

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 7 October 2011.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mr R E Brookbank, Mrs T Carpenter, Mrs P T Cole, Mr G Cooke, Mr A Duncan, Mrs E Green, Mr S Griffiths, Mr P W A Lake, Mr G Razey, Mr L B Ridings, MBE, Mr M J Vye and Mrs J Whittle

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms K Kerswell (Managing Director), Mr A Pettigrew (Interim Director, Specialist Children's Services), Mr N Baker (Head of Kent Youth Service), Mr P Brightwell (Policy & Standards Manager - Looked After Children), Mr T Doran (Head Teacher of Looked After Children - VSK) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

28. Minutes of the meeting held on 31 August 2011 (Item A2)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Panel's meeting held on 31 August are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

In response to a question, Mr Brightwell explained that it was not yet clear when the Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill will become legislation. Lobbying is currently going on regarding the financial impact of this upon authorities. Mrs Whittle added that more amendments are being made or are likely to be made. Mr Brightwell and Mrs Whittle both undertook to update Panel Members on the progress of the Bill.

29. Chairman's and Cabinet Member's oral updates (Item A3)

1. Mrs Whittle gave an oral update on the following issues:-

LAC placed by other local authorities – meeting with Children's Minister Tim Loughton, who wrote to authorities in July 2010 and has promised to write again, addressing the issue of increasing Foster Carer availability in London to cover the needs of London LAC.

Recruitment of Foster Carers – Members living in North East Kent had reported seeing recruitment advertisements for London Foster Carers on buses in Kent. Mrs Whittle said she would keep a watching brief on this issue.

Assisted Boarding Scheme – a package of bursaries and support is available from boarding schools in Kent, and the children most at risk of coming into care will be first to be considered for places on the new assisted boarding scheme.

Martin Narey's review of the Adoption service – a report of Mr Narey's review will be made to the Panel's 5 December meeting, to which all County Members will be invited.

Children's Commissioning Board – a report was considered by Cabinet in September. Members should meet young people at first hand and seek their views, as the Children's Champions Board had done.

2. Mrs Whittle, Ms Kerswell, Mr Pettigrew, Mr Doran and Mr Brightwell responded to comments and questions from Members, and the following points were highlighted:-

- a) although the number of LAC placed in Thanet from elsewhere in Kent has been a matter of much discussion, concern was expressed that moving them from Thanet should not simply spread the problem elsewhere. Figures show that the number of Kent LAC placed in to Thanet is not as high as often perceived, as LAC placed in Thanet from elsewhere in Kent currently occupy only 11 places in Thanet schools;
- b) Ms Kerswell commented that the issue of LAC placed in Kent by other local authorities was likely to take some time longer to resolve, and she suggested raising the issue of a cumulative levy to penalise authorities which continue to place their LAC in Kent. Monies raised by this levy could be channelled towards health and education services used by these LAC. A report to Cabinet in 2010 had set out the costs of providing health and education services, and this could be updated and used to support the levy idea;
- c) in discussing and promoting the levy idea, it is important to present a balanced view. The administration and costs of accommodating vulnerable children must not be seen to outweigh the importance of caring for them in a secure and supportive placement, as many find themselves far from home;
- d) the sufficiency duty requires all local authorities to have sufficient Foster Care places to accommodate their own LAC, and discussion between London Boroughs (the Pan London Group) had set out three aims:- to set clear targets for Foster placement provision, to share their residential provision with neighbouring Boroughs to make optimum use of any spare capacity, and to check the accuracy of data;
- e) Members requested data on the age breakdown of the LAC in Kent, and *a briefing paper will be prepared for the Panel's next meeting;*
- f) having a large number of LAC in one school can have a detrimental effect on the academic performance of LAC and other children;
- g) a report prepared on the placement costs levied by London Boroughs, compared to those levied by Kent, could be updated and re-used to help address the issue again. *This report will be updated and brought to the Panel's December meeting; and*

- h) when asking other authorities to reduce the number of LAC they place in Kent, it is important to remember that Kent places 10% of its own LAC out of county, and it should be prepared to 'put its own house in order first'. Data prepared for budget monitoring at the POSC had shown that 99% of Kent's out of county placements are made for one of three reasons:- to place a child with relatives, or to access medical facilities or specialist services not available within Kent. Members asked to be told where these placements are made.
3. RESOLVED that the information given in the update and in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

30. Update regarding the work of the Head Teacher of Virtual School Kent (VSK)

(Item B1)

1. Mr Doran introduced the report and set out the key points in the development of the service since last reporting to the Panel, and next planned steps. A first Achievement Ceremony had recently been held at the University of Kent, for LAC and their Foster Carers. The service had three aims for its immediate future;

- to raise and enhance its profile,
- to improve service delivery by co-locating with other agencies and improving the ratio of staff to LAC from 1:750 to 1:30 – 50, and
- to improve quality assurance and accountability with six raising attainment plans based on Kent Challenge models and by co-ordinating the use of the pupil premium via Personal Education Plans (PEPs).

2. Mr Doran responded to comments and questions from Members, and the following points were highlighted:-

- a) good links and relationships with school staff are key to the success of VSK, and the aim is to upskill designated teachers within a school and develop a sustainable locality model which will help schools to solve any problems themselves. Upskilling teaching staff will benefit all pupils, not just LAC;
- b) Head Teachers welcome VSK as it helps them to support more LAC, but its presence puts pressure on other services. The aim is to achieve unified and integrated services to address this;
- c) VSK cannot hold schools to account for the way in which the pupil premium (currently £435 per LAC per annum) is used, as it is not ring-fenced. Ofsted looks at the service from the point of view of information sharing via the PEP. The electronic PEP includes the pupil premium, so this can be addressed in the future;
- d) the national target for LAC school attendance is 80%, and Kent just beats this but should strive to better this by setting its own target of 90-95%. As Corporate Parents, KCC Members should set challenging targets for VSK and ask for future reports to measure attendance against a 95% target. Mr Doran explained that VSK is obliged to report

attendance against the national target of 80% but also measures higher ratings and will report these to Members;

- e) one key action for VSK is to improve the stability of placements and minimise moves, as these two elements have a huge impact on a LAC's schooling;
- f) some VSK staff are on duty and available every day, including school holidays, and others work in term time only;
- g) VSK works with academies in the same way as it works with other schools, working on the basis of co-operation and transparency;
- h) National Indicator data shows that LAC placed by other local authorities perform better at school than Kent's own LAC, although the latter are catching up;
- i) VSK has finite resources and is simply unable to work with LAC once they leave full-time education, but much goes on outside school, linked to the work of VSK, to support young people who are leaving or preparing to leave care; and
- j) Kent's aim is to place its LAC in the best possible schools, and the new Admissions Code for schools will incentivise good schools to take on a pupil who brings with them a pupil premium.

3. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information given in the report and in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks; and
- b) the VSK team and its partners in schools be congratulated on the progress achieved.

31. Corporate Parenting Training - Feedback from previous training (Item B2)

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

- a) Corporate Parenting sessions held so far had been appreciated and rated 'good' and 'outstanding' by those Members who had attended, and feedback had been good in helping to shape future sessions;
- b) the sessions allow good discussion around the role of Corporate Parents, but this would be more useful if more Members attended and took part. Mrs Whittle undertook to write to all Members to encourage their participation in future sessions;
- c) the next three sessions will concentrate on the more intensive Level 2 role, and will link to the quality assurance framework; and

- d) it is still hoped that Corporate Parenting training will be included in the induction training for all newly-elected Members, with refresher sessions at regular intervals thereafter.
2. RESOLVED that the information given in the report and in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks, and more Members be encouraged to attend future training sessions.

CLEARED DRAFT