

## **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 27 July 2022**

### **MINUTES of a meeting held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.**

PRESENT: Dirk Ross (Chairman), Rob Barton, David Beaney, Dan Bride, Tom Byrne, Gary Cooke, Lesley Game, Stephen Gray, Sarah Hamilton, Sarah Hammond, Peter Harman, Sarah Howell (substitute for Tony Doran), Margot McArthur, Shellina Prendergast, Nancy Sayer, Tracy Scott and Caroline Smith.

ALSO PRESENT: Kayleigh Leonard and Karly Muchmore.

IN ATTENDANCE: Nicola Anthony, currently Head of Fostering (East), Maria Cordrey, new Head of Fostering (East) (from 1 September), Maureen Robinson, Management Information Unit Service Manager, Christy Holden, Head of Strategic Commissioning, Children and Young People's Services, Joanne Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, Virtual School Kent, Nimesh Patel, Head of 18+ Care Leaving Service (North and West), Rachel Calver, 18+ Service Manager, Rita Boboye, 18+ Service Manager, Sian Fox, Commissioner, Theresa Grayell, Democratic Services Officer, and Katy Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer.

#### **1. Apologies and substitutes**

Apologies for absence had been received from Trudy Dean, Tony Doran, Alison Farmer, Sharon Williams and Sue Chandler. Sarah Howell was present as a substitute for Tony Doran.

#### **2. Chairman's Introduction**

1. The Chairman welcomed all participants to the meeting and said that he would be running the Panel's future meetings as hybrid events to allow as many people as possible to attend by whatever means best suited them.

2. He then set out his thoughts and plans for the Panel's future work. He started by saying that he was looking to fill some of the gaps in the Panel's membership, hopefully by recruiting an Adopter rather than an additional Foster Carer. He asked Panel members to give him suggestions of other groups who could add a representative to the Panel or attend a meeting as a guest. He wanted to make the membership open to everyone.

#### **3. Outcome of Ofsted inspection of Kent County Council Children's Services**

1. The Chairman said how delighted we was with the excellent outcome of the recent inspection, with three parts of the service rated as 'outstanding' and one 'good'. He recorded his thanks to all staff and young people who had taken part in the inspection and been interviewed by the inspectors. This had given the inspectors invaluable evidence of the reality of young people's experiences of the Council's services. He said how very proud he was of staff and the services they delivered to young people in care in Kent.

#### **4. Pattern of meetings**

1. The Chairman asked Panel members if they would prefer to meet at a different time of day, to help achieve a better attendance than had recently been the case.

Some members preferred morning meetings but it was pointed out that morning meetings would need to avoid departmental management and leadership meetings which involved key officers and would also need to fit round the programme of existing meetings for other committees, most of which took place in mornings. The Chairman suggested that, out of the six meetings in the year, three could be placed in term time and three in the school holidays, rather than the current pattern of two in term time and four in the school holidays. The Democratic Services Officer undertook to look into finding suitable morning slots but pointed out that moving to morning meetings may limit the options available and that it may not be possible to have much choice of date.

## **5. Engagement with district partners to address the issue of housing for Care Leavers**

1. An area of work which the Chairman much wanted to address was the issues faced by care leavers, who found that they had no choice of where they lived when leaving care and were currently limited to applying for housing in the area in which they were last in care. Young people should be asked what they needed in terms of housing so decisions could be made which were better informed and which would suit the young person concerned. A good template for assessing housing need could be developed and shared with other districts so all young people across the county could be treated in the same way.

2. Caroline Smith added that there was currently a challenge card from young people who sought to be able to apply for housing in whatever district of the county they chose, and not just where they had last been in care. Sarah Hammond added that Manchester had a good model of such an arrangement in which the responsibility for housing care leavers was shared. She undertook to send the Chairman details of the Manchester model.

3. Lesley Game commented that she had attended an activity day yesterday which was well attended by young people but not by elected Members. As all elected Members were corporate parents, and many also served on district and borough councils, attendance at such an event would give them a valuable opportunity to meet and speak to young people about their experiences with local issues such as accommodation, and she urged more members to attend in future.

## **6. Minutes of the Panel's meetings held on 16 February and 13 April 2022**

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

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

1. Maureen Robinson introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) performance measures were largely based on national measures common across all local authorities and the targets had been set against comparative data where possible. Due to the Kent's large proportion of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC), some of the measures and targets had been adjusted to take account and were therefore not always directly comparable to national and statistical neighbour averages;

- b) in setting the targets for 2022/23, Kent's performance had met or exceeded the England average. Targets had only been amended where it was felt that performance improvement was possible. The majority of measures were at their optimum level and it was expected that very little variance against this would be seen, therefore those targets would remain the same as for 2021/22;
  - c) the Chairman queried keys areas in which improvement would be sought and the following were identified: (i) the effect of the national transfer scheme on Kent's completion rate of initial health assessments, (ii) placement stability, (iii) education, health and care plans (EHCPs) for children in care and (iv) delays cause to the adoption process by the court process; and
  - d) asked what impact job vacancies had on Kent's ability to meet targets, Sarah Hammond advised that vacancies and temporary social work staffing had had some impact on processing EHCPs and it was hope that this situation would improve by January 2023.
2. It was RESOLVED that the proposed targets and performance data set out in the scorecard be noted, with thanks.

## **8. Participation Team update**

1. Jo Carpenter thanked the Chairman for his commitment to addressing the housing issues face by care leavers. She set out the key activities and headlines of the Team's work since the last meeting. Two new apprentices had joined the team, and an adoptee was about to join. The Apprentice vacancies had been advertised across the county in a bid to attract more representatives from East Kent. The recent 16+ awards ceremony had been a big event with much to arrange, including outfits and transport to the venue, like a school 'prom'.
2. Tom Byrne, Rob Barton and Kayleigh Leonard talked about recent activities and added that events had been used as a way to engage young people in talking about issues such as their expectations of the Independent Reviewing Officer service and views about Personal Education Plans. The Adoptables had put together some advice to prospective adopters about how to help an adopted child to integrate, as well as some ideas about how young people in care with LGBTQ+ issues could best be supported at school. The Who Cares Council had also had input into the style and language used in the book 'My Family Foster' and had added a section about how feedback had been responded to.
3. The team responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-
- a) all 30 events in the summer programme were all fully booked, with 25-30 young people in each, and young people were limited to taking part in two events each, to allow a maximum number the opportunity to take part. 'Try Something New' Saturdays had been established to supplement the programme of other activities and allow more young people a chance to

engage and meet the team in the hope that they would join in further with work on the issues set out above;

- b) the Chairman of the Panel asked that dates of events be sent to him so he could send them out to all elected Members once a month to encourage more Members to attend local events and engage with children and young people in care. The Chairman of the Council added that she would be happy to attend more of such events;
- c) the Chairman of the Council raised the issue of social workers persisting in taking children out of class to have their regular care review meetings. Sarah Hammond advised that school staff had to be involved in such meetings, so they had to take place in school time and on school premises. Jo added that many young people no longer felt so much stigma around being in care and were happy to attend in school time as long as they were consulted and had an opportunity to avoid missing their favourite class;
- d) Other meetings, for example, a first meeting after coming into care, which would need to involve a social worker and others, such as the police. Once the child had got to know their social worker, these meetings would be more like 'one to ones', just between the child and their social worker;
- e) Sarah Hammond said that she was very proud of the way in which young people had spoken to Ofsted inspectors and that they clearly felt empowered and confident to do so. The work and support of the Participation Team had played a large part in building that confidence; and
- f) Rob and Kayleigh had represented young people very well at the 'Our Care' day at Parliament, but it was disappointing that no Kent MPs had been present that day to hear the points raised by their young people. The Chairman offered help to contact MPs for any such future occasion.

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

#### **9. Verbal Update by the Cabinet Member**

- 1. As Sue Chandler was unable to attend, the usual Cabinet Member update was not given.
- 2. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Shellina Prendergast, and the Deputy Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, Sarah Hamilton, added their congratulations on the excellent outcome of the Ofsted inspection and young people's contribution to it.

#### **10. Kent Fostering Service Annual Report 2022 and Business Plan 2022 / 2023**

- 1. Caroline Smith introduced the report and highlighted key points, including recruitment, mental health support and the annual Foster Carer Awards ceremony.

She advised the Panel that this was Nicola Anthony's last meeting and that Maria Cordrey would take over the role of Head of Fostering (East), on 1 September. Caroline thanked Nicola for her leadership of the service, particularly through the covid pandemic, which had made a big difference to the way in which the Council supported its young people through that very difficult time.

2. Nicola set out the way in which foster services across the south-east worked together to share learning and best practice and support recruitment, which was an ongoing challenge. The Chairman asked that he be kept informed of any recruitment events so he could encourage other elected Members to attend and support the service in its efforts to attract and recruit more foster carers. Such events were usually arranged by the Kent Foster Care Association.

3. Caroline and Nicola responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) asked how Kent would compete with independent fostering agencies (IFAs) to attract good foster carers, Caroline advised that Kent was now able to understand more about people's reasons for choosing between working for an agency or a local council and was able to be more competitive. A view was expressed that, to stay competitive, Kent would need to take account of the rising cost of living and the impact this would have on foster carers being able to afford to continue;
- b) IFAs had a much larger recruitment budget and their carers tended to take on children placed from more distant home authorities, for example, London boroughs, whereas local councils were able to offer care for more local children and offer them the benefits of family and community support. Nicola added that the service was able to learn from the experiences of people who had decided to move from working for an IFA to a local council, and the fact that people made this move was welcomed. Kent was always seeking to recruit more foster carers;
- c) the most common reasons for people to stop fostering for Kent was that they retired, moved away from the area or decided to adopt instead;
- d) the quality of the team, the improvements made to the service and the organisation of the Kent fostering service were impressive and were warmly welcomed;
- e) asked about services for children who needed more specific support from fosterers, for example, in terms of physical disability, mental health and identity issues, Caroline advised that there was a foster care team which offered an enhanced support package for foster carers of children with physical disabilities and specialist or complex needs. The service was always looking to recruit more of such carers and was reviewing the support package it offered them in an effort to attract more. She assured the Panel

that no sector of society, for example, single parents, trans and same-sex couples, was barred from fostering as long as they met the care and safeguarding requirements and were considered to be reliable and loving carers;

- f) asked how many children with complex needs proved harder to place, and where they would stay while awaiting a placement, in terms of using in-house or external provision, Nicola undertook to look into this and advise the Panel after the meeting. Caroline added that placement would depend on their needs but the service would always seek to place them in a family setting;
- g) recruitment campaigns used advertisements in community hubs such as schools and GPs' surgeries and social media, Instagram, Spotify, prime and Netflix, and made use of QR codes to allow people to access more information. The service worked with district council partners to enclose leaflets with annual Council Tax bills. Those targeted were people working in caring professions, 'empty-nesters' with a spare room to use, as well as younger people, although it was understood that the latter were generally less able to help in terms of economic stability and spare accommodation space; and
- h) the Chairman suggested that it would be helpful for the Panel Membership to include a 'twin-hatter' elected Kent County Council Member from each district across the county as this would strengthen district links, and he undertook to explore this option with elected colleagues.

- 4. It was RESOLVED that the information contained within the Kent Fostering Annual Report and Business Plan 2022/2023 be noted, with thanks.

## **11. Sufficiency Strategy 2022 - 2027**

1. Christy Holden and Caroline Smith introduced the report and Caroline thanked Sian Fox for her work in developing the vision and driving forward the Sufficiency Strategy as an engaging and enlightening document, including the use of children's drawings to illustrate it.

2. The Strategy used the same Nurture principles as Virtual School Kent. Sarah Howell advised that Kent was the first virtual school in the country to gain Nurture accreditation and had been asked by other virtual schools to help them to achieve the same, as well as being asked by Ofsted to contribute to training its inspectors. Christy added that the Nurture principles could also be used in mainstream schools using 're-investment in inclusion' funding. Jo Carpenter added that the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) had approached Kent to learn how they gathered the views of young people, with a view to establishing a national board of young people to shadow the NAVSH.

3. Asked about 16- and 17-year-olds who were not permanently housed in suitable accommodation, Sarah Hammond advised that there was a small number of young people in uncertain accommodation, for example, staying with a friend's family, and the service would check how secure this accommodation was and ensure that they were not left to fend for themselves or in danger of becoming homeless.
4. It was RESOLVED that Kent's Sufficiency Strategy 2022 – 2027 be noted and supported.

## **12. Care Leavers Covenant**

1. Caroline Smith introduced the report and advised that the Panel was being asked to support the principle of the Kent County Council becoming a signatory to the Covenant. Nimesh Patel added that support of the Covenant could contribute to Children's Services achieving a 'outstanding plus' rating at its next inspection. Support of the Covenant would enable the 18+ service to establish wider and advantageous links with local businesses and would also raise the profile of the Panel at County Council, which currently only received the Panel's minutes for noting. The Care Leavers Covenant was similar to the Armed Forces Covenant.
2. The Panel welcomed the Covenant and its aims and supported the idea of the Council becoming a signatory to it as this would attract other organisations to sign up and give it their support. Kent could be the first integrated care service to become a signatory. The Panel was advised that the Young Adults Council had been consulted about the County Council becoming a signatory and had supported the idea.
3. The Democratic Services Officer advised that, although the report asked the Panel to agree to adopt the Covenant on behalf of the Council, it would need to refer the issue to the full Council, with the advice that the Panel supported the County Council becoming a signatory, and that it could make a recommendation to that end, before signing could actually be agreed.
4. It was RESOLVED that the principle of the County Council becoming a signatory to the Care Leavers Covenant be welcomed and supported.

## **13. Chairman's closing remarks**

1. The Chairman closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending. He reminded Panel members that he would be happy to receive any ideas for future work and suggestions of groups which could attend a future meeting and perhaps have a representative on the Panel.