

## **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 20 JULY 2021**

### **NOTES of a briefing held on Microsoft Teams.**

PRESENT: Ann Allen (Chairman), Rob Barton, Julianne Bayford, David Beaney, Dan Bride, Tom Byrne, Charmaine Chapman, Gary Cooke, Tony Doran, Sophia Dunstan, Lesley Game, Stephen Gray, Kelly Grehan, Sarah Hamilton, Margot McArthur, Shellina Prendergast, Dirk Ross, Nancy Sayer, Tracy Scott, Caroline Smith and Sharon Williams.

ALSO PRESENT: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, Alisha Church and Alexandra Gordon.

IN ATTENDANCE: Matt Dunkley (Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education), Nicola Anthony (Head of Fostering, East), Jo Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager, Virtual School Kent), Chris Nunn (Senior Management Information Officer, Management Information and Intelligence), Christy Holden (Lead Commissioning Manager), Theresa Grayell (Democratic Services Officer, Clerk) and Katy Reynolds (Democratic Services Officer, Support Clerk)

#### **1. Membership**

The Panel noted the revised County Council Membership following the May elections, and that Sharon Williams from Ashford Borough Council had also joined the Panel as a representative of the Kent Housing Group.

#### **2. Apologies and substitutes**

Apologies for absence had been received from Trudy Dean, Dr Dan Jones and Sarah Hammond.

Chris Nunn was in attendance in place of Maureen Robinson.

#### **3. Introductions**

As this was the first gathering of the Panel since the May elections, participants introduced themselves one by one by switching on their camera and giving their name and post title and, in the case of elected Members, the division they represented.

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

The Chairman proposed and Lesley Game seconded that Trudy Dean be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Panel. There were no other nominations and Mrs Dean was duly elected as Vice-Chairman.

#### **5. Chairman's Announcements**

1. The Chairman advised that a Challenge Day arranged by the Participation Team would take place in the following week at the Detling showground, near Maidstone, and hoped that all Panel members would support the day and join in.

2. The Chairman also advised that her charity for this year, as Chairman of the County Council, would focus on the support and help that young people gave to other young people.

## **6. Notes of the briefings held on 14 February 2021 and 27 May 2021**

These were accepted as sensible summaries. There was nothing arising.

## **7. Introduction to the Panel for new Members, and**

## **8. Overview of the Corporate Parenting role for new Members**

1. Jo Carpenter and Caroline Smith set out the purpose of these agenda items as a way of raising the profile of the corporate parenting role among elected Members and an introduction to the role to new Members who had joined the Council as a result of the May elections. Caroline added that she viewed the role of corporate parent to Kent's 1,700 children and young people in care and 2,000 care leavers as a privilege and the most important role an elected Member could have. She hoped that Members would agree.

2. Jo introduced Alisha Church and Alexandra Gordon, who were attending as new members of the Participation Team. Sophia Dunstan, Rob Thomas, Tom Byrne, Charmaine Chapman and Alisha and Alexandra presented a series of quiz questions, using an interactive app, to test people's understanding of the number and age profile of Kent's care population, services offered, aspects of the corporate parent role and the importance of the Panel.

3. Panel Members stated their reasons for joining the Panel, including making the life experience and future of children and young people better than it would have been, listening to young people and challenging on their behalf, as any parent would. Matt Dunkley added that the role of corporate parent was shared by all Members and officers of the County Council, who took over control of all aspects of a child's life from the moment they entered care.

4. Alex and Alisha each told the Panel about their own experiences of being in care, from ages 11 and 15 respectively, the fostering and school placements they had had and how they each felt about their overall experiences. Alex said she had found being in care tough but would not change anything about her experience of foster care she had received. She had stayed on in the Participation Team after completing her apprenticeship to help other young people. Alisha praised her foster carers but said her school career had suffered as a result of disruption, however, she had been able to retake maths as part of her apprenticeship.

5. The Panel were then asked their views about what were the characteristics of a good corporate parent. Responses included:-

- treating all young people as individuals, to allow them to develop into who and what they wanted to be, rather than imposing ideas;

- setting a good example of adulthood that a young person could aspire to;
- having an inquiring mind, checking and challenging information and being an advocate for the needs of young people;
- to meet young people and listen to their views, wishes and ideas at first hand;
- not to apply standard rules and assume knowledge but to ask young people's interests, views and wishes and to be ready to embrace their identity;
- to let young people explore their own culture, sexuality and identity, and support them to understand and deal with life's ups and downs;
- to help young people to understand that every young person in a 'normal' family has challenges as they negotiate their teen years and approach adulthood; and
- tolerance and understanding.

6. Charmaine, Alex and Alisha added that Young People's Councils had been established in 2012 to listen to young people, take positive action on their behalf and allow them to be involved in decision making. There were now four councils, covering different age groups, with satellite groups being established in 2018, including the Adoptables and the Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers. Tom added that Participation Days and Take Over Days had been very successful. Rob added that young people in care did not want people to feel sorry for them as they were in care, not to apply lower standards to them but to treat them the same as their peers. Kent's Pledge to children and young people in care had been renewed in 2021 to demonstrate Kent's commitment to children and young people in its care. It was suggested that the Pledge be discussed at the next meeting of the Panel. The Chairman added that her pledge would be to ensure that another Takeover Day would be able to take place in the Council Chamber at Sessions House as soon as this was possible.

## **9. Participation Team Update**

1. Jo Carpenter introduced the written report in the agenda pack and advised that four new Apprentices, including one UASC, had been appointed in early July. Tony Doran added that he and Jo had attended the South East Regional Virtual School Head Teachers' conference to present on the work going on in Kent. Both said how proud they were of Kent's Participation Team and the innovative ways they had established to help support children and young people in care.

2. The updates were noted, with thanks.

## **10. Verbal Update by the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services**

1. Sue Chandler thanked the Participation Team for the introductory information and quiz they had prepared and added how proud she was of the way they continued to support other young people. She said that, with the Chairman and the Director, she aimed to be the best corporate parent possible.

2. She then gave a verbal update on the following issues:

**Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)** – on 10 June 2021, the County Council had stopped accepting additional UASC and the resulting

negotiations with the Home Office to place them with other local authorities had developed rapidly. Much information had already been reported on the KCC website and in the media, but a detailed report on the UASC situation would be considered by the County Council on 23 July.

**Reconnect** - businesses, organisations and members of the community had united with the County Council to provide a programme of fun activities and learning opportunities for the school summer holidays. A number of Kent leisure centres were offering children and young people a six-week pass for £25, or £10 for those in receipt of benefits-related free school meals. Parents or carers could buy the pass for their child or children direct from the leisure centre they wished to use. Full details of what was available at each participating leisure centre would be available on the centre's website. Local Children's Partnership Groups had awarded grants to local clubs, societies and charities delivering a range of events, fun days, camps and activities, ranging from archery to zumba. Additionally, district councils across Kent had developed their own local offers for children and young people, to add to the Reconnect offer. There were learning opportunities with Invicta National Academy, delivering daily live lessons, and Audiopi, Lyfta and Sir Linkalot were making their education platforms available free to families over the summer. Kent's commissioned youth providers and the Council's own open access services were offering additional sessions and activities in every district, with a wide variety of options, to provide something for everyone. Reconnect had worked with Headstart Kent to increase the capacity of support services which mentor young people, provide bereavement support and counselling. To help them travel to the events on offer during the summer holidays, every young person in school Years 6 to 13 would receive a free bus pass, which could be used on Stagecoach and Arriva buses, as well as on other services subsidised by the Council, between 22 July and 31 August 2021. Holiday activities and food provision was available in every district, and places were rapidly being taken up. Places were made available to children entitled to free school meals and allowed them to enjoy free provision on at least four days each week for four weeks. She commended this activity as an excellent start to the Reconnect programme and looked forward to its development through the next academic year.

**Virtual School Head Teachers** - from September 2021, local authorities would receive funding to resource Virtual School Head Teachers to work with early years settings, schools, colleges and social care leaders to create a culture of high aspirations that would help all children with social workers to make educational progress. With the knowledge and expertise gained from their work promoting the educational outcomes of looked-after and previously looked-after children, Virtual School Head Teachers would enhance the partnerships between education settings and local authorities by working with agencies to further understand and address the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience and helping to demonstrate the benefits of attending an education setting, as well as ensuring there are mechanisms in place to offer advice and support to teachers and social workers, with the aim of narrowing the attainment gap. They would be provided with the additional resource required to take on the strategic leadership role for children with a social worker, enabling them to recruit additional team members to support them with these responsibilities. She reminded the Panel that covid-19 had affected all children and, for many of the most vulnerable, had increased barriers to education. It was essential that the cohort of children with a social worker were supported to

recover from the pandemic. Funding for this strategic leadership role for children with a social worker had been confirmed until March 2022 and she looked forward to seeing updates as the work progresses.

**Virtual School Kent Awards 2021 nominations** – these were now open, for Kent Children and Young People in Care. The deadline for Early Years nominations and those in Years R to 11 was 30 July and for those in Years 12 and 13 and Care Leavers, the deadline was 27 August. She was hopeful that it would be possible to celebrate the achievements of Kent’s children and young people in person this year and she encouraged nominations to be submitted.

**Foster Carers Awards 2021 nominations** - this year’s ceremony to celebrate the achievements of Kent’s foster carers would be held on 13 October, as a face-to-face event at the Detling Showground in Maidstone, and nominations were now open. There would be 40 awards, ranging from achieving outstanding outcomes for children to significant contributions to the development of the Fostering Service. It was planned that nominations would be able to be completed via Microsoft Teams, and further details on how to do this would follow.

**The Care Review** - the independent review of children’s social care had now reached its first major milestone and had published its Case for Change, which set out what the review had heard so far and made some initial recommendations for change, inviting comment. The Council would respond as an authority as well as encouraging individual social workers and practitioners to respond individually. More information could be found on the review’s website.

**Care leavers** – Kent’s care leavers had worked with the Applied Research Collaboration for Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) on a piece of work called ‘Beyond Lockdown’. The research team worked with Kent care leavers to co-produce the key messages and videos for care leavers and those services working with them, to enable them to provide effective support during the pandemic. This work was presented in May to the National Benchmarking Care Leavers Forum and again on 10 June to practitioners from all local authorities. This excellent work was warmly commended.

**Vote of Thanks** – as pandemic restrictions were being lifted, Mrs Chandler recorded her thanks to all the officers and social workers who had worked with young people during the pandemic to help them avoid becoming isolated, as well as to young people themselves, who had supported each other and kept each other safe.

3. Mrs Chandler then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) asked if some young people were at greater risk from the strains place on the health service by the pandemic, and if they could have priority treatment, for example, by having prescriptions fast-tracked, Mrs Chandler advised that children and young people in care were given priority across the health service. The Council’s Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee would look into reported delays with getting GP appointments, despite child in care status. Nancy Sayer added that GPs’ appointment capacity had

been a challenge for children in care and UASC but that foster carers were advised to register a child in care at their local practice as a permanent rather than a temporary patient. She added that the health care plan which was prepared for every young person coming into care would take account of and aim to address these difficulties. Access to dental appointments, which had also been an ongoing challenge, was improving; and

b) asked how any elected County Councillor would know how many children in care there were in their division, and what they could do to support them, for example, with school placements, Caroline Smith advised that statistical information about the local care population could be provided to County Council Members. The Chairman added that she hoped the former Local Area Briefings, which would update local Members on a range of information about County Council services in their area, would soon be able to resume. Julianne Bayford added that the Kent Foster Care Association was now increasing its local events and would be able to let Panel Members have details of these. She also encouraged Panel Members to respond to the Care Review's Case for Change consultation, highlighted above.

4. The verbal updates were NOTED, with thanks.

#### **11. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care**

1. Chris Nunn introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel.

2. Concern was expressed that fewer than half the indicators had met their target, and that performance against targets should be able to be compared to other local authorities, also that target setting should be the subject of a separate report. Matt Dunkley advised that many targets had been affected by covid restrictions and lockdowns. He advised that most key performance indicators (KPIs) were set nationally and it was only possible to measure things for which data was collected. However, as KPIs were national, Kent's performance could be compared to other authorities in the south east and with Kent's statistical peers, including figures relating to UASC. The inclusion of this in future reports was welcomed, starting in November, with a more detailed report being presented to the Panel once a year.

3. The performance data in the Corporate Parenting Scorecard was NOTED, with the comparative data discussed above being presented to the Panel annually.

#### **12. Kent Fostering Service Annual Report 2021/2022 and Kent Fostering Service Business Plan 2021**

1. Caroline Smith and Nicola Anthony introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

a) the Chairman recorded her thanks to all Kent's foster carers and said how proud she was of them and the work they did in supporting Kent's children

and young people in care. This was warmly supported by other Panel members; and

b) asked what impact the covid pandemic had had on foster carer recruitment, Ms Anthony advised that some carers had decided to downsize or retire as a result of work and life changes arising from the pandemic, while others had been accommodating elderly or vulnerable relatives in the spare room they would otherwise have used for fostering. Some were hesitant at resuming their former lives in case of further lockdowns or restrictions. As a result of these changes, the recruitment of foster carers had been intermittent. Foster training such as Skills to Foster would be put online as soon as possible, and attendance at events would resume when this was safe, to return to the recruitment activity previously pursued.

2. It was RESOLVED that the information contained within the Kent Fostering Annual Report and Business Plan 2021/2022 be NOTED, with thanks.