

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Swale 3, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 21 June 2011.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mr R E Brookbank, Mrs P T Cole, Mr G Cooke, Mr P W A Lake, Mr K H Pugh, Mr L B Ridings, MBE, Mrs J Whittle, Mr S Griffiths, Mr G Razey.

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms K Kerswell (Managing Director), Mr A Pettigrew (Interim Director, Specialist Children's Services), Mr N Baker (Head of Kent Youth Service), Mrs L Totman (Head of Corporate Parenting), Mr P Brightwell (Policy & Performance Manager - Looked After Children), Mr T Doran (Head Teacher of Looked After Children - VSK), Mr D Waller (Directorate Manager: Governance, Member Support & Communication) Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

##### **8. Membership**

*(Item A1)*

1. The Panel noted its new Membership, which now included more KCC Members, two Head Teachers and one Foster Carer. It was planned that a second Foster Carer would join, as well as two representatives of the Children In Care Council.
2. The Chairman welcomed Mr Cowan, Mr Griffiths and Mr Razey to their first meeting.

##### **9. Minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2011**

*(Item A3)*

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2011 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman.
2. Members were advised of two sessions of Corporate Parenting training for all KCC Members, on 13 and 20 July, and that more dates are planned. A guide to good Corporate Parenting would also be sent to all Members.

##### **10. Dates of Future Meetings**

*(Item A4)*

The Panel noted the dates reserved for its meetings for the remainder of 2011, as follows:-

Wednesday 31 August 2011, 10.00 am  
Thursday 13 October 2011, 2.00 pm  
Monday 5 December 2011, 2.00 pm

All meetings will take place at County Hall.

*Before proceeding to the main business, the Chairman sought and received the Panel's agreement to consider all items as urgent business, as the papers had not been placed on public deposit with the required five clear days' notice.*

## **11. Exclusions**

*(Item B1)*

1. Mr Waller introduced the report, which had been prepared in response to Members' request for more detailed information. Mr Pettigrew, Mr Baker and Mr Doran responded to comments and questions from Panel Members. The following points were highlighted:-

- a) the number of exclusions of LAC from school has risen nationally, but Kent has three times the national average;
- b) the paper only covers schools, but there are many other providers of education for young people over the age of 16. To establish a protocol to address the issue across the whole county, all providers would need to be included;
- c) the Youth Service had been a contributor to the commissioning of alternative education, and now the service also includes the Youth Offending Service, it is able to add a valuable multi-agency element;
- d) Kent has a history of excluding more LAC from school than any of its neighbour counties. This is partly due to the fact that LAC are likely to have more behavioural problems than other young people. Exclusions of LAC place an extra pressure on foster families. The protocol to reduce LAC exclusions is urgently needed;
- e) schools could be seen as having a Corporate Parent role similar to that of the County Council;
- f) it would be useful to look at what other counties have in terms of an exclusion protocol, and to what extent this has contributed to their lower exclusion rates;
- g) the Virtual School is able to support young people well and has had a positive impact of the number of exclusions, being able to introduce specialist expertise earlier;
- h) it is very difficult to write a protocol which addresses the needs of all LAC, as every child has their own individual challenges and needs;
- i) there is always a delicate balance to be achieved between keeping a child in school while problems are worked through and taking them out of school temporarily to address problems, allowing them to adjust (eg if they are in a new placement) and returning them to school when they are more able to settle; and

- j) it is important that the Panel monitors this issue and has further reports on progress. The Panel's comments could be built into the Protocol.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information given in the report and in response to Panel Members' comments and questions be noted, with thanks;
- b) comments made by Panel Members be taken into account when developing the Protocol; and
- c) a further report be brought to the Panel to update Members on progress made.

## **12. Missing Children**

*(Item B2)*

1. Mr Brightwell introduced the report and he and Mrs Totman and Mr Doran responded to comments and questions from Panel Members. The following points were highlighted:-

- a) some concerns were expressed about the accuracy of the data available, as it could be 4 – 6 weeks old. Having an integrated data set would allow much more accurate data to be prepared;
- b) the report did not include vulnerable children who are still at home with their families, and a future report was requested which would set out how the KCC works to support these children;
- c) children go 'missing' for many reasons, and a greater understanding is needed of the reasons for this. Some patterns can be identified, eg many of the LAC who go missing in Thanet are those placed by other local authorities and who have decided to return home. Education Welfare Officers work with all LAC, including those placed by other local authorities; and
- d) work had been done about two years ago to identify the costs incurred in dealing with missing children placed by other local authorities, but the costs were found to be low and so are not a major concern. What is more of a burden is the strain on staff time and resources, which are diverted from Kent's own LAC.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information given in the report and in response to Panel Members' comments and questions be noted, with thanks; and
- b) a further paper on how the KCC works to support vulnerable children who are still at home with their families be prepared for a future meeting of the Panel.

### **13. Update on the Work of the Virtual Head Teacher for Looked After Children** (Item B3)

1. Mr Doran introduced the report and updated on developments since the Panel's previous meeting. He responded to comments and questions from Panel Members. The following points were highlighted:-

- a) Virtual School Kent was formally launched on 23 May and had been the subject of a workshop at the 'Narrowing the Gap for LAC' Conference. This workshop was run by a former LAC and was very successful;
- b) there are now new targets for, and ways of reporting, health assessments. Health assessments must now be taken account of in all care plans, and progress towards achieving the 85% target by March 2012 is monitored monthly;
- c) there are some outstanding IT issues about the way in which health assessments are recorded, and the way in which they would be included in the ICS system in time for a September 2011 launch; and
- d) the team had had success in attracting more than 100 very well qualified applicants for its Higher Level Teaching Assistant posts.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information given in the report and in response to Panel Members' comments and questions be noted, with thanks; and
- b) the ongoing development of services for LAC be supported, and a further report on the difference being made by Virtual School Kent be presented to the Panel's October meeting.

### **14. Draft LAC Strategy** (Item B4)

1. Mr Brightwell introduced the report and explained that the draft Strategy had been revised, condensed and re-focussed since it was last reported to the Panel. He and Mr Pettigrew, Mrs Totman and Mr Doran responded to comments and questions from Panel Members. The following points were highlighted:-

- a) the Strategy is multi-agency and has support from all partners, who must work together to achieve its ambitions and inspire confidence in the young people whom they are trying to help;
- b) one aim of the shortened Strategy is to help young people understand how the decisions which shape their care are made, and by whom. The final document will be in a user-friendly form, and will also exist in summary form, and on-line. It will include pictures of, and drawings by, young people in care;

- c) increased multi-agency working amongst people who are closest to and known by a child will support them in their current placement and reduce the number of times they need to move;
- d) Kent scores well, nationally, in the small average number of moves its LAC make, and no child is moved on unless the move is in the best interest of the child; for instance, to move them from a temporary to a permanent family placement is a good move and not to be avoided. To minimise moves caused by placement breakdown, Foster Parents are given extensive support; and
- e) decisions on suitable placements are made jointly by a whole range of professionals, and the involvement of the child in the decision is paramount.

2. Ms Kerswell commented that she would like to see the Strategy include an introduction written by a young person, and that her aim was for every senior KCC officer to have the Corporate Parenting responsibility included explicitly in their job description.

3. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the draft Strategy be welcomed and endorsed, and the information given in the report and in response to Panel Members' comments and questions be noted, with thanks; and
- b) a further paper on the Strategy's action plan and how the Panel can monitor progress be presented to a future meeting of the Panel.