

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Swale 3, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 27 April 2011.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, Mr R Brookbank, Mrs P T Cole, Mr G Cooke, Mr P W A Lake, Mr M J Vye, Mrs C J Waters, Mr M J Whiting Mrs J Whittle

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Brightwell (Policy & Performance Manager - Looked After Children), Mrs J Doherty (Policy Manager), Mr T Doran (Head Teacher of Looked After Children - VSK), Mr A Pettigrew (Senior Manager), Mr A Speller (CEO, The Young Lives Foundation), Mrs L Totman (Head of Corporate Parenting), Mr D Waller (Directorate Manager: Governance, Member Support & Communication) Ms D Fitch (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Policy Overview))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Election of Chairman

(Item)

Mrs A D Allen was elected Chairman of the Panel

2. Terms of Reference, agreed by County Council on 6 April - to be endorsed by the Panel

(Item 2)

RESOLVED that the terms of reference as agreed by the County Council on 6 April 2011 be endorsed.

3. Membership and Officer Attendance

(Item 3)

(1) The Chairman reminded the Panel that it was also intended to include young people and foster carers as Members of the Panel, but it was important that the Membership of the Panel did not become too large to be effective. Reports should be written in a way that made them easily understood by young people and foster carers who would not be use to local government terminology.

(2) Mr Speller confirmed that young people from the Children in Care Council were interested in being involved with the Panel but it was important to take into consideration the timing of the meeting in order to enable them to take part. He asked that the Panel to allow a rotating membership from the Children in Care Council. The Chairman stated that she would also be happy to receive items for the Panels agenda from young people. The importance of ensuring that the meetings of the panel were run in such as way as to make the young people feel comfortable participating was emphasised.

(3) Mr Brightwell referred to the issue of consent for young people attending meetings of the panel which were public. It was important to think creatively about

how to involve young people in the work of the panel. The challenge was for the panel to carry out its business in a way that made sense to young people. He suggested the possibility of using video conferencing to allow young people to participate in the meeting and give them the flexibility to just get involved with those items that were of interest to them.

(4) Ms Totman stated that she was in the process of identifying two foster carers to join this Panel and they should be identified in time for the next meeting. There was also an issue of the timing of meetings to enable them to attend as, for example, they may need to collect children from school.

(5) It was acknowledged that there was a need to keep the Membership of the Panel under review and to explore different options to make the meetings as accessible and effective as possible, such as video conferencing. It was important to ask young people how they would like to be involved.

RESOLVED that the County Council Membership of the Panel (Mrs A D Allen, Mr R Brookbank, Mrs P T Cole, Mr G Cooke, Mrs E Green, Mr P W A Lake, Mr K H Pugh, Mr L B Ridings, Mr M J Vye, Mrs C Waters, Mr M J Whiting and Mrs J Whittle) be noted.

4. Children In Care Council Update - Service Level Agreement for Young Lives Foundation.

(Item 4)

(1) Mr Speller updated the Panel on some of the key matters in relation to the Children in Care Council (CICC). The Council had been elected in May/June 2010 and held their first meeting in July 2010. They had now met five times (on a bi-monthly basis). Their next meeting would be held in June 2011.

(2) He stated that the CICC members had requested that young people in or leaving care should be involved in the design and delivery of training and professional development for those who make decisions about their lives in care, e.g. social workers, carers, designated teachers and discussions were now underway with relevant bodies to take this forward. He drew Members' attention to a recent suggestion from the Department for Education that CICC members should be involved in the training for corporate parents.

(3) A CICC online survey of the experience of young people in Kent's care was being distributed via the secondary schools in early May. It is hoped that the findings will be available by early June.

(4) CICC members had also contributed to the formulation of the Looked After Children's Strategy.

(5) The CICC had recognised the challenge of representing and communicating with all Kent's young people in and leaving care. A CICC web presence was currently in development; and the CICC was discussing introducing more localised arrangements with open CICC in local areas, combined with activities, to encourage greater involvement. The young people had also suggested that a hard copy newsletter should go out to all young people in care in the summer. This would

include the findings from the survey, an update on the Children in Care Council, and any relevant changes at KCC. It should be written in such a way as to be of interest to young people.

(6) Mr Speller referred to the funding for two apprenticeships to support the work of the CICC, for which recruitment was currently underway.

(7) Mr Speller informed Members that the CICC had been represented at the recent south east regional meeting for CICC's organised by the Department for Education. Arising from this and other regional meetings, the DfE has sent out templates for CICC's to complete and return that identified seven requests that Children in Care Councils should make of Corporate Parents and five features to ensure CICC's were robust and effective. The Department of Education had suggested that the Children in Care Council should have the right to meet on an annual basis with the Children's Services Director and the relevant Member. He stated that the Children in Care Council had not met with a Director of Children's Services but that they had met the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services.

(8) Mr Speller and Mr Brightwell then answered a number of questions from the Panel which included the following:-

- Mr Brightwell explained that 12 young people had volunteered to be part of the Children in Care Council and they had all been appointed. Now that the profile of the Council had been raised, more young people were interested in taking part so it was intended to increase the membership to 20-25 young people and hold further elections.
- It was intended to have two lead Children in Care members for each area and to arrange local meetings which any looked after child in that area could attend.
- An assurance was given that these local meetings would cover district areas but at the moment they were in the process of looking at where looked after children lived to decide on areas for local meetings.
- It was suggested that the involvement of Looked After Children in Locality Boards should be considered.
- Mr Doran referred to the virtual schools website that had just gone live, which was a good networking tool for looked after children.
- In relation to governance of the Children in Care Council, the young people made it clear at their first meeting that they did not want to elect a chairman for the year; they agreed that the chairmanship would be rotated. Meetings tend to be informal. It was early days for the Council and young people were developing into their role and governance would develop as they became more confident.
- It was requested that copies of the records of outcomes from the Children in Care Council meetings could be made available to the Panel.

RESOLVED that the update report be noted.

5. Virtual School Business Plan and Head Teacher's Report

(Item 5)

(1) Mr Doran introduced his progress report on the Improvement Plan Objectives and gave Members of the Panel the opportunity to raise concerns and issues. He stated that Virtual School Kent had a clear identification with a brand and logo. The logo and art work had been designed by a student at Canterbury College studying fine arts who was a looked after child. She was very pleased that her design had been chosen and had now decided to go to university to study Arts and Graphics. The Panel were shown the design and was very impressed with it. Mrs Whittle was asked to write and thank the designer for her work.

(2) Member of the Panel made comments and officers answered questions which included the following:-

- Mr Doran agreed to supply an organogram of the service at the request of Mr Vye.
- It was confirmed that the Looked After Children Education Advisors and High Level Teaching Assistants all came from an experienced educational background. They would be up skilling associated staff to build capacity. Each locality would have a looked after children specialist nurse.
- Mr Doran explained that resources would be deployed to 6 localities made up of the 12 districts, so some Districts were grouped together and some were stand alone.
- It was necessary to have accurate data to make sure that resources were used in a way that had the maximum impact for looked after children. In west Kent Looked After Children Advisors had to work with a smaller number of looked after children across a large area, whereas in the east Kent they may have 30 looked after children in a single school.
- In response to a question on whether the Integrated Data Set took data from all schools regarding looked after children, and was all information pooled with heath, Mr Doran explained that there were many systems which collected data and the majority were not designed to work together. Work was being carried out to improve the system.
- It was confirmed that all academies had signed up to data sharing.
- In relation to educational attainment Mr Doran set out the figures for looked after children achieving 5 GCSE's including maths and English, these were well below the national indicator. There needed to be a robust intervention package for any child that became a looked after child at key stage 4.
- In response to a question on what support there was for a looked after child in primary school to take the Kent Test, Mr Doran explained that one of the Higher Level Teaching Assistants for West Kent also delivered Kent Test tutoring and had a 100% pass rate. In year 11 there were 2 looked after children at grammar school.
- Mr Pettigrew explained that although Kent children did not do very well at Key Stage 4 , Kent had the same percentage of children in care as our benchmark authorities which achieved better results.
- Mr Pettigrew stated that the exclusion rate for Looked after Children was increasing.
- Mr Doran confirmed that the Personal Education Allowance (PEA) was £500 per child.

RESOLVED that (a) the proposal to prevent the loss of the PEA; (b) that the Panel support a letter being sent to Ministers regarding the loss of PEA from the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services.

6. Update on Looked After Children Strategy - verbal update

(Item 6)

(1) Ms Totman explained that it was intended to take the draft Looked After Children's Strategy to the Panel before it was considered by the Specialist Children's Services POSC on its way to Cabinet and then the Improvement Board. Mr Brightwell stated that as the strategy delivered Corporate Parenting, it needed to be approved by Members. This strategy would fill the gaps highlighted by the Ofsted inspection. It would be a high level strategy which would set the vision and direction for all agencies responsible for delivering Corporate Parenting. At this stage there was a very clear willingness by agencies to sign up to this strategy. The document would also reflect the views and feelings of young people, which had been missing from other strategies. This strategy would clarify the meaning of Corporate Parent so that people understood their role and responsibilities.. The aim was to delegate as much of the decision making for Looked after children to their carers with support, so that decisions were made by people who were accountable to the young people.

(2) Mr Brightwell identified five key issues and challenges:-

1. Current performance
2. New legislation and guidance
3. Rise in the number of looked after children
4. Number of looked after children placed in Kent by other local authorities
5. Obtaining and using information in a better way.

He identified five strategic objectives

1. Working together
2. Becoming life long learners
3. Developing responsible adults
4. Being emotionally, mentally and physically healthy
5. Safe and nurtured in a home setting.

(3) Mrs Whittle referred to the need to have refresher courses for Member on their role as a Corporate Parent.

(4) Mr Brightwell undertook to circulate a draft of the strategy to the Panel on 10 May to enable panel members to feed in their comments before it was considered by Cabinet and the Improvement Board.

RESOLVED that it be the Draft Looked After Children Strategy be circulated to Panel for their comments and that it be noted that it would also be taken to a future meeting of the Specialist Children's Services Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

7. Future meetings

(Item)

Mr Vye suggested that at the agenda meeting Members should agree what they would like Mr Doran to update the Panel on. He stated that he would like an update on Secondary School exclusions at every other meeting and progress with children missing from care twice a year. In relation to these issues, Mr Doran suggested that Members might like to invite Mr Berry to attend their meetings for these items.