

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 13 December 2022

MINUTES of a meeting held online

PRESENT: Trudy Dean (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Rob Barton, David Beaney, Tom Byrne, Tony Doran, Kelly Grehan, Sarah Hamilton, Sarah Hammond, Peter Harman, Shellina Prendergast, Nancy Sayer, Tracy Scott and Caroline Smith.

ALSO PRESENT: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

IN ATTENDANCE: Kevin Kasaven (Assistant Director, Safeguarding, Professional Standards and Quality Assurance, Integrated Children's Services), Leemya McKeown (Assistant Director (Safeguarding Professional Standards and Quality Assurance), Christy Holden, Head of Strategic Commissioning, Children and Young People's Services), Maureen Robinson (Management Information Unit Service Manager), Pritpal Sodhi (Quality Assurance Manager, IRO Service North-West), Theresa Grayell (Democratic Services Officer), and Hayley Savage (Democratic Services Officer).

1. Apologies and substitutes

Apologies for absence had been received from Dirk Ross, Dan Bride, Alison Farmer, Lesley Game, Stephen Gray, Margot McArthur and Sharon Williams.

2. Vice-Chairman's Announcements

1. The Vice-Chairman advised that she would be leading the meeting as the Chairman was unable to attend. The meeting had been moved at short notice from physical to online to avoid participants needing to travel across the county in inclement weather on potentially dangerous roads and pavements.

2. She also asked the Panel to agree that an agenda setting be held at the end of the meeting, and that this then become the regular method of agenda setting. This was agreed.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2022

1. It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2022 are correctly recorded. There were three points arising:

- a) minute 2, para 1 - the Vice-Chairman advised that she supported the Chairman's plans for the future role of the Vice-Chairman and for the role to be taken on by another person;
- b) minute 8 – further detail was needed on the delays to the Adoption process; and
- c) minute 6, para 1 - the impact of the Prime Minister's recently-announced plans in relation to asylum seekers would need to be considered and could be covered in the Cabinet Member's verbal update.

4. Participation Team update

1. Tom Byrne and Rob Barton introduced the update and advised that Georgina Hallam and Kayleigh Williams had joined the team to work with care leavers and adopted young people, respectively. Recent engagement events had been well attended and much enjoyed. Rob Barton undertook to circulate two videos of these events to Members of the Panel. Young people had taken part in role play training exercises with trainee and newly qualified social workers, via local universities, and students had given feedback about how useful this had been for them.

2. The update was noted, with thanks.

5. Challenge Card Update – ‘My Things Matter’

1. Tom Byrne introduced the report and advised that a new Challenge Card had been lodged to adopt a minimum standard of support and facilities that young people needed when moving between placements. Caroline Smith added that Foster Carers were leading on putting this into practice to ensure that young people had their own suitcases to keep, and that bin bags were not used, even for an emergency move taking place at short notice. In this situation, a young person would be given their own suitcase as soon as possible after the move. Training given to Foster Carers would be supported by written guidance. Caroline accepted the challenge card on behalf of Integrated Children’s Services. The new practice could be established across the county very quickly and it was expected that, by the next meeting of the Panel, all Foster Carers would be on board and ready to sign up to it.

2. A previous challenge card, a campaign to establish that all young people leaving care could apply for social housing in any district of the county, was progressing, but liaising with local housing officers at District Councils would take time. Panel Members who served on both County and District Councils could help to move this forward by lobbying their local council. This could also be addressed via the Kent Leaders’ Group, and Sue Chandler confirmed that the group was already aware of the campaign but undertook to raise it again there. Sarah Hammond confirmed that the County Council had a duty to ensure that all young people leaving care had access to safe and secure accommodation but, not being a housing provider, had no duty or power to provide that accommodation. The aim was that, as a young person approached the age at which they must leave care, they could choose to apply for housing in any area and that their status as a care leaver should give them no advantage or disadvantage over anyone else joining the housing list. The Vice-Chairman added that it would be most helpful if every County Council Member were to ask their local District Council what it was doing to progress the issue.

3. The update report was noted, with thanks, and the Panel welcomed and supported the challenge cards and the actions being taken to meet them. A further update on ‘My Things Matter’ would be made at the Panel’s next meeting.

6. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

1. The Vice-Chairman said she was keen to see key performance indicators (KPIs) being reviewed in the light of the Ofsted report on the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) service, and the need to be able to show that any child with a SEND assessment was achieving their full potential. Tony Doran advised that the service had its own KPIs relating to academic performance and outcomes but offered that his future VSK Head Teacher Annual Reports to the Panel could subdivide statistics to list SEND and Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) separately. He advised, however, that comparing special and mainstream schools would give a skewed picture, so a range of performance data could be presented to accommodate this. Tony and Steve Tanner, Assistant Director, SEND, would work closely together to address issues relating to placements and monitoring. This enhanced level of data reporting could be included in the scorecard once a year, when the statistics had been verified.

2. Sue Chandler commented that it would help to be able to get more children with SEND into mainstream schools. Tony advised that the Ofsted report had highlighted positive scrutiny of children in care with SEND and he would welcome any method to raise the profile of education issues faced by children in care.

3. It was RESOLVED that the performance data in the Corporate Parenting scorecard be noted, with thanks.

7. Verbal Update by the Cabinet Member

1. Sue Chandler gave an update on the following issues:-

Care Leavers' events – Sue had attended the 'Aspirations and Pledge' event and had been inspired by the aspirations and commitment of care leavers to make the most of their opportunities. There was a range of pledges to enhance the experience of care leavers and an annual event to celebrate this would next be held in October 2023.

Foster Carers' Awards, 4 November 2022 – Sue had not been able to attend the event but placed on record her sincere congratulations to all those who had been recognised there.

Christmas Appeal – the aim was to raise £20,000 to be able to give every care leaver in Kent a gift voucher. The appeal had so far raised 91% of its target, and Sue thanked everyone who had contributed. Details of the appeal could be found on KNet and the Young Lives Foundation website.

Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children (UASC) – The Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, had announced this morning a new plan in relation to asylum seekers, but the direct impact for the County Council of this statement was difficult to identify at this early stage.

There had been 19 referrals so far in December, a reduction in numbers, which was usual once the weather turned colder, but still above the average for this time of year. It was hoped that accommodation could be found which did not involve the use of hotels. The National Transfer Scheme was operating but more slowly than

Kent would like. Many current immigrants were from Albania, a safe country, although some were claiming asylum due to issues relating to slavery. Kent had assumed corporate parenting responsibility for a few unaccompanied Albanian minors, who would take on the same care status as other UASCs. Generally, there were very few Albanians in Kent's UASC cohort, currently only 5 out of 74.

2. Sarah Hammond added that other local authorities were being urged to establish safe reception centres to provide more suitable accommodation than hotels. She advised that, even if young people did not claim asylum, they would still become the responsibility of the local authority in which they arrived. So far in 2022, 60 Albanian young people had arrived, some of which had gone missing upon arrival, which was characteristic of that cohort.

3. The verbal update was noted, with thanks.

8. Independent Reviewing (IRO) Service Annual Report 2021/2022

1. Leemya McKeown introduced the report and highlighted that:

- a) a key aim of the service was to maintain a stable workforce to minimise the number of times a child in care had to be allocated a new IRO;
- b) due to the increase in UASC, the service had planned to identify IROs who could specialise in working with UASC, and this had now come to fruition. UASC IROs would be based in safer reception centres, would support the National Transfer Scheme and would work to meet children's welfare needs;
- c) work on the Voice of the Child, and to increase participation, had gone on through the pandemic by meeting online with young people. It had surveyed 50 children in care about their experiences of the IRO service and engagement during the pandemic. Other work surveyed IROs to find out what support they needed to have to engage most effectively with young people; and
- d) the LAC review had sought to assess how best Kent could quality-assure its work, using audit tools, and it was planned to build on this work.

2. She then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including:

- a) there were various reasons for a young person not to attend their care review meetings; some did not like speaking about personal things in a group and sought instead to have a one-to-one, while others found the process too formal. Other methods of engagement and consultation could include social media platforms such as Snapchat. Pritpal Sodhi advised that review meetings belonged to the child and the content and style of them would be shaped by the child's wishes. They would take place where the child felt most comfortable to take part;

- b) asked if there were any aspects of the service that they would like to change, Pritpal said he would like to be able to identify a permanent placement for a child earlier. Leemya said her plans for 2023 included strengthening the Sense of Belonging project by seeking feedback (for example, via the LAC review process) before a placement broke down. She hoped to be able to report progress on this in next year's IRO Annual Report;
 - c) Kevin Kasaven added that he would like to see delays in court proceedings addressed, to return to the 26-week target timescale. To achieve this would need good early assessments and would need to address the shortage of family law solicitors available to support cases. Currently, resources were not best placed to deliver the best and fastest process. To improve the pre-proceedings stage, courts would need to be urged to accept a social worker's assessment earlier and move on to hearing the case quicker. Currently, if the process went on for any longer than six months, the whole preparation stage would have to be repeated;
 - d) asked what the County Council could do to help improve this process, Kevin advised that stronger working links between IROs and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) would improve what could sometimes be an adversarial relationship, with the CAFCASS process bringing complications to IROs' work. Sue Chandler added that to do this may require political intervention; and
 - e) asked about the potential impact of parental alienation on a child in care, Sarah Hammond undertook to advise the questioner outside the meeting.
3. It was RESOLVED that the Annual Report and its findings be noted, with thanks.

9. Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2022

- 1. Caroline Smith introduced the report and set out some of the year's highlights:
 - a) the recent Ofsted report had praised the excellent part taken in the inspection process by the VSK Apprentices;
 - b) the 'Aspirations and Pledge' event had highlighted new opportunities, and young people could be mentored by the County Council and its partners to help them achieve their goals;
 - c) the 16+ Awards ceremony had been a major event which celebrated young people. There had been much good feedback from young people and carers about the organisation of the event and the way in which it had made young people feel special;
 - d) the Foster Carer Awards had also been a very successful event to celebrate the care and dedication of Kent's Foster Carers; and

- e) the Christmas campaign this year had been different from previous years in seeking, and achieving, support from local businesses, including John Lewis, Waitrose and the Gallagher Group.

2. Asked what would happen if the appeal were to exceed its £20,000 target to provide a gift voucher for every care leaver, Caroline advised that any surplus money would be used to provide 'welcome boxes' for care leavers setting up their first independent home. Boxes would include items identified by young people as the basic things they most needed, including crockery, cutlery, bedlinen, basic tools and first aid supplies.

3. Asked if care leavers would receive their gift vouchers in time for Christmas, given the postal strikes, Caroline advised that the first vouchers would be posted, together with a Christmas card designed by a young person, on 13 December, so would arrive in good time for Christmas. As the appeal continued and more money was raised, further instalments of vouchers and cards would be dispatched.

4. The Vice-Chairman asked if and when the Corporate Parenting Annual Report would be presented to full Council, as this would be a good opportunity, alongside the Corporate Parenting Panel minutes being included as a regular agenda item for noting, to raise the profile of the corporate parenting role. She undertook to raise this with officers at the next full Council meeting, which was imminent. Sarah Hammond agreed and suggested that this would also be an opportunity for young people to attend full Council to present the Annual Report and address the Council.

5. It was RESOLVED that the Corporate Parenting Annual Report be noted and welcomed, with thanks.

10. Looked after Children Annual Report April 2021 - March 2022 (for the Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group)

1. Nancy Sayer introduced the report and set out key challenges:

- a) the role of designated nurses for looked after children was to give support and guidance to help the care system to achieve the best outcomes for young people;
- b) the Integrated Care Board (ICB - previously the CCG) was struggling to appoint sufficient designated doctors to work with looked after children, as this was a relatively new specialism and there was a national shortage of suitably-qualified community paediatricians who could take on the role;
- c) the ICB had received a presentation from the VSK Participation team, aimed at helping to design a service which best benefitted young people in care, and how best to engage with and support them; and
- d) the number of UASC in Kent continued to impact the NHS's ability to achieve initial health assessments for all within the target timescale, and it was hoped that the National Transfer Scheme would shortly start to move young people on to other local authorities faster, to comply with the agreed

10-day target. 916 UASC had entered the care system in Kent during 2022 and she reminded that Panel that the NHS received no additional funding to support the delivery of healthcare services to these young people.

2. The service had also achieved online training for GPs and practice nurses, which would help them to understand the child health issues faced by children coming into care, and their carers, including the trauma that many children might be dealing with as they left their birth families, for whatever reason, and entered the care system. To spread awareness and keep knowledge up to date, training would need to be widely available and repeated regularly.

3. It was RESOLVED that the Annual Report be noted and welcomed, with thanks.

The Vice-Chairman had lost connection just at the end of the meeting so the Democratic Services Officer closed the meeting and thanked participants for attending.