

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL– 01 April 2025

MINUTES of the meeting held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.

PRESENT: Shellina Prendergast (Chair), Gary Cooke, Dylan Jeffrey, Sarah Hamilton, Sarah Hammond, Caroline Smith, Ingrid Crisan, Tracy Scott, Stephen Gray, Dan Bride, Kayleigh Leonard and Tom Byrne.

ALSO PRESENT: Sue Chandler (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services).

IN ATTENDANCE: Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), Alice Gleave (Interim Assistant Director for SEND Operations), Leemya McKeown (Assistant Director, Safeguarding Professional Standards and Quality Assurance), Kevin Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Roxanne Hills (Designated Nurse for Looked after Children) and Georgia Humphreys (Democratic Services Officer).

Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies had been received from Mr Brazier, Mr Love, Mr Bartlett, Mr Horton, Mr Passmore, Mr Beaney and Ms Sayer for whom Ms Hills was present as substitute.

Ms Hamilton, Ms Bride and Ms Scott were in attendance virtually.

Chair's Announcements

1. The Chair asked the Chairman of the Council to mention the young people who attended Parliament to address issues of importance and the hard work of the apprentices at the last meeting of the County Council.
2. The Chair shared that the Vice-Chairman had recently invited unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) from the Maple Rise Reception Centre on a local litter pick and to a birdwatching club meeting.
3. The Chair commended the work of Mr Cooke, who was invited to address the Panel. Mr Cooke reflected on his time as a Councillor and as a Corporate Parent.

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2025

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

Participation Team update

1. Ms Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, CYPE, and her team introduced the report and gave an overview of its content.
2. Ms Carpenter introduced Karmel, an apprentice, to the Panel and asked that the apprentices attend the next meeting of the Panel to discuss their meeting in Parliament. Additionally, noting that Nathan, an apprentice, had finished his assessment level three, achieving distinctions.
3. There was no longer a requirement for Maths and English GCSE's to achieve the Apprenticeship Framework Qualification, this would allow more young people to take part in the qualification.
4. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Ms Carpenter explained that the service had good links with Kent Refugee Action Network (KRAN), there was a joint project to celebrate Kent Refugee Week.
 - b. Ms Carpenter shared that it was found that young people had concerns over independence. These included:
 - i. the ability to drive, young people were to be taken to Bluewater Shopping Centre to an experience where those aged over 14 can try driving on a track.
 - ii. travelling independently, parents and carers had anxiety at the thought of their young people travelling alone, the team had planned to take the young people to London over the summer.
 - iii. being safe when alone at night and being able to navigate Google Maps.
 - iv. concerns about life post-18 years of age.
 - c. Ms Carpenter shared that all of the data collated from the adoption group's work with Kooth was brought back to Adoption Partnership South East for use for wider work and training for parents.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the update.

Verbal Update by the Cabinet Member

1. Mrs Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, gave a verbal update on the following:
 - a. A thematic review of young people in the justice service was undertaken. In Kent it found many cases of good practice of youth justice services, as well as some areas of further work, there was a link between young people being out of school and entering into the justice system. The challenge that had arisen from this was to increase inclusive practices in schools to limit exclusions.

- b. In February 2025, eight members from the Kent Youth Parliament attended the Youth Parliament Debate in the House of Commons, alongside more than 300 young people from across Britain and British overseas territories. They debated on topics such as: a raise in National Minimum Wage for those aged under 22 years of age, more political education in schools, lowering the voting age to 16, affordable public transport and free period products. The young people voted to prioritise period dignity and lowering the voting age as their campaigns. Four Kent Youth MP's spoke in the debate and one member of the Kent Youth Parliament was chosen to represent the South East and deliver closing speech for the parliamentary literacy debate.
 - c. Mrs Chandler shared that an Ofsted inspection of Sunrise Children's Home had been undertaken in February 2025, it was rated outstanding in all categories. Mrs Chandler shared her congratulations to staff.
- 2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. The Chair requested that links to the debates be included in the minutes.
 - i. Period dignity: [UK Youth Parliament - Debate - Period dignity - 28/02/2025 - YouTube](#)
 - ii. Political literacy: [UK Youth Parliament - Debate - Political literacy - 28/02/2025](#)
 - iii. Voting age: [UK Youth Parliament - Debate - Voting age - 28/02/2025](#)
 - iv. Living wage: [UK Youth Parliament - Debate - Living wage - 28/02/2025](#)
 - v. Public transport: [UK Youth Parliament - Debate - Public transport - 28/02/2025 - YouTube](#)

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the update.

Children in Care Scorecard 6 month update

- 1. Ms McKeown, Assistant Director, Professional Standards & Quality Assurance, CYPE, presented on this item.
- 2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Social workers had the opportunity earn more money as agency staff, which had the possibility of making the KCC benefits package seem less desirable. The Children's Wellbeing in Schools Bill, proposed an alternative way to work with SEND children, a qualified social worker would not be needed in all situations.
 - b. Mr Kasaven explained that declining numbers in social workers was a national trend.

- c. Ms Leonard believed that young people had struggled to focus on employment opportunities as they were worried about other aspects of adult life.
- d. Ms Hammond noted that green levels in staffing had not yet been achieved, in order to try and combat the low levels, there were countermeasures put in place such as limits on how many times and where staff could move job's within the service. Ms Crisan added that the Government had introduced a ruling which required social workers to work within a Local Authority for three years before they could become a locum social worker.
- e. Ms McKeown was to come back to the Panel with the figures, excluding data related to Kent's UASC population.
- f. Panel members noted that the transition period for young people was extremely significant.
- g. There was effort going into 'growing' additional apprentices as on average, they were more likely to stay within the service for a longer period of time.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the update.

Children in care with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

- 1. Ms Gleave, Interim Assistant Director for SEND Operations, introduced the report and gave an overview of its content.
- 2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Ms Hammond said that children from other authorities placed in Kent caused a significant extra expense for the Council. Moreover, 1/3 of Kent children had SEND needs, compared to 75% of looked after children placed in Kent. Additionally, any additional costs relating to looked after children were the financial responsibility of Kent.
 - b. Ms Gleave was to work with the SEN inclusion team to look into why figures for reduced timetables were higher and bring an update to the Panel at future meeting.
 - c. Ms Hammond explained that Kent used more independent special schools than any other authority, and therefore it was not practical to adopt a strategy that involved the use of more independent special schools. Ms Gleave added that schools supported and scrutinised each other and questioned issues such as reduced timetables, this enabled Head Teachers and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO's) to have a positive, working relationship.
 - d. Ms Hammond explained that there was an effort to ensure all new Members of the KCC were properly informed of their duties as Corporate Parents.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the work of the Virtual School and SEND in supporting its young people.