kent Cares Town' website would include interactive applications. Chelsea added that young people had had input into the design of that website to make sure it was user-friendly.

13. V said she was not sure what she wanted to do in the future. Her GCSE courses included Psychology and Sociology and she was not yet sure in which direction this might lead her. It would be good to work with the VSK.

14. The news of care leavers continuing their education at university and entering apprenticeships was warmly welcomed. The visitors were asked how the successes of young adults previously in care were tracked and celebrated so they could serve as examples of positive outcomes for children in care and the options available to care leavers. Mr Doran added that, although the VSK remit ended when a young person reached 18, the destinations of care leavers would be recorded and tracked.

15. The young people were thanked for attending and telling the Panel about their views and experiences. Panel members who attended the Lifelong Links launch event said it had been excellent and encouraged other Panel members to watch the video made by Lemn Sissay, which was shown there. This was available on YouTube and it was suggested that a link to it be included in the Panel minutes.

16. The Chairman summed up by saying how proud she was of the young people who attended the Panel's meetings to talk about their hopes, wishes and views. The Panel always enjoyed meeting young people and hearing their views at first hand and she thanked them for taking time in their half-term holiday to come to County Hall and meet the Panel.

### **UNRESTRICTED ITEMS (meeting open to the press and public)**

#### **74. Chairman's Announcements**

*(Item 5)*

The Chairman announced that Elena Ewence was attending the open part of the meeting as she was spending the week shadowing Shellina Prendergast. Elena was a sixth form pupil and the Co-Chairman of the Kent Youth County Council.

The Chairman also reminded the Panel that the VSK Talent Showcase would take place following the Panel meeting, at Sessions House. The Panel and all Members of the County Council had been invited to attend.

The Chairman referred to recent media coverage of an announcement made by the Children's Minister about young people's placements.

## **75. Membership**

*(Item 2)*

The Panel noted that:

- Hazel Smith and Bethan Haskins had left the Panel as they had both left their respective CCGs.
- Sarah Vaux, Chief Nurse for Medway CCG, had joined the Panel in place of Bethan Haskins.
- Since publishing the agenda, Carolyn Moody had resigned from the Panel after serving on it for several years as foster carer. The Chairman referred to the outstanding contribution Carolyn had made to the work of the Panel and said she would write to Carolyn with the Panel's thanks and best wishes for the future.

## **76. Apologies and substitutes**

*(Item 3)*

Apologies for absence had been received from Teresa Carpenter, Trudy Dean, Reece Graves, Stuart Griffiths, Sarah Hammond, Andy Heather, Chloe-Elizabeth Mutton, Nancy Sayer and Sarah Vaux.

Reece Graves and Chloe-Elizabeth Mutton were busy with the final arrangements for the VSK talent showcase.

Ian Chittenden was present as a substitute for Trudy Dean, and Nikki Cruickshank for Sarah Hammond.

## **77. Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 22 March 2018**

*(Item 4)*

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the Panel meeting held on 22 March 2018 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman.

## **78. Verbal Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)**

*(Item 6)*

*Chelsea Goodwin, VSK Apprentice, stayed on from agenda item 1 and took part in the remainder of the meeting.*

1. Ms Dunstan and Ms Goodwin gave a verbal update on the work of Our Children and Young People's Council, the Super Council and Young Adult Council and forthcoming participation events. *The text of the update would be attached to these minutes.* They and Mr Doran then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) the methods used to promote the use of the MOMO app would follow what had been done previously to promote the use of the e.PEP system;
- b) young people in care who were in the youth custody system should be able to use MOMO as they could be given access to suitable devices on which to contact a support network. MOMO Express allowed a young person to log in on a youth worker's account to access the system;
- c) MOMO was welcomed as an excellent tool which allowed young people in care to express views and feelings whenever and wherever they felt able to. The model could be used by schools to support their pastoral care service and help young people to start to address issues around mental health; and
- d) EDMODO was a safe way to contact other young people in care and was similar to Facebook but, unlike Facebook, could not be accessed by anyone outside a limited network of other young people in care.

2. The Chairman thanked Ms Dunstan, Ms Goodwin and the other VSK apprentices for the invaluable contribution they made to the Panel with their frank, first-hand accounts of the issues which concerned young people in care and leaving care.

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

#### **79. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member** (Item 7)

1. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, Roger Gough, gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

**Lifelong Links Conference** – Mr Gough had opened this recent conference and Mr Dunkley had been the closing speaker. Chelsea, Sophia and Reece had presented well and spoken very effectively at the conference about the benefits of the Lifelong Links project. The project was being trialled by seven local authorities around the UK.

**Children's Commissioner** – there had been media coverage on the morning of the Panel meeting about the Children's Commissioner having expressed concern about placement stability. Kent's rate of placement breakdown was roughly equal to the national average. In this and other subjects, in which Kent was measured against other authorities, Kent was always likely to record a higher number of cases due to its large geographical size and care population. The Commissioner had also expressed concern about other aspects of care stability.

**Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) update** – the number of UASC arriving in Kent was very low, with only 44 having arrived so far this year. Only very small numbers were arriving at any one time. The National Transfer Scheme was unfortunately not working as well as had been hoped. Kent currently hosted 217 under-18s and 881 care leavers, and the latter group was now causing the most concern in terms of resources. Mr Gough had recently attended meetings with the Immigration Minister, Caroline Noakes at which they had discussed the costs of providing care leavers' services for UASC when they reached 18. He had also visited the Millbank Centre with Mr Dunkley on 31 May.

- a) in response to a question about the number of children in care permanently excluded in Kent, Ms Smith explained that this rate had improved in the last twelve months, helped by the Sense of Belonging project;
  - b) Mr Dunkley *suggested that a report on life stability, covering three aspects – stability of foster placement, of school placement and of social worker – be made to a future meeting of the Panel.* He added, however, that some planned moves were very carefully made and that some moves were desirable and beneficial, for example, from a temporary to a permanent placement; and
  - c) in response to a question about UASC involvement in Our Children and Young People's Council and other groups, Ms Dunstan explained that a few did come to the Super Council and some to the Young Adult Council. It was good to have them included to help them to integrate and those who attended helped each other with language skills.
2. It was RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted, with thanks, and that a report on life stability, covering three aspects – stability of foster placement, of school placement and of social worker – be made to a future meeting of the Panel.

## **80. Performance scorecard for Children in Care**

*(Item 8)*

*Mrs M Robinson, Management Information Service Manager, was in attendance for this item.*

- 1. Mrs Robinson introduced the report and explained that the Children's Commissioner had asked local authorities for a voluntary submission of data and in return had undertaken to provide other national comparative data.
- 2. The one change in the scorecard since last reporting it to the Panel was the number of returner interviews completed within 72 hours of a young person returning from being missing. The overall completion rate for interviews was 88%, so was good; it was just the 72-hour deadline which was sometimes hard to meet as it was not always possible to meet up with a young person, or sometimes they simply did not wish to participate.
- 3. Mrs Robinson, Mr Dunkley and Mr Doran responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-
  - a) the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee received more detailed reports setting out the reasons for any performance which had not met the target and what would be done to address this shortfall. Mr Dunkley offered to share this greater detail with the Panel;
  - b) the opportunity to look at continuity of social worker placement in the 'life stability' item (suggested following the Cabinet Member's verbal update) was welcomed;

- c) the opportunity to be able to make a more detailed comparison between Kent's performance and that of other local authorities, by using the data to be supplied by the Children' Commissioner, was also welcomed; and
  - d) in response to a question about the number of school exclusions of children in care, Mr Doran explained that exclusions were usually for a fixed-term only. There were currently no children permanent excluded. The number of temporary exclusions was monitored weekly and monthly, and had fallen slightly since the same time last year. If a pupil had multiple temporary exclusions, the reasons for this would be investigated and an action plan put together to address the issue.
4. It was RESOLVED that the performance data in the scorecard, and the information given in response to comments and questions, be noted.

### **81. Review and update of the Sufficiency, Placements and Commissioning Strategy - 2015-2018**

*(Item 9)*

*Ms M L Hall, Commissioning Manager, Children Living Away From Home, was in attendance for this item.*

1. Ms Hall introduced the report and highlighted the changes made to the strategy since last reporting it to the Panel.
2. It was RESOLVED that the progress against the strategy, and the plan to develop a new strategy for 2019 onwards, be noted

### **82. Revision of rates payable and charges levied for Children's Services in 2018-19**

*(Item 10)*

1. Mr Dunkley introduced the report, which had previously been considered by the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee before the Cabinet Member had taken a key decision to approve the new rates and charges in March 2018. The Chairman commented that the new rates would hopefully help to attract more foster carers.
2. It was RESOLVED that the decision taken by the Cabinet Member on 15 March 2018 to revise the rates and charges with effect from 1 April 2018, as set out in the report to the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on 8 March 2018, be noted.

### **83. Virtual School Kent validated summer 2017 results report**

*(Item 11)*

1. Mr Doran introduced the report and explained the difficulties of obtaining validated results for children in care, and the delay of approximately eight months between the exams having been taken and the results being validated. The National Centre for Educational Research (NCER) was hoping to speed up the system so validated results could be available in the autumn of the year in which the exams had been taken.



2. Much of Kent's performance was above the national average and the attainment gap between children in care and their peers had narrowed. This performance was excellent, as approximately 36% of the cohort was made up of UASC, some of whom had been in the UK only one year at the time they had taken the exams. One UASC who had been in the country two years had scored five A\*s, including English and Maths, and some pupils attending special schools had scored four GCSEs. The number of NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) had fallen from 55%, when the VSK had started, to less than 14% now, although this cohort experienced peaks and troughs through the year, for example, at the end of the school year. Mr Doran responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) the excellent performance of children in care was welcomed, and the work done by the VSK to support them commended;
- b) the Solihull approach and paired reading scheme had similar aims of supporting children's reading age and academic attainment via joint working between parents, schools and other professionals. This approach was welcomed and supported, as young people should be helped by whichever means possible to come to view reading as something to be enjoyed. This enjoyment could come from reading any material which interested them, and once they enjoyed reading, they would have a skill for life; and
- c) asked about formal events to celebrate the achievements of children and young people in care, Mr Doran explained that these would continue to be held, as in previous years, and the dates of these would be supplied to the Panel, once known. He emphasised, however, that achievements continued to be celebrated throughout the year.

3. It was RESOLVED that the impact of the Virtual School Kent, in relation to its performance, be welcomed.

**84. Corporate Parenting pilot scheme: Kent County Council acting as a guarantor for Care Leavers**  
(Item 12)

1. Mr Dunkley and Ms Smith introduced the report and explained that a pilot scheme was to start shortly, for a period of twelve months, with a cohort of twelve young people. This pilot scheme would allow an opportunity to test the risk element to the County Council and identify the likely costs associated with the scheme, which were expected to be lower than the costs of accommodating young people in other types of accommodation.

2. Ms Dunstan added that the guarantor scheme offered excellent opportunities for young people who wished to rent privately to do so. Landlords generally did not view young people in care as being good potential tenants, but to discriminate against them because of their care status was simply not right.

3. It was RESOLVED that the Challenge Card progress to date be noted and the details of the pilot of a guarantor scheme to inform a wider policy change be agreed.