

## 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 Thursday, 1 November 2018.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mr T Byrne, Mr G Cooke, Mr T Doran, Ms S Dunstan, Mr D Farrell, Mrs L Game, Mrs S Gent, Ms S Hamilton, Mrs S Hammond, Ida Linfield, Mr G Lymer, Mrs S Prendergast, 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 G Little (Democratic Services Officer)

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

##### **107. Membership**

*(Item 1)*

1. The Panel was asked to note that Virtual School Kent apprentices, Tom Byrne and Chelsea Goodwin had joined the Panel and that Chloe-Elizabeth Mutton had completed her apprenticeship and had therefore left the Panel.
2. It was RESOLVED that the membership change be noted.

##### **108. Apologies and substitutes**

*(Item 2)*

1. Apologies were received from Mr Roger Gough, Mr Michael Northey, Julianne Bayford, Andrew Heather and Sarah Vaux.

##### **109. Election of Vice-Chairman**

*(Item 3)*

1. Mrs Ann Allen (Chairman) proposed, seconded by Mrs Lesley Game that Ida Linfield be elected as Vice-Chairman of this Panel.
2. It was RESOLVED that Ida Linfield was elected Vice-Chairman to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

##### **110. Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 19 September 2018**

*(Item 4)*

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2018 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

### **111. Meeting Dates 2019/20**

*(Item 5)*

It was RESOLVED that the Panel noted that the following dates had been reserved for its meetings in 2019/20:

Wednesday 29 May 2019  
Thursday 25 July 2019  
Tuesday 17 September 2019  
Friday 22 November 2019  
Tuesday 18 February 2020  
Thursday 2 April 2020  
Friday 29 May 2020

All meetings would take place at County Hall, Maidstone, and would commence at 10.00 am

### **112. Chairman's Announcements**

*(Item 6)*

The Chairman informed the Panel that there were no announcements.

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

*(Item 7)*

1. Sophia Dunstan (Participation Support Assistant, Virtual School Kent (VSK)), Tom Byrne (Participation Support Assistant, Virtual School Kent) and Jo Carpenter (School Bursar and Project Officer, Virtual School Kent), gave a verbal update on the work of the OCYPC, the Super Council and the Young Adult Council and forthcoming participation events. *The text of these updates will be appended to these minutes.* With Tony Doran, (Head Teacher of the VSK), they then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:
  - (a) the October activity days held within the half term period saw a more positive turnout within East Kent compared to the activity days held in the West and North of Kent. This may have been due to the accessibility of the Turner Gallery which may have encouraged greater attendance, however VSK were pleased with the level of interest and participation from children in care across the county; and
  - (b) the Young Adult Council's (YAC) Life Hacks booklet was produced to help support and prepare young people leaving care and offered a number of handy hints and recipes. Following comments from the Panel asking whether the booklet would be accessible at school libraries or universities, Ms Carpenter said that VSK would be happy to share the booklet and would welcome the prospect of publishing the booklet on the Kent County Council

website. Mr Doran confirmed that one copy of the booklet could be distributed to each Kent school library.

2. Mr Matt Dunkley (Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education) commended the apprentices for their contribution at the Directorate Management Team training event which was well received by all staff.
3. It was RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted, with thanks.

#### **114. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member** (Item 8)

1. The Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, Mrs Shellina Prendergast, gave a verbal update on the following issues: -

**Children in Care** – to date there had been 1265 citizen Looked After Children which was a reduction from the 1500 five years ago. This number continued to decline over the last year and was relatively low in proportion to Kent's population. Indicators such as Placement Stability and stability of social workers also continued to improve.

**Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) update** - so far in 2018 there had been 123 new arrivals, with 253 open cases of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and 241 UASC Looked After Children. Whilst the level of those entering the system was evidentially lower than the levels recorded in 2017, Kent's UASC numbers had risen in recent months. Mrs Prendergast reported that Kent had 1629 Care Leavers, 874 of whom were from a UASC background

**Virtual School Kent (VSK) Awards Ceremony** - Mrs Prendergast and Mr Gough attended the recent VSK awards ceremony for older Children in Care and Care Leavers; Mr Dunkley and Mr Gough presented the awards. Mrs Prendergast commended the tremendous achievements in academic work, sport, community work and creativity.

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

#### **115. Challenge Card Update** (Item 9)

1. The Chairman introduced the report and invited comments and questions from the Panel.
2. The Panel's response to comments and questions was as follows:
  - (a) Jo Carpenter (School Bursar and Project Officer, Virtual School Kent) said that the challenge around the Corporate Parenting Panel dates was in the process of being resolved. Virtual School Kent were reviewing different ways in which

Panel Members could visit and meet children in a different environment as an alternative to children attending the Corporate Parenting Panel.

(b) Sarah Hammond (Director of Integrated Children's Services East (Social Work Lead)) advised the Panel that work was in hand to expand the membership of the Recruit Crew, which attended and participated at interview panels for social workers, foster carers and adopters. To help young people to play a larger part in these panels, meetings would be scheduled to avoid school and college times. Caroline Smith (Interim Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting), as a supplement to this, said that a Working Group had been established and work was being undertaken in coalition with the Human Resources (HR) department to review the current recruitment arrangements and the practicalities of holding interview panels outside of school hours. It was key to ensure that the correct processes were in place to support young people's involvement with the recruitment of staff.

3. It was RESOLVED that the challenge card progress to date and actions taken to meet the challenge be noted.

#### **116. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care** (Item 10)

1. Chris Nunn (Senior Management Information Officer, Children, Young People and Education) introduced the report that set out the Performance Scorecard for Children in Care and highlighted the key performance data and targets that needed to be monitored to promote the best outcomes for children and young people looked after by Kent County Council.

(a) In response to concerns raised regarding the direction of travel, Mr Nunn confirmed that, regardless of how big or small an increase or reduction in performance may be, the direction of travel would reflect that trend. Therefore, whilst it was important to monitor the direction of travel, attention also needed to be paid towards the change in figures. Mr Nunn agreed to incorporate additional guidance notes in the report to clarify how performance was measured. In addition, Matt Dunkley (Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education) agreed to revise the Children in Care Performance Report to include data on the direction of travel over a set period of time and identify ways to illustrate this.

(b) With regard to caseload levels, Sarah Hammond (Director of Integrated Children's Services East (Social Work Lead)) said that there had been a 0.2% increase due to the combination of newly qualified Social Workers and reduced caseloads in the first six months of their arrival. Ms Hammond confirmed that the newly qualified staff were not additional but they had replaced more experienced staff who had left the service. Other unprecedented circumstances such as children in care in court also impacted

on performance measures as the number of children per family varied from case to case which may have prolonged the adoption process. Ms Hammond was pleased to announce that the percentage of children leaving care who were adopted was 16.6%, which was above the target level of 15%.

(c) Mr Nunn confirmed that the demographic breakdown for Kent's Looked After Children included the cohort of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers, a vast majority of whom were male. If that cohort were removed from the statistics, the data would reveal a very different picture. Mr Nunn agreed to circulate a revised report, excluding Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers, to the Panel Members as requested.

(d) Caroline Smith (Interim Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting) said that a narrative was produced on a monthly basis which captured the movement of Children in Care. With regard to adoption figures, one child could cause a green rating to move into a red. This may be due to the complex nature of a particular case whereby a child with a disability may require greater care, therefore impacting on the length of time it would take to find the correct family for that child.

(e) Ms Smith confirmed that Kent was on track for the number of families who could be adopters. As of 2018 over 100 children had been placed with 89 adoptive families. The National Adoption Week was held from 15<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> October to raise awareness and promote the benefits of becoming an adoptive family. Ms Smith was pleased to announce that it was a very positive campaign and Kent received a very good response. Kent was not struggling to find adoptive families and she assured the Panel that there was a very small cohort of children in care with disabilities which caused prolonged processes as it was essential that the right families were being matched to those children. Mr Nunn agreed to circulate to the Panel Members the adoption figures as requested.

2. It was RESOLVED that the performance data in the Children in Care scorecard be noted.

### **117. The Corporate Parenting Annual Report September 2018**

*(Item 11)*

1. The Chairman introduced the report that set out the work of the services for children and young people in the care of Kent County Council and informed the Panel that the report would be presented at the Full Council in December.
2. Caroline Smith (Interim Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting) said that it was the first annual report that had been produced for the Corporate Parenting Panel that presented the work and achievements of Kent County Council's key corporate parenting services. The report set out the commitments of Kent and

was a useful tool for potential adoptive parents as it helped to promote a clear positive message and provided them with the essential information regarding the recruitment, assessment and approval process.

3. The Panel commended the report and the officers for their work.
4. It was RESOLVED that the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2018 be noted.

**118. Update on Mind Of My Own App for Children in Care and Care Leavers**  
*(Item 12)*

1. Caroline Smith (Interim Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting) provided the Panel with an update on the delivery and implementation of the Mind Of My Own (MOMO) app and web-based application tool which had been designed to help young people to share their thoughts and feelings with professionals they worked with, whether this be Social Workers, Teachers or Independent Reviewing Officers. Training for professionals, facilitated by MOMO, took place across several dates in September and October and the results of the training saw an increase of usage in Kent; Ms Smith referred the Panel to the case examples within the report.
2. Jo Carpenter (School Bursar and Project Officer, Virtual School Kent) assured the Panel that MOMO was not viewed as an alternative to any statutory requirements but rather another method of engaging children and young people and enhancing the professionals who worked with them. Since May 2018, usage had doubled within Kent, with 244 workers using MOMO and 280 young people having accounts, however, the next step was to work in coalition with other services to promote MOMO and further increase its usage.
  - (a)The Panel asked whether Foster Carers encouraged children to use MOMO. Ms Carpenter said that Foster Carers were apprehensive as they did not understand how the tool would be used, although the feedback since the implementation and training of MOMO had been positive. The MOMO app started to be recognised as a useful tool for young people as it gave them instant access to their professionals and also allowed them to choose who they wanted to send their message to.
  - (b)In response to why the demographics reveal greater usage from females compared to males, Tom Byrne (Participation Support Assistant, Virtual School Kent) said that he did not feel that this was due to the accessibility of the app, it was a larger social issue that was inherent within the male demographic as they did not share their concerns as openly as the female society would. In addition, Matt Dunkley (Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education) said that this was a management concern and the Directorate needed to look at alternative routes for the male users to ensure all voices were being heard.

(c) Ms Carpenter said that feedback from the professionals identified MOMO's limitations, one of which was that the app did not have the facility of translation. This issue was fed back to MOMO and work was being done to rectify the problem.

(d) The other limitation noted from the feedback was that MOMO did not have the facility for the worker to respond directly to the young person; the Professional would need to respond via an alternative method such as text message or email. Work was being done to look at whether a Kent County Council version of MOMO could be produced, however, this would need to be supported by external software which would require substantial IT infrastructure investment.

3. It was RESOLVED that the progress of the roll-out of Mind Of My Own (MOMO) be noted.

### **119. Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2017/2018**

*(Item 13)*

1. Tina Onuchuckwu (Independent Reviewing Officer, South East Kent) introduced the report that set out the performance of the Council's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service for Children in Care from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

2. Pritpal Sodhi (Independent Reviewing Officer, North West Kent) said that IRO caseloads had reduced over the year, which in turn provided more opportunities for IRO case oversight and scrutiny, including the completion of midway review meetings. The IRO Service also worked closely with Virtual School Kent (VSK) to support participation and activities for looked after children and young people including their attendance at looked after children council meetings. Work had also been undertaken in conjunction with VSK Apprentices on the following:

- the re-design of the Kent Care Town website,
- ensuring young people were involved in the recruitment of IROs;
- the IRO Quality Assurance form was being reviewed to focus on key areas of the child's placement and plan for permanence; and
- invitation letters to review meeting were being revised to ensure these were child centred and encouraged young people participation in the meetings

3. Sophia Dunstan (Participation Support Assistant, Virtual School Kent) provided feedback to the Panel on her experience with the IRO when in care and said that the Children in Care Council Meetings were focused on encouraging participation in reviews. The young people who provided feedback to her said that the IRO incorporated games into the meeting to make the young person feel more comfortable. Miss Dunstan would be in attendance at County Council in December to present the positive feedback.

(a) In response to concerns raised regarding District teams failing to inform the IRO Service of children in need of an IRO within the specified timescale, Mr Sodhi said that a majority of District teams were not missing the three day

target; instances where targets had been marginally missed were often unprecedented, such as new staff who were not familiar with processes. The IRO Service had its own tracking system to monitor the number of children coming into the service and had the ability to monitor what stage that child was at in terms of the assessments they had undergone. Sarah Hammond (Director of Integrated Children's Services East (Social Work Lead)) explained that the data would have captured the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker cohort and agreed to generate separate data that looked at the number of children outside of that cohort who had been assigned an RIO.

(b) Miss Dunstan said that the Children and Young People's Council would not have sight of anonymised complaints as this would defy the purpose of the council which was to promote a positive impact for others. As a supplement to this, Jo Carpenter (School Bursar and Project Officer, Virtual School Kent) assured the Panel that if a young person had a personal issue, this would be referred to that child's allocated Social Worker.

(c) In response to concerns regarding the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children in London reaching the age of eighteen, Sarah Hammond (Director of Integrated Children's Services East (Social Work Lead)) said that due to limited accommodation and resources in Kent during 2015-16, a majority of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children had to be placed in London. Work had been undertaken since then to ensure that asylum-seeking children remained within Kent. Ms Hammond agreed to circulate the figures showing the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children in local accommodation.

4. It was RESOLVED that the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report be noted.

## **120. Children in Care with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) exclusions** *(Item 14)*

1. Tony Doran, (Head Teacher of the Virtual School Kent (VSK)) introduced the report that provided an overview of the 2017-18 exclusions for Children in Care and highlighted some of the key findings around those children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The data indicated that 11% (more than one in ten) students with an EHCP had experienced a Fixed Term Exclusion. Mr Doran said that escalation meetings had taken place between the Area SEN Manager, VSK Deputy Head, SENCO and the Area Children and Young People's Service Manager to resolve complex cases and promote collaborative working. Further development work included training for Social Workers and Foster Carers on the SEN Code of practice and the appointment of a dedicated Senior Educational Support Officer to support Young People placed outside Kent.

(a) In response to questions raised regarding the number of children allocated an EHCP, Mr Doran said that the data within the report was from young

people who had all received an EHCPs. A majority of young people do not gain an EHCP for their social or emotional mental health needs due to the attachment disorder associated with Children in Care, however, work was being done with SEN to develop appropriate specialist support for those young people who did not qualify for an EHCP.

2. It was RESOLVED that the report be noted, and that Virtual School Kent be requested to provide an update to the panel in six months.