

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 15 February 2023

MINUTES of a meeting held in the Lecture Theatre, Sessions House

PRESENT: Dirk Ross (Chairman), Trudy Dean (Vice-Chairman), David Beaney, Dan Bride, Tom Byrne, Gary Cooke, Stephen Gray, Kelly Grehan, Margot McArthur, Nancy Sayer, Tracy Scott, and Caroline Smith.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), Christy Holden (Senior Commissioning Manager), Kevin Kasaven (Assistant Director, Safeguarding, Professional Standards and Quality Assurance, Integrated Children's Services), Kayleigh Leonard (Participation Team Apprentice), Leemya McKeown (Assistant Director (Safeguarding Professional Standards and Quality Assurance), Maureen Robinson (Management Information Unit Service Manager), Mark Vening (Head of Fostering West) and Anna Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer)

1. Apologies and substitutes

Apologies for absence had been received from Lesley Game, Sarah Hammond, and Shellina Prendergast.

2. Chairman's Announcements

1. The Chairman advised that conversations had taken place with district and borough councils regarding the promotion of fostering opportunities within Kent and Medway through various events and initiatives including the distribution of leaflets with Council Tax letters. It was confirmed six districts had agreed to provide a leaflet and they were Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Ashford Borough Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Swale Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

The Chairman said it was being explored whether an article could be included in a quarterly magazine for Ashford residents. The Chairman asked Members of the panel for any suggestions and ideas for similar initiatives and said it would be wonderful to engage all 12 districts within Kent. The circulation of posters and leaflets was suggested, and the Chairman asked for a stock of items currently available to take place. Caroline Smith agreed to investigate this.

2. The Chairman paid tribute to Theresa Grayell who was retiring after 40 years at KCC and thanked her for her valuable service to the panel and to the Council as a whole. He wished her all the best for the future.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2022 are correctly recorded.

4. Participation Team update

1. The Chairman referred to the success of the Virtual School Kent (VSK) participation event which had taken place prior to the meeting, and which had included collaborative activities around young people's positive experiences of fostering and the sharing of individual experiences from young people themselves.
2. Ms Jo Carpenter highlighted some future events that the Participation Team would be facilitating, and the Chairman highlighted the importance of the events and encouraged Members to attend where possible.

RESOLVED that the update was noted.

5. Verbal Update by the Cabinet Member

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

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) – Mrs Chandler explained that as of 10 February 2023, there had been 38 UASC referrals since the beginning of February 2023 and 112 since the start of the year. She said January 2023's UASC numbers were lower than those seen in January 2022, but still higher than any other year prior to that. Mrs Chandler said she expected the county to see a significant number of new UASC arrivals throughout 2023.

Ashford Youth Hub UASC Event – Mrs Chandler said that on 16 February 2023 the Council would be holding another event for UASC young people at Ashford Youth Hub. She said the event would give young people an opportunity to play sports, socialise and make connections with others who had been through similar experiences to them. Mrs Chandler said she would be dropping in on the event to meet the young people and the staff supporting them, and emphasised the importance of these kinds of events to the mental health of UASC young people.

Uplifts in Government Funding for Care Leavers – On 2 February 2023 the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing announced that from April this year, the leaving care allowance would be increased from £2,000 to £3,000. For care leavers undertaking apprenticeships, there would be an increase to the bursary available from £1000 to £3,000. Mrs Chandler said both increases were very much welcomed for care leavers and would help them to set up home independently and successfully transition into the world of work.

2. Asked whether there was a separate type of allowance for university or other types of education for care leavers, it was noted that there was a local offer for care leavers specific to each local authority.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

6. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

1. Ms Maureen Robinson introduced the Performance Scorecard for Children in Care for November 2022 and said this included the latest comparative data published on 17 November 2022 and covered the period April 2021 to March 2022.
2. Ms Robinson highlighted several areas to provide some context to the report. She said Kent had the third highest number of Children in Care in England, and Kent's rate of Children in Care per 10,000 had increased, from a rate of 48 in 2020/21 to 53 in 2021/22 and remained lower than the average for England. Ms Robinson explained that if Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) were excluded from the current rate it would be considerably lower and Kent had the highest number of UASC Children in Care which was considerably higher than the next highest local authority. She said Kent had the highest number of Care Leavers in England.
3. Ms Robinson explained that Kent's performance against the measures included within the national comparative dataset was either in line with, or above, the average rates for England. There were a couple of performance measures where this was not the case and they were Placement Stability (3 or more placement moves in the previous 12 months), Percentage LAC identified as having a substance misuse problem during the year, and Percentage of children looked after who had a statement of SEN/ EHCP.
4. Members discussed Placement Stability in Kent, and Mr Kasaven provided an explanation behind the reasons and factors relating to placement moves and the recording of data. Ms Robinson provided clarity around the data including planned and unplanned moves and agreed to provide a breakdown of data in the next report. Ms McKeown explained there was a working group which looked at improving placement stability and which was developing proposals for improvement. It was agreed that a report exploring the matter in more depth would be brought back to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
5. A discussion took place around the vacancy rate of social workers within Kent and nationally, the strategies that were in place, and the methods being developed within the Council to recruit and retain permanent social workers.
6. Members discussed the delay in issuing Education, Health and Care Plan's (EHCP's) and whether Children in Care should be prioritised. It was noted that it was important that all EHCP's were delivered in a timely way and that the EHCP was not completed until an education placement was decided. Nancy Sayer said she would investigate the concern raised by Members that health care assessments were a delaying factor in the timely completion and issuing of the EHCP and report back to the Panel.
7. Asked for clarity regarding the definition of 'statistical neighbours', Ms Robinson said they were pre-defined and used to produce the comparative data. Data for authorities such as Swindon and Lancashire (who were not statistical neighbours) was used separately to provide individual comparisons.

RESOLVED that the performance data in the Corporate Parenting Scorecard be noted.

7. Missing Episodes – Performance Report

1. Ms Bride introduced the Missing Episodes Performance Report which included an analysis of the missing episodes of Kent's children who were in care, and the processes and responses of Kent's services to missing episodes to manage risk and reduce missing episodes.
2. Ms Bride explained that historical and present-day data from Power BI, KCC's platform for business intelligence was used to provide the analysis. A cross-directorate working group reviewed the Return from Missing Conversation processes and following a period of system testing, these changes 'went live' in mid-July 2022. There were approximately 1,200-1,400 children in care at any one time placed in Kent by other local authorities and these children had been excluded from further analysis as Kent did not hold Corporate Parenting responsibility for them.
3. Ms Bride highlighted an area for concern where children went missing for more than a day. She explained that as at 5 January 2023 there were 112 children and young people currently missing, and said 70% of those were UASC and 105 were male. Ms Bride explained that practitioners offer children a 'return conversation' within 72 hours of their return from missing. She explained children were not obliged to have a conversation and there were therefore challenges in achieving the target. The biggest response came from Children in Care. The cross directorate working group had analysed responses to improve those conversations which in turn could tackle the issues why the missing episodes occurred and prevent them from happening again.
4. A Member asked for further detail regarding when a child in care was considered missing and after what timeframe a report was made, and it was clarified that each recorded missing episode included the police being contacted. It was noted that some missing episodes included circumstances where the child or young person did not consider themselves to be missing, and it was recognised that even in those circumstances that data was helpful in supporting the child.
5. The Panel discussed when and how (for example by calling 101 or online) young people were reported missing, and if foster carers were required to report children missing to the Police. Mr Kasaven agreed to investigate the process and report back to the Panel.
6. The data per day of missing episodes that was recorded included historical cases and the Chair asked for a breakdown to show the difference between historical and present day. Mr Kasaven agreed to request this data.

RESOLVED that the Missing Episodes Performance Report be noted.

8. Overview of the National Safeguard Review

1. Ms Leemya McKeown introduced the Overview of the National Safeguard Review report and presented a series of slides.
2. Ms McKeown explained the purpose of the National Child Safeguarding Review Panel which was to undertake a national review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential specialist schools which were registered as children's homes. She provided an overview of Phase 1 of the Panel and summarised the findings and subsequent actions. Ms McKeown explained the Quality Care Review measured the quality and safety of placements of disabled children in a home and school setting, and a questionnaire had been designed by Kent Analytics for completion by social workers. The questionnaire consisted of a series of questions based on areas identified by the Department for Education and areas in the questionnaire included Written Plans and Reviews, Opinions of the Child, their families and professionals around them, and Safeguarding. Ms McKeown explained that 17 placements in total were reviewed, and the questionnaire contained a series of closed questions (e.g. yes/no questions) and a series of open questions where respondents could complete further work. Ms McKeown provided a summary of the results.
3. The Chairman asked about a safe setting in which children were asked to share their views and Ms McKeown said different ways of connecting with children was explored to encourage them to do so, and Mr Kasaven went on to explain how this could be achieved, for example within schools.
4. It was noted that a Phase 2 report would be due in March which would look at any issues and recognised that far away placements involved more risk. The importance of health and children's social care working closely together was discussed.

RESOLVED that the Overview of the National Safeguard Review report be noted.