

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Darent Room - Sessions House on Tuesday, 29 January 2019.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Ms J Bayford, Mr R H Bird (Substitute for Ida Linfield), Mr G Cooke, Mr T Doran, Ms S Dunstan, Ms L Fisher, Mr R Graves, Mrs S Hammond, Mr G Lymer, Mr M J Northey, Mrs S Prendergast, Ms C Smith and Ms S Vaux

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough

IN ATTENDANCE: Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

121. Membership

(Item 1)

The Panel noted that Karen Constantine had joined the Panel in place of Dara Farrell.

122. Apologies and substitutes

(Item 2)

1. Apologies for absence had been received from Justin Dumigan, Lesley Game, Sue Gent, Stephen Gray, Sarah Hamilton, Andy Heather, Ida Linfield and Nancy Sayer.
2. Rob Bird was present as a substitute for Ida Linfield.
3. The Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, Matt Dunkley, was also unable to attend as he was recovering from a recent hip operation. Panel Members sent Mr Dunkley their best wishes for a speedy recovery.

123. Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 1 November 2018

(Item 3)

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2018 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

124. Chairman's Announcements

(Item 4)

The Chairman congratulated and thanked Rob Barton and Chelsea Goodwin, Apprentice Participation Workers, Virtual School Kent, who had made such an excellent presentation to the full County Council on 13 December, when introducing

the Panel's annual report. Panel Members thanked the young people who had attended and said that, as corporate parents, they were very proud of them.

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

(Item 5)

1. Sophia Dunstan, Participation Support Assistant, and Reece Graves, Apprentice Participation Worker, Virtual School Kent (VSK), 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, Virtual School Kent, they responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) participation events were funded from a combination of a VSK budget and contributions by individual County Council Members' grants; and
- b) the aim was for the small groups for boys and girls to each include around ten young people, to keep the size manageable and enjoyable. The girls' group currently had nine participants. To engage more hard-to-reach young people in these groups would be good.

2. The update included reference to the wish to stage a 'Take Over' Corporate Parenting Panel day, similar to the 'Whitehall Take Over' in November 2018. This idea was greeted with interest and enthusiasm by Panel Members.

3. It was RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted, with thanks, and the suggestion of a 'Take Over' Corporate Parenting Panel day be welcomed.

126. Challenge Card Update

(Item 6)

1. Caroline Smith, Interim Assistant Director of Corporate Parenting, introduced the report and summarised progress on challenge cards for the rent guarantor scheme and the timing of interview panels involving young people on the Recruit Crew.

2. The pilot of the rent guarantor scheme was currently half-way through, with 15 young people taking part; 9 female and 6 male. The aim was to involve 25 young people and then to assess the effectiveness of the pilot before deciding whether or not to pursue a key decision by the Cabinet Member to set up the scheme. Ms Dunstan spoke of her good experience of the rent guarantor scheme and how responsive and supportive she had found it.

3. Dates and times of interview panels involving young people were being addressed by liaising with the County Council's human resources (HR) team. The future dates of Corporate Parenting Panel meetings had also been placed in school holidays wherever possible to allow more young people to attend and speak to the Panel without missing school or college.

4. Ms Smith and Sarah Hammond, Director of Integrated Children's Services (Social Work Lead), responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) asked about foster carers' awareness of the rent guarantor scheme, Ms Smith advised that the personal advisors who would work with 17-year-olds to prepare them for leaving care would also work with foster carers to prepare them for the transition period. As the scheme was currently only a pilot, it had not yet been included in strategy documents and would have wider publicity when it was launched as a permanent scheme. Ms Hammond explained that the scheme related to young people taking on fully-independent accommodation and paying rent at market rates. She reassured the Panel that the scheme would not be used as a way of encouraging young people into independent accommodation if they were not ready and fully prepared to do so;
 - b) it was acknowledged that landlords taking on a young tenant needed to be reassured that the rent for the property would be paid reliably, and that young people and their foster carers would also need to be reassured and confident that they would be safe in their new home; and
 - c) further reference was made to the 'Take Over' Corporate Parenting Panel day mentioned in the OCYPC update, and a request made that the birth children of foster carers be included in the event, to acknowledge the value of their views of the care system and their role in supporting and sharing their lives with their foster siblings.
5. It was RESOLVED that the challenge card progress to date, and the actions being taken to meet the challenges, be noted.

127. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member (Item 7)

1. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, Roger Gough, referred to the presentation made by Rob Barton and Chelsea Goodwin at the County Council in December and said that he had received very positive feedback from other Members about their contribution and to Chelsea's work on the Whitehall Take Over. He then gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

Change for Kent Children – this initiative was currently subject to consultation and would lead to the set-up of a new Directorate to bring together Early Help and Social Care teams. Change for Kent Children focussed on adolescents and sought to achieve an integrated Adolescent Service, bringing together Youth Justice, Youth Hubs, etc.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) – the arrival of increased numbers of asylum seekers at Dover, covered by the media at the end of 2018, had mostly involved adults and few children. The number of UASC arriving in November and December 2018 had been slightly higher than the numbers for the same period in 2017, but the total arrivals for the whole of 2018 was 171, lower overall than arrivals for the whole of 2017. Kent's current UASC total was 247, with 905 care leavers.

Media interest in young people missing from care – recent media coverage had covered two main strands; UASC missing from placements and children in care's connections to family as a reason for going missing. Support available to young people in care would always include the Lifelong Links project.

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

128. 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 summarised the changes since last reporting to the Panel at its November meeting. She responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) asked about the feasibility of obtaining data generated by partner organisations, to complement the County Council's own data, Mrs Robinson explained that data could be obtained from other agencies. She undertook to look into this and advise the Panel at a future meeting of what was possible to supply and with what frequency;
- b) concern was expressed that the target of 65% for the percentage of care leavers in employment, education and training might not be sufficiently challenging. The Cabinet Member for CYPE, Mr Gough, advised the Panel that Kent's figure for young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) was very low compared to the national average. Mrs Robinson advised that the national rate of care leavers in employment, education and training was 58.6% and the rate for Kent's statistical neighbours was 56%; and
- c) a view was expressed that the targets set should be appropriate. Performance rated green did not mean that the target was pitched too low. Kent's services did perform well against target but it was important to continue to review targets and not to become complacent.

2. It was RESOLVED that:-

- a) the performance data set out in the Children in Care scorecard be noted and welcomed, and the comments set out above be noted; and
- b) the Panel be advised at a future meeting of what data from partner organisations was possible to supply and with what frequency.

129. Virtual School Kent Overview Report 2017 (validated results) and 2018 (un-validated results)
(Item 9)

1. Mr Doran introduced the report and summarised key areas of performance, including the good performance of Kent's Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 children in care cohorts compared to national average, decreasing numbers of NEETs, successful university entries, the excellent work which continued to be done on participation and engagement by the VSK apprentices as ambassadors of children in care, and to tackle the stigma of being in care, and the Fostering Partnership award won in 2018. He also set out the priorities for 2018/19. Mr Doran and Ms Hammond then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following;

- a) the report and the performance it set out were welcomed as evidence that VSK was a good model and was working well. Concern was expressed that the ambitions set out for the development of the 0-25 service should not overstretch the service and risk diluting the successes achieved. Mr Doran said the VSK would continue to drive improvement in all its services, and reassured the Panel that multi-issue working would not dilute the quality of any one service. He outlined the ways in which the VSK had successfully expanded its range of work since its inception in 2010, to make sure that every child in care would have the best support and education possible to help them achieve and be the best they could be. Ms Hammond added that VSK worked to support all children in care to achieve their educational potential, regardless of the age at which they came into care. Many young people came into care in their mid-teens and had the added challenge of settling into school quickly and taking key examinations only a short time afterwards. Many achieved good grades despite having this challenge. *She undertook to supply the Panel with information about the age at which young people entered care, so their educational attainment could be set against this context;*
- b) the work to tackle the stigma of being in care was supported, and Mr Doran explained that there needed to be a balance between giving children in care the time and support they needed to settle into a new placement and school and have the required reviews without drawing unnecessary attention to their care status. Ms Dunstan added that the rent guarantor scheme could help to address stigma for care leavers trying to find accommodation as it would help prospective landlords to overcome their prejudice about trusting care leavers to be good, reliable tenants. The VSK Participation Support Workers were also visiting schools to give talks about tackling stigma. The Chairman added that young people could face stigma for a number of other reasons, such as their religion or sexuality, so needed to be equipped with the resilience and life skills to cope with this;
- c) concern was expressed about the increasing number of children overall, not just those in care, who had Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Mr Doran advised that, although the number of children in care with EHCPs had always been higher, compared to their peers, the rate in the general population had increased by 40% while the rate among children in care had increased by only 1.1%;
- d) a foster carer commented that the engagement and participation support of the VSK could be the only constant element in a young person's life if they were moving between a number of placements and schools; and
- e) the Chairman asked a foster care if young people with disabilities were included sufficiently in engagement and participation events and was advised that any children in care applying for a Kent sports bursary would automatically be eligible for it as part of their personal education plan (PEP). This could give children who were less academic the opportunity to develop other skills and excel in other fields.

2. It was RESOLVED that:-

- a) the impact of the Virtual School in relation to its performance be noted and the children and young people it supported be congratulated on their achievements and successes; and
- b) the priorities of the Virtual School for 2018-19 be endorsed.

130. Young People missing from placement
(Item 10)

Mr S Fitzgerald, Assistant Director, South Kent, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Fitzgerald introduced the report and highlighted key areas of activity. He pointed out to the Panel that many missing episodes could be accounted for by a relatively small number of children who went missing repeatedly. Conducting interviews with young people within the target 72 hours of their return was a challenge, as many did not wish to be interviewed, but the County Council was working with the Young Lives Foundation to reduce the pressure by undertaking those interviews in a different way. Collaborative work with Kent Police and family group conferencing was also helping to support this work. Mr Fitzgerald responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) the County Council recorded and monitored every missing episode, but these figures were inflated by including young people who were missing for only a few hours as well as those, relatively few, who would be missing for days or weeks. This full and frank reporting demonstrated transparency. If a young person was known to go habitually to a friend's or relative's house, the Police, when involved, would go to that house first to look for them;
- b) asked if a social worker could perhaps be able to make enquiries first, to avoid involving the Police, and how long it might be possible to avoid involving the Police, Mr Fitzgerald explained that there was a 'lower-level' response which would be used if a young person was known to be at a friend or relative's house. Relatives would help by contacting social workers if and when the child turned up at their house;
- c) it was difficult for foster carers to judge when to report a child as missing if they knew the child concerned simply had a habit of coming home late. They would have a separate plan of action for each child in their care, to accommodate that child's habits. If a missing child were not reported, a foster carer would be taking a risk, so the issue was complex and required careful judgement by foster carers;
- d) asked if there was any geographic pattern to missing episodes, and if any area had a higher level than others, Mr Fitzgerald advised that Dartford, Dover, Maidstone and Thanet had the largest numbers of cases; and
- e) asked if the definition of 'missing' included any timeframe, Mr Fitzgerald said someone going missing regularly for a couple of hours at a time could be more at risk than someone missing for a single, longer period. Young people aged 16 and 17 living in supported accommodation who went missing would be reported by the accommodation provider, and providers

varied in the speed at which they would make such a report. Guidance on the issue and the process for reporting a young person as missing was included in foster carers' training.

2. It was RESOLVED that Kent's current position for children in care going missing, and the work being undertaken to better understand the circumstances which lead to missing episodes, alongside the steps being taken to mitigate risks as much as possible, be noted.

131. Life Stability report for Children in Care (Item 11)

Ms N Anthony, Interim Head of Fostering, and Mrs S Skinner, Head of Adoption Service, were in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Smith introduced the report and advised the Panel that, in terms of stability of care, Kent performed well compared to the national picture, particularly in its use of initiatives such as Foster to Adopt. Stability of social worker numbers had improved much, with 87% of social workers now being on permanent contracts. Mrs Skinner, Ms Hammond and Ms Anthony responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) stability was important as it underpinned everything else in a young person's life and helped to give them boundaries. Foster carers were key to giving young people stability and Kent was fortunate in the excellent quality of its foster carers;
- b) Foster to Adopt helped to streamline the process of placing and settling a child in care as it cut out one stage of the process and offered a real opportunity to reduce the number of moves a child had to make. Mrs Skinner advised that children who had experienced a breakdown of placement in the past would be placed with foster carers who were registered to adopt. Foster carers who were committing to adopt would be carefully trained and would need to be well supported through the process, which could be lengthy. Ms Hammond added that fostering to adopt was a big commitment and investment on the part of the foster carers. Placing a child with foster carers to be adopted by them later was a difficult decision to make as it needed certainty at the outset that the child would ultimately enter adoption and would not return to their birth family;
- c) it was acknowledged that stability and good role models were important for children and young people, to counter the chaos and instability which could so easily become 'normal' for them; and
- d) Foster to Adopt was likened to what was formerly known as 'long-term fostering'. Ms Anthony assured the Panel that most foster carers took on the role for the long-term, and advised that 85 carers currently offered Staying Put places for young people aged 18+. The lasting influence on a young person of a good foster carer was highlighted and the point made that many young people continued to visit their former foster home as adults.

2. It was RESOLVED that the report and actions being taken to improve placement stability for Kent children in care be noted.