

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 16 FEBRUARY 2022

NOTES of a meeting held using Microsoft Teams.

PRESENT: Dirk Ross (Chairman), David Beaney, Dan Bride, Tom Byrne, Ian Chittenden (substitute for Trudy Dean), Gary Cooke, Alison Farmer, Lesley Game, Stephen Gray, Kelly Grehan, Sarah Hamilton, Sarah Hammond, Sarah Howell (substitute for Tony Doran), Margot McArthur, Nancy Sayer, Tracy Scott and Caroline Smith.

ALSO PRESENT: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, and Karly Muchmore, VSK Apprentice.

IN ATTENDANCE: Matt Dunkley (Corporate Director of Children Young People and Education), Jo Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager, Virtual School Kent), Maureen Robinson (Management Information Unit Service Manager), Christy Holden (Head of Strategic Commissioning, Children and Young People's Services), Theresa Grayell (Democratic Services Officer, Clerk) and Hayley Savage (Democratic Services Officer, Support Clerk)

1 Apologies and substitutes

Apologies for absence had been received from Rob Barton, Julianne Bayford, Charmaine Chapman, Trudy Dean, Tony Doran, Sophia Dunstan, Shellina Prendergast and Sharon Williams.

Ian Chittenden was present as a substitute for Trudy Dean and Sarah Howell as a substitute for Tony Doran

2 Chairman's Announcements

1. The Chairman announced that he intended to review the role and working practice of the Panel. He also hoped to involve a wider range of people and would be looking into how the Panel could work more closely with the 12 districts in Kent, perhaps by linking via Members who served on both District and County Councils.

3. Notes of the briefings of the Panel held on 15 September and 8 December 2021

1. These were accepted as sensible summaries of the proceedings. There was nothing arising from them.

4. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

1. Maureen Robinson introduced the report and highlighted key areas of performance. She explained that the way of recording the number of initial health assessments (IHAs) completed on time had changed, and that future reporting would be of a 12-month rolling total. In November 2021, 94% of citizen children in care but only 25% of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) had their IHAs completed within the target time. As the cohorts of young people included in categories were small, for example, the number of young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), there was a narrow margin between a red and green

rating. Maureen, Sarah Hammond and Matt Dunkley then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) asked to what extent staff shortages contributed to performance, and what could be done to minimise the impact, Sarah explained that there was no shortage of adoption social workers and that the adoption process was started by prospective adopters rather than by staff. The current delays in cases being heard were caused by waiting lists at courts and by more complex cases, for example, adoptions of sibling groups. Delays were largely out of the control of the Council; and
- b) Nancy Sayer added that Kent had to complete a larger number of IHAs as the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) had been slow in transferring children to other local authorities, which would otherwise have taken on the responsibility of undertaking IHAs for those children. Some had moved on in the NTS before they could attend their Kent appointment, and those appointments could not always be reallocated to other young people, losing some capacity. In setting appointments, no differentiation was made between citizen children and UASC; they were allocated strictly on a first-come, first-served basis. Medical staff carrying out IHAs also had other workloads so could offer limited IHA appointments, and limited transport facilities, for example, from the Millbank centre, affected the ability of young people there to attend appointments. Sarah suggested that one way to help ease the problem would be to list the NTS cohort separately to show a more detailed picture. Nancy added that every effort was made to make the process as brisk as possible but this did not show up in the way data was currently reported.

2. It was RESOLVED that the performance data set out be noted, with thanks.

5 Participation Team update

1. Jo Carpenter introduced Karly Muchmore, who had joined the team as a new apprentice, and advised that there would shortly be more vacancies in the team, including for a young person who had experience of, and could support other young people going through, the adoption process. It was planned also that more young people would join the Children Who Care group of sons and daughters of foster carers. The week of 7th to 11th February had been National Apprenticeship Week.

2. Tom Byrne showed a video of young people enjoying half-term engagement events and activities, which was welcomed by Panel members, as the team's films had been on previous occasions, as an excellent way of seeing the activities provided and the obvious enjoyment and benefit they brought to so many young people. Asked how well events were spread, and offered opportunities, across the whole county, Jo advised that it was difficult to suit everyone in all areas. The team was trialling some Saturday morning 'taster' session to encourage young people to try something new, as part of the Reconnect programme, with a hope that they would then be interested to join future events in their area.

3. Karly told the Panel about her experiences of being a Virtual School Kent (VSK) Apprentice since joining the team in July 2021. She had attended and helped organise participation events and had taken part in interview panels. This involvement had encouraged her to leave her comfort zone and she had enjoyed the new challenges this had brought. She said she had had a good supportive social worker when she had been in care, who had helped her to look ahead and think about what she wanted to do in the future, and from this experience she was now sure that she wanted to go into social work as a career.

4. Asked if all apprentices completed their training, Jo advised that, in the 10 years that the scheme had run, almost all of the 32 young people had completed their training successfully. Those who had not completed it had found that it was not the right thing for them or had many other things going on in their lives at that time and felt unable to focus on or commit to it sufficiently. Some starting an apprenticeship had not known at the time what they wanted to do and had been able to learn skills which would help them to build an idea of their strengths and weaknesses and decide what work they might want to do in the future. New Apprentices joined the team at different times and those who were more experienced could help and support newer ones.

5. Asked if care leavers were made aware of the wider apprenticeship options available in the Council, Jo advised that they were always told about other opportunities and, pre-covid, a corporate parenting 'roadshow' would engage all directorates to make them aware that care leavers would be seeking opportunities. Caroline Smith added that a big Apprenticeship event for care leavers would take place on 11 April, at which employers would be able to engage with young people who may be interested in joining them.

6. Regarding other future activity, Jo set out plans for the 16+ Awards on 21 July, which Members were invited to attend, and plans for Easter holiday activities.

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

6 Challenge Card Update

1. Jo Carpenter introduced the report and set out progress on past challenges and a new challenge about care leavers being able to join the housing register in any district of the county. Sarah Hammond set out the process for registering and said that the aim was for a young person to be able to be 'a resident of all 12 districts'. Matt Dunkley added that 'twin hatter' Members who also served on district councils could help by championing the project and encouraging all district housing departments to take the same supportive approach to care leavers.

2. The Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, Sue Chandler, said that she was also a twin hatter and had supported the establishment of such a project for some time, and she warmly welcomed and accepted the challenge set out in the report. She undertook to liaise with the Panel Chairman, the Council Leader and twin hatter Members to move this forward.

3. Another twin hatter pointed out that some districts would not be keen to be compelled to consider an application from any care leaver across the county as they would compete with local people for very limited housing stock, particularly for social or affordable housing.

4. The Panel's support for the challenge was welcomed as it affected many young people and finding suitable accommodation was often raised by care leavers as a problem and a major source of anxiety. Currently, many young people had their housing applications rejected as they had not lived in an area long enough to be eligible.

5. It was RESOLVED that the progress of former challengers be noted, and the new challenge be welcomed and supported.

7 Verbal Update by the Cabinet Member

1. Sue Chandler welcomed Karly and thanked her for her contribution to her first Panel meeting. She also thanked the participation team for another excellent report and video. She then gave an update on the following issues:-

Young People's Mental Health Week – the 'Grow Together' project sought to help young people to build their emotional resilience by considering and highlighting the resources and support the Council could offer them, including the work of the Kent Resilience Hub, Thrive bubbles and signposting and support to access services delivered by other providers.

'Reachable Moments' project – a pilot project was being run in Ramsgate by the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) and the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital, to engage at first hand with young people who were experiencing violence and support them to seek mediation. Dan Bride advised that the funding available for this project would end in 2022 but could be extended for three more years. The project involved the Police, the Youth Justice service and other partners. The VRU also had new funding to undertake needs analysis work, and it was suggested that they be asked to attend a future meeting of the Panel to talk about their work.

'Moving Forward' care leavers' project – also a pilot project running in Thanet, providing support and assistance to young people in two age groups – those aged 16/17, as they transitioned to adult services, and those aged 18-25 as they prepared to leave care.

Nurture accreditation – VSK had achieved this prestigious accreditation and was the first virtual school in the UK to do so. This was a very significant achievement and Tony Doran and his team were warmly congratulated. It was hoped that the Kent team could help virtual schools elsewhere in the country to strive for and achieve this accreditation.

Reconnect Digital Inclusion Support Offer – this sought to establish an access pathway for young people aged 14-18 who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), to support them back into learning. Each would be given their own

electronic device and a 4G router, for which they could apply via the Digital Kent website.

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

8 Corporate Parenting Annual Report November 2020 - November 2021

1. Caroline Smith introduced the report, which was dedicated to the memory of former Panel Chairman, Ann Allen, as she had been instrumental in establishing it. Caroline highlighted the key milestones covered in the report, including the Christmas gift appeal for all care leavers, which had exceeded its total to raise £23,000, with a very large donation being made by Gallagher Ltd, a local building company. It was hoped that next year's campaign could start earlier and be spread wider to raise even more money.

2. It was hoped that Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June 2022 could be marked by issuing every young person in care in Kent with a meaningful memento of this unique historic event.

3. It was RESOLVED that the Panel note and welcome the annual report and their responsibilities as corporate parents.

9 Missing Episodes - Performance Report

1. Dan Bride introduced the report, which was welcomed and commended for its content and clarity, and highlighted key areas of work. She emphasised that missing episodes among citizen children were rare and that most young people who had missing episodes were UASC and mostly young men. Most missing episodes were for one day or less but needed to be logged as such, even if a young person were just late coming home. The very few longer missing episodes raised more concerns. These were all among young male UASC. Young people returning from being missing were asked to take part in a return interview, as part of nationally issued guidance, and although participation in these was not compulsory, more interviews now took place than did previously.

2. A Panel member who had previously worked as a probation officer spoke of her experience and suggested that shops and cafes could be made aware of the issues faced by young people who go missing and be asked to look out for any young person causing concern. They could be supplied with leaflets to hand to a young person, setting out some guidance and a contact number to call for support. Dan added that a new multi-agency initiative called Community Shield sought to provide safe spaces for young people to go to, where they could be met by a trained and vetted support worker. This was welcomed, and she undertook to share details of the scheme with all Panel members so they could share them across the county.

3. Dan responded to comments and questions from the Panel and advised that:
 - a) more information was now recorded than previously about the nature and causes of missing episodes. They could take many forms, including

staying out beyond curfew to see friends or a boyfriend/girlfriend without permission or the approval of carers;

- b) a 'buddy' for young people who often go missing and have complex and deep-seated reasons for doing so could offer a first contact in a crisis and could start to help them talk about and work through difficult feelings;
- c) professionals, including the Police, who find and speak to young missing people are reminded that the issue at hand is, first and foremost, one of safety and concern for the young person's welfare and wellbeing; and
- d) the idea of a pocket-sized 'contact card' which could be easily and discreetly packed and carried was welcomed and would be explored as a project with the VSK Apprentices, so young people could have input into its content and design.

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

10 Virtual School Kent (VSK) Annual Report

- 1. Panel Members were asked to email any questions and comments about this report direct to the report author for a response.