

## **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 21 October 2025**

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

**PRESENT:** Pamela Williams (Chair), Martin Brice, Dan Bride, Stephen Gray, Christine McInnes, Stuart Heaver, Brian Horton, Isabella Kemp, Adrian Kibble, Kayleigh Leonard, Connie Nolan, Claudine Russell, Nancy Sayer, Tracy Scott, Martin Brice and Caroline Smith

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Chistine Palmer (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services), Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), Marian Smith (Deputy Headteacher – Virtual School Kent), Chris Nunn (Senior Management Information Officer), Maria Olsson (Service Manager – Regional Adoption Agency), Kevin Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Christy Holden (Head of Children's Commissioning), Robin Cahill (Senior Commissioner), Alice Gleave (Assistant Director SEN Statutory Services), Connor Cruickshank (Apprentice Participation Worker), Ingrid Crisan (Director for Operational Integrated Children's Services) and Georgia Humphreys (Democratic Services Officer)

#### **Election of Vice-Chair**

1. Mr Burns proposed, and Mr Kibble seconded that Miss Kemp be elected as Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
2. As there were no further nominations, the Chair declared Miss Kemp as Vice-Chair of the Panel.
3. **RESOLVED** that Miss Kemp be elected Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

#### **Apologies and Substitutes**

Apologies had been received from Mr Chamberlain, Mr Sefton and Mr Doran for whom Ms Smith was present as substitute.

Ms Nolan and Ms Bride were in attendance virtually.

#### **Chair's Announcements**

1. The Chair and the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services were working to get the poster provided by the Participation Team at the previous meeting framed and displayed in Sessions House.

#### **Minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 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 provided the Panel with an overview of the various activities and events that had been held. Additionally, the successes of various young people were highlighted, as were the awards presented at the Virtual School Kent (VSK) Pre-16 Awards Ceremony 2025, at which the Chairman of the Council, KCC officers and members of the Panel were in attendance.
2. The Participation Team shared a video which highlighted the VSK Pre-16 Awards 2025.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. Members of the Panel congratulated the Team for their hard work and achievements.

RESOLVED that the Participation Team update was noted.

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

1. Mrs Palmer, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, gave a verbal update on the following:
  - a. The new Kent Fostering Film, 'The Run' was launched and played to the Panel. It was made in collaboration with local authorities across the county, the message emphasised the importance of foster carers, encouraging those who could to sign up.
  - b. On Friday 10<sup>th</sup> October, in recognition of World Mental Health Day, over 170 young people from 20 secondary schools across Kent participated in the annual Big Mental Health Conversation. Organised by the KCC i-THRIVE and Participation Team, the event featured a series of interactive workshops aimed at promoting wellbeing and fostering open, supportive discussions around mental health.
  - c. The CYPE Children's Services Awards, held on 16 October, recognised the hard work of Children's Services and those who support them, across the county.
  - d. From August to October, Mrs Palmer visited the Young Lives Foundation with the Chairman of the Council, the Children's Short break Unit at Fairlawns in Ashford, St Peter's House in Broadstairs and Swanscombe Family Hub.

RESOLVED that the verbal updates were noted.

## **Kent CIC in the statutory school years with an EHCP - Access to Education**

1. Ms Smith, Deputy Headteacher – Virtual School Kent, presented the bi-annual report. She noted pupil numbers remained stable, with 33% of Key Stage 3 pupils holding an EHCP. It was highlighted the tracker used to monitor children in care not in suitable education had shown an increase. In response to this, collaborative work took place with colleagues in SEN and social care to identify and address barriers to education. It was recognised some cases proved difficult to resolve, requiring escalation at a county level, often due to a lack of provision. A Year 11 partnership meeting had been held to discuss onward destinations for Key Stage 4 pupils, alongside a Post-16 SEN partnership meeting.
2. Ms Gleave, Assistant Director of SEN Statutory Services, added that work in specific areas led to an increase in the percentage of children in care receiving EHCPs within the 20-week timeframe. Ongoing training was implemented to improve the quality of social care advice received by the service. Annual reviews were steadily improving, with updates to EHCPs for children in care progressing well. The role of the Designated Social Care Officer was highlighted, who used a tracker to monitor children in care and collaborated with SEN officers where challenges around placements or tuition had arisen.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. When asked whether the number (58.9%) of children in care in Kent without an EHCP was due to insufficient places and delays in the construction of two new special schools. It was said Kent had a sufficiency plan in place, and while the two special schools were expected to come on board, the delays caused a knock-on effect for existing special schools. Additional work was being undertaken to support mainstream settings in equipping children appropriately and support services were available to assist both children and schools with transitions. Mr Kasaven confirmed there were ongoing discussions with the Department for Education regarding the two special schools and explained the strategy aimed to keep children in mainstream schools where possible, ensuring adequate provision and maintaining existing relationships.
  - b. Mr Kasaven explained the opening of the two special school would not fully address or resolve the overcrowding issues.
  - c. Ms Gleave was to come back to the Panel with figures related to the average time taken to secure suitable school placements after an EHCP was received. It was said a large proportion of children would remain at their pre-existing school placement after receiving an EHCP.
  - d. In order to provide support to those students that transfer schools after receiving an EHCP, support officers were in place to ensure there was

a proper goodbye from the first school and welcome and support from the new school. It was recognised schools were a safe space for children and young people, aids for the transition such as memory books were maintained to ensure they had memories. In some cases visits to the new school outside of school time could be arranged, additionally the presence of one designated adult, that the young person could go to, was said to ease the transition. Ms Gleave added SEN Inclusion Advisors supported schools with transition plans to ensure the transition was smooth and the school were appropriately equipped before the child started.

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

### **KCC's Sufficiency Strategy 2025 to 2028**

1. Ms Holden, Head of Children's Commissioning and Mr Cahill, Senior Commissioner, introduced the Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2028. It was explained the purpose of the strategy was to ensure KCC met its statutory responsibility to ensure every Child in Care, Child in Need and Care Leaver had access to safe and suitable accommodation. The six pillars of reform from the Government's 2023 'Stable Homes Built on Love' strategy were highlighted and explained, as the foundation of this strategy.

RESOLVED that the report and the Sufficiency Strategy 2025 to 2028 were noted and endorsed.

### **Adoption Partnership South East, Regional Adoption Agency**

1. Ms Smith, Assistant Director of Corporate Parenting and Ms Olsson, Service Manager – Regional Adoption Agency, introduced the report and gave an overview of the work of Adoption Partnership South East (APSE) between 2024 to 2025.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. Ms Olsson explained six sibling pairs came through with an adoption plan from 2024-25. Ms Smith shared the service had a list of adopters who were ready, assessed and approved, work was done with Medway and Bexley to increase the pool of adopters.
  - b. In terms of training to support adopters who would adopt sibling pairs, Ms Olsson explained the service offered training, additionally support was offered to staff to ensure they could recognise sibling pairs that had to remain together.

RESOLVED that the information contained within the report was noted.

### **Children in Care Scorecard 6 month update**

1. Mr Nunn, Senior Management Information Officer, introduced the report, providing the Panel with an overview of the purpose of the scorecard and how it was produced. Additionally, Mr Nunn explained that out of the 29 Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), ten were green, thirteen amber and six red, three of those indicators had significant changes from the last update. It was explained the six red indicators had additional commentary provided by the service.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. When asked about the length of time between children entering care and the court authority to place them for adoption. Mr Kasaven explained that when a child started their journey of being looked after, day one was the first court date, hearings could take up to two years to take place due to numerous factors, including court timings and the availability of a Judge. Additionally, the Coronavirus Pandemic was identified as a factor that impacted the timescales of the court cases.
  - b. The percentage of Initial Health Assessments completed within the 20 working day statutory timeframe was monitored monthly rather than on a rolling basis. Ms Sayer, Associate Director and Designated Consultant Nurse for Looked after Children and UASC (NHS Kent and Medway ICB), explained the high number of children placed in Kent by other local authorities contributed to increased demand, with responsibility falling on Kent to ensure these children were seen. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) were a significant factor in the level of demand, as processing their cases took time. Mr Kasaven highlighted the challenge of obtaining consent within five days, which could delay assessments. Kent was receiving around 3,000 children into care annually, with approximately 1,300 placed by other authorities. The cost of placements in Kent was high, and competition from other local authorities funding premium rates priced Kent out of the market. The number of children requiring assessments who did not belong to Kent contributed to delays.
  - c. When asked about the data for the average number of days between becoming looked after and placement order compared to the target. Mr Nunn explained the target of 250 days was challenging, it was highlighted the national average was 350 days, the service was looking to adjust the target to be more inline with the national average.
  - d. In response to the red indicator, of the percentage of children in care placed within 20 miles from home, Mr Kasaven was to provide data of placement distances at a later date, highlighting the aim was to keep children within 30 miles.

- e. When asked if the Local Authority raised concerns around funding and placing children further than needed with Central Government. Mr Kasaven explained the Association of Directors Children's Services (ADCS) collected views from all members and provided by way of formal letter the nationwide problem to the Department of Education (DfE). It was highlighted that due to the Sense of Belonging Regulations, smaller local authorities felt less pressure to develop or improve their own SEN provision, which added pressure on larger authorities, such as Kent, to deliver the services for other local authority children.
- f. Ms Smith recognised recent recruitment drives within the 18+ Care Leaving Service were unsuccessful. The staffing issues were due to reasons such as long term sickness and maternity leave. It was explained recruiting Personal Advisors was difficult due to a competitive market, with London boroughs offering higher salaries. Some vacancies were successfully filled and contingency measures were in place, including support from other specialists within the service to ensure continuity and prevent any negative impact from staffing gaps. Additionally, efforts were made to increase the number of apprenticeship and work experience opportunities. It was hoped these measures would help improve performance and return the service to a green rating.

RESOLVED that the proposed performance measures and targets were noted and agreed.