

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Swale 1, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 31 August 2011.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mr R E Brookbank, Mrs P T Cole, Mrs E Green, Mr P W A Lake, Mr K H Pugh, Mr L B Ridings, MBE, Mrs C J Waters, Mr M J Whiting and Mrs J Whittle

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr A Pettigrew (Interim Director, Specialist Children's Services), 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), Mrs B Bridgland (Work Programme Officer) and Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

15. Membership

(Item A1)

1. Members noted that two new co-opted Members - Teresa Carpenter, a Foster Carer, and Anthony Duncan, representing the Children In Care Council - had joined the Panel.
2. Alan Barham, Head Teacher of the Sittingbourne Community College, had tendered his resignation from the Panel as he found that he is unable to commit sufficient time.
3. Mrs Carpenter and Mr Duncan were both welcomed to their first meeting, and Mr Barham's resignation was noted with regret. A replacement will be sought, so the representation of Head Teachers on the Panel can continue.

16. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2011

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that, subject to the deletion of the first two sentences of paragraph 1 d) of Minute 11, the minutes of the meeting held on 21 June are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman.

17. Matters arising from the Minutes

Minute 13, paragraph 1 c)

Members discussed the issue of health assessments for Looked After Children and received points of clarification from officers. The following points were highlighted:-

- a) the IT issues around the recording of health assessments which were mentioned in the minute are being dealt with, and the backlog of recording is being reduced;

- b) Members were assured that the IT issues had not and do not delay or stop assessments from being done. The rate of assessments being completed has actually increased over this period;
- c) health assessments in general are still an issue for many LAC, with some being reluctant to have them and anxious about what it is involved. More work is needed on the way assessments are approached and the issue is broached with young people; and
- d) communication around the issue is important and needs to be thoughtful and innovative. Suggestions put forward for ways to approach the issue were to use a well-known athlete to promote the importance of regular health checks, to make use of Telehealth equipment, and to hold a Healthy Living Day event.

18. Meeting Dates 2011/2012

(Item A4)

The dates reserved for the Panel's meetings for the remainder of 2011 and through 2012 were noted, as follows:-

Friday 7 October 2011, 2.00 pm (this replaces 13 October)
Monday 5 December 2011, 2.00 pm
Thursday 23 February 2012, 10.00 am
Thursday 19 April 2012, 10.00 am
Wednesday 13 June 2012, 2.00 pm
Thursday 20 September 2012, 2.00 pm
Friday 26 October 2012, 10.00 am
Friday 14 December 2012, 10.00 am

All meetings will take place at County Hall.

19. Chairman's and Cabinet Member's Oral Updates

1. To allow the Chairman and Cabinet Member to update Members on issues which are not part of the agenda, a new item was added to the agenda for this and each future meeting.
2. The Cabinet Member for Specialist Children gave an oral update on the following issues:-

Backlog of unallocated cases – Work on this is proceeding, and KCC has exceeded the target set for it by the Secretary of State.

Early Intervention and Preventative Services Strategy – this is to be introduced in the autumn of 2011 and will be the subject of a report to the Specialist Children's services POSC in November.

New Assisted Boarding Scheme – the scheme discussed at the Panel's June meeting is being developed.

Reducing the number of Looked After Children

Review of Adoption Services – Martin Narey's independent report on this will be considered by the County Council on 20 October, and a report on the issue will be made to the Panel's December meeting.

Review of Children's Trusts

Emergence of Locality Boards

3. Members asked to be given a written executive summary of progress on issues identified by Ofsted, as a way of helping them to identify key points, emerging issues and latest news.

20. Performance and Quality Assurance Frameworks

(Item B1)

1. Mr Pettigrew introduced the report and presented a series of slides. He emphasised the importance of performance and quality assurance frameworks in moving forward with issues identified in the Improvement Notice. He responded to comments and questions from Members and the following points were highlighted:-

- a) Members requested that a simplified summary of the performance report be prepared, to help them identify salient points and prompt questions. The one-page 'dashboard' summary which is used for the Children's Services Improvement Panel could be used. Mr Pettigrew undertook to provide a briefer analysis for future meetings;
- b) this 'dashboard' tool and the issues listed on page 41 of today's agenda would make valuable additions to future Corporate Parenting training for Members; and
- c) a breakdown of information by district, to help Members to understand trends in their own divisions, will shortly be available, and could be useful for Children's Trusts and Locality Board.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information given in the report and presentation and in response to Members' comments and questions be noted, with thanks;
- b) the frameworks be endorsed; and
- c) the summary report and toolkit items requested by Members be developed.

21. Progress on delivering the Improvement Plan targets and Ofsted's requirements

(Item B2)

1. Mrs Totman introduced the report and, with Mr Pettigrew and Mr Brightwell, responded to comments and questions from Members. The following points were highlighted:-

- a) a protocol is being developed by the KCC to reclaim money spent on CAMHS services for young people placed in Kent by other local authorities;
- b) some information is noted in the report as being 'unavailable'. This is supplied by other agencies and there is some delay in it being passed on, although Members were assured that there is no barrier to information being passed on;
- c) Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) could be tasked with pressing for the completion of initial health assessments for young people entering care, as the first assessment is the most important;
- d) although the KCC would welcome an increase in the number of IROs, more important aims are to reduce the number of Looked After Children and increase the number of social workers;
- e) good school attendance is vital for a LAC, and attendance is closely monitored. The first year of monitoring had shown good progress in addressing this issue. Failure to attend school is a useful first indicator of other problems; and
- f) although Ofsted recommended that more information sharing should go on, Kent is already very innovative in the way it shares information, eg between schools and social services. Reports presented to the Panel are necessarily limited to information about LAC.

2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to Members' comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

22. Developing Corporate Parenting in KCC (Item B3)

1. Mr Brightwell introduced the report and the 'Ten Questions' document, and he, Mr Pettigrew, Mrs Totman and Mr Doran responded to comments and questions from Members. The following points were highlighted:-

- a) the Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill will, if it becomes legislation, give LAC status to all young people held in custody in Kent. KCC will be required to take on increased costs and responsibility, but increased funding will not follow automatically but will be reliant on results, taking the form of reimbursement of outlay. The cost of keeping a young person in custody is £214 per day. Panel Members will be supplied with a summary of the Bill, and the impact of it will be the subject of a future report to the Panel;
- b) Kent scores better than many other local authorities in the stability of its placements and in limiting the number of times a child is moved;

- c) although Kent has a higher number of LAC than some other local authorities, the majority of its cases tend to be less challenging;
 - d) feedback from Foster Carers on Q6: 'How well do your Foster Care arrangements work?' could be collected by including the comments by carers the end of the review form, and via the Foster carers Advisory Board;
 - e) some Members commented that Members' role as Corporate Parents is not given sufficient priority in Members induction, and Members are not as involved as they could be or should be. One question to add to the 10 is 'Do elected Members get the information they need to fulfil their CP role?'; and
 - f) the 2010 Ofsted report had said that 'achievement, attendance and progress were inadequate', but Members were assured that, although only partial GCSE results are so far available, the picture of performance is good. Previous predictions had proved to be inaccurate.
2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to Members' comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

23. Annual Adoption Report (Item B4a)

The Chairman sought and received the Panel's agreement to consider this item as urgent business as the papers had not been placed on public deposit with the required five days' notice.

Mrs V Glenn, County Manager for Adoption, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Glenn introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from Members. The following points were highlighted:-
- a) an inspection of the adoption service will start on 31 October 2011 and last for two weeks. The previous inspection, in 2008, had been very successful and all three recommendations made had been acted upon. Inspectors will wish to meet the Cabinet Member and the Panel Chairman;
 - b) Members asked about plans to consider reconvening the Concurrency Panel, which they felt had worked well but had been discontinued. Martin Narey is looking at this as part of his independent report on the adoption service;
 - c) it was suggested that a working group be set up to look into engagement between KCC and the courts;
 - d) Kent parents who wish to adopt a child from abroad are supported by the KCC adoption service but have to pay for the service provided.

Kent will always assess any relatives of an overseas child who are living in this country before placing the child with adoptive parents;

- e) neither the age or ethnicity of adopters or the ethnicity of the child are considered as barriers to an adoption placement;
 - f) Special Guardianship Orders can be made in favour of a member of the child's birth family in an effort to keep them with their birth family as far as possible; and
 - g) an interim report on the adoption service will be available at the end of September and will be referred to the Panel's *October?* mtg.
2. The Panel was advised that Mrs Glenn will be leaving her current post at the end of November, and she received Members' thanks and best wishes for the future.
3. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to Members' comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

24. Fostering Position Statement 2010/2011
(Item B4b)

Mrs T Vickers, Fostering County Manager, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Vickers introduced the report and highlighted the key priorities for the service. She and Mr Pettigrew responded to comments and questions from Members. The following points were highlighted:-

- a) young people in care are involved in the process of recruiting foster carers, and their input is much valued;
 - b) the fostering team is piloting a scheme to promote foster caring via locals schools, in partnerships with Virtual School Kent, starting with an initial project in Dartford and later in Dover; and
 - c) a review of the IT payment system and the ongoing problems with payments to foster carers has been undertaken, and IT problems are now almost solved. The gaps in performance arising from these issues were not the fault of the staff.
2. RESOLVED that:-
- a) the information set out in the report and given in response to Members' comments and questions be noted, with thanks; and
 - b) the Fostering team be congratulated on exceeding their target of registered foster carers.

25. Promoting Children's Social Care

(Item B5)

Mr I Tucker, Senior Press Officer, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Tucker introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from Members. Members added the following suggestions to those listed in the report:-
 - a) a feature on local radio or TV to highlight the social worker role would help to raise greater awareness of the profession;
 - b) retiring social workers need to have their contribution recognised in a more timely way. Sometimes a letter marking their retirement and acknowledging their contribution arrives some time after they have left;
 - c) retiring social workers could be treated to a tea party at County Hall with the Chairman of the County Council;
 - d) social workers who have given long service could be given a long service medal, in the same way that the Police and Fire Services reward long-serving staff; and
 - e) the 'shadow a social worker' scheme, discussed previously by the Panel, will allow elected Members to understand the social work role. To include District Council housing officers in this scheme would be useful for them, as housing is a key issue in family cohesion, but the scheme must not become too onerous or a burden upon social worker being shadowed.
2. RESOLVED that the suggestions listed in the report be noted and welcomed, and the Members' additional suggestions, set out above, be added.

26. Update on Looked After Children (LAC) Exclusions

(Item B6)

Mr C Berry, Head of Attendance and Behaviour Service, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Berry introduced the report and he and Mr Doran responded to comments and questions from Members. The following points were highlighted:-
 - a) the exclusion protocol is vital to the work of Virtual School Kent;
 - b) data will soon be available on fixed-term exclusions;
 - c) unlike local authority schools, Academies have no requirement to report exclusions, so information sharing must rely on good informal relationships. The number of Academies makes this reporting a big issue;

- d) there is no timescale within which fixed exclusions have to be reported to Corporate Parents, but they always are reported as a matter of best practice; and
 - e) it is a requirement that young people up to statutory school age are offered an alternative placement, eg an apprenticeship, if permanently excluded, but there is no requirement as yet for any such arrangement for young people over 16.
2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to Members' comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

27. Update regarding the work of the Head Teacher of Virtual School Kent (VSK)
(Item B7)

1. Mr Doran introduced the report and responded to comment and questions from Members. The following points were highlighted:-
- a) on 1 September 2011, VSK will become fully operational, with a highly-qualified staff team. The East and West Kent VSK teams are co-located with related local services;
 - b) a review of the assessment pilot will shortly be undertaken and will be reported to the Panel's October meeting;
 - c) September will see the launch of a VSK rewards structure, to which designated teachers will be able to refer;
 - d) Kent has scored well this year against NI 101, with some results still awaited; and
 - e) persistent absence has reduced in the last year, and the VSK team are confident that they can meet the target set by the Secretary of State.
2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to Members' comments and questions be noted, with thanks.