

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 Thursday, 10 April 2014.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mr R E Brookbank, Mrs T Carpenter, Mrs P T Cole, Mr S Griffiths, Mr G Lymer, Mrs C Moody, Mr B Neaves, Mr R Truelove, Mr M J Vye and Mrs Z Wiltshire

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P J Oakford and Mrs J Whittle

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms M MacNeil (Director, Specialist Children's Services), Mr P Brightwell (Head of Quality Assurance, Children's Safeguarding Team), Ms S Hammond (Assistant Director of Specialist Children's Services, West Kent), Ms S King (Assistant Director East Kent, Children in Care), Ms T Vickers (County Fostering Manager) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

10. Membership
(Item A2)

The Chairman reported that Mr Oakford had not in fact left the Panel, but that he would leave later in the year when he took over the Cabinet Member role to cover Mrs Whittle's maternity leave. The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that she would amend the records accordingly.

11. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2014
(Item A3)

1. RESOLVED that these are a correct record and they be signed by the Chairman.

2. In response to a question from Mr Vye about the importance of exit interviews with social workers leaving the County Council, Ms MacNeil explained that the exit interview process would be reviewed to ensure that all social workers leaving would have a face-to-face meeting with an appropriate person and that feedback arising from these interviews would be carefully recorded and used to improve future service.

12. Minutes of the meeting of Kent Corporate Parenting Group (KCPG) held on 27 February 2014
(Item A4)

1. The inclusion of these on the Panel's agenda was welcomed, and their clarity praised.

2. Mr Vye, a Member of the KCPG, reported that young people had asked to attend meetings of the KCPG. If such meetings were also to include Members of the

Corporate Parenting Panel, the number of people involved would be so large as to be impractical. The Chairman added that the evening meetings which the Panel used to arrange with young people in care had been very valuable and should be resurrected. It was generally agreed that engagement with young people needed careful thought and planning to make it as inclusive and productive as possible.

3. In response to a question from Mr Vye about LILAC (Leading Improvement for looked After Children). Mr Brightwell explained that LILAC had been discussed by the Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC) on 9 April. Two pieces of research were currently underway, one by LILAC and one by the Young Lives Foundation, and these would be combined to give a good overview of participation with young people in care and how this engagement could be improved. *The Panel would keep a watching brief on the development of this research and would review it at a future meeting.*

4. RESOLVED that the minutes be noted.

13. Oral Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)
(Item A6)

1. The Chairman reported that Sophia Dunstan was taking part in the participation days which the VSK apprentices arranged for children and young people in care so had given apologies to the Panel meeting.

2. *A written update would be circulated after the meeting to all Panel Members.*

14. Cabinet Member's Oral Update
(Item A7)

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

Attended meeting of OCYPC on 9 April – this meeting had included a good discussion about increasing awareness of the Kent County Council's Pledge to Children and Young People in Care. A short film had been made of a rap about the Pledge. The meeting had been well chaired by Sophia Dunstan.

Ofsted view on placement at a distance from a child's home – some 8,000 children in care were currently placed more than 20 miles from their family homes, friends and social support networks. There was an urgent need to develop provision to allow these young people to be placed nearer their homes. Mrs Whittle said she had been 'disappointed' by the Local Government Association's response to the new regulations. Related to this was the problem of London Boroughs trying to recruit foster carers from Kent, rather than within their own areas. If they were to recruit more locally, they would be able to accommodate more of their own care population and would not need to make distant placements in neighbouring authorities. A report by the Department for Education was expected shortly and would be considered by the Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee. Mrs Whittle had recently been interviewed about the issue and would be lobbying the Children's Minister further to impose sanctions on those authorities which breach the new regulations, *and would report back to the Panel on the outcome of this lobbying.* She reassured the Panel that Kent County Council placed very few of its children in care

outside the county, and these more distant placements were made only when there was a good reason to do so.

Adoption Breakdowns – recent research had shown up patterns in the breakdown of adoption placements. Mrs Whittle undertook to circulate the research to Panel members, and it was subsequently agreed that *the Panel would receive a report on the research to a future meeting*. A recent television series had highlighted the work of adoption services in the UK and the challenges they faced. Campaigns were currently in place to target those children who were hard to place.

2. Mrs Whittle responded to comments and questions from Panel members, as follows:-

- a) East London Boroughs continued to be the main source of placements in Kent, with Suffolk and Essex County Councils also placing large numbers;
- b) Panel members referred to the known contribution of domestic abuse to family breakdown and children entering care, and members acknowledged the long term effects that such experiences could have on a child's later years;
- c) Mrs Whittle referred to research undertaken by Martin Narey which had highlighted the percentage of the adult prison population which had previously been in care;
- d) at a recent conference organised by Coram, a speaker had highlighted the mental health issues often present in children when they entered care. A check of mental health issues would be undertaken during initial health checks, but a view was expressed that such checks should be prioritised and undertaken as soon a child entered care. Members acknowledged the long-standing problem of delayed or uneven access to children's mental health services and the work going on to address this. Mrs Whittle said she would emphasise the importance of Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) funding to MPs; and
- e) a view was expressed that, in addition to the CAMHS service, therapeutic counselling was also needed. Ms MacNeil explained that emotional health and wellbeing services could meet this need, as this was not necessarily covered by CAMHS.

3. The oral updates were noted, with thanks.

15. The Views of Children and Young People in Care (Item B1)

1. Mr Brightwell introduced the report and highlighted key areas of progress since drafting the report, which included a DVD made by young people in care to update the 'Care to Listen' DVD produced in 2010. The aim of this was to follow the experiences of young people in care over time, in a similar way to the 'Seven Up' series of television programmes, which visited each of a research group of children every seven years. The Democratic Services Officer added that the Leader had

proposed that the DVD be shown to the full Council on 15 May, to accompany a presentation on the new Care Leaver's Charter.

2. Mr Brightwell and Mrs Whittle responded to comments and questions from Members, as follows:-

- a) disappointment was expressed that almost three-quarters of young people in care had said they were unaware of the Care Leaver's Charter. Mrs Whittle agreed that some may not have heard about the actual Charter document but added that most young people were well aware of what they were entitled to;
- b) Members commented that, in future feedback, it would help to know what type of accommodation respondents were in at the time they gave their views;
- c) respondents could also be asked about their plans for future education and employment and what the 16+ service could do to help them achieve them. Mr Brightwell explained that, from May 2014, an online quality assurance audit would include a section for care leavers over 18;
- d) Mr Brightwell added that he was aware that some senior officers viewed the corporate parenting role as being limited to a small number of people, which suggested that more work was needed to extend awareness of the corporate parenting responsibility and what the County Council as a whole could do to support and help children in care and care leavers;
- e) one very practical way in which help could be given would be to support apprenticeships for care leavers, so they could add this to their *curriculum vitae* and compete with other care leavers. Members asked if a target could be established – for example, that each Directorate offer so many apprenticeship places for 16+ care leavers, with the aim of getting them into full apprenticeships at 18. The establishment the new Directorate structure offered a good opportunity to promote a new initiative such as this. The Chairman undertook to discuss this initially with the Cabinet Members for Commercial and Traded Services and Corporate and Democratic Services;
- f) Mr Brightwell confirmed that the surveys had been carried out independently of the 'exit interviews' undertaken with young people leaving care. Although the content of these interviews would be used to shape future service, young people's views were sought regularly at other times. Some 20% of young people leaving care would usually respond to an exit interview, and it was hoped that this participation rate could be improved; and
- g) the importance of meetings between Panel members and young people in care was emphasised, and the wish expressed that these effective meetings should be resurrected.

3. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the views of the young people detailed in this report be noted;
- b) analysis of the findings of the independent survey currently in progress, with the other sources of information available, which contain information about the views of children and young people in care and care leavers, be supported; and
- c) a subsequent report be presented to the Panel which contains the analysis of the above, with recommended actions and a timeline for regular reporting.

16. Ofsted Inspection Action Plans - update
(Item B2)

1. Mr Brightwell introduced the report and summarised the next key steps in the Council's progress from an 'adequate' to a 'good' rating:-

- concentrating on care planning:- plans should be robust and of good quality;
- child-focussed practice, vital to achieve a good rating:- the child should be at the centre of all areas of work at all times; simply asking them their views was not enough;
- staff supervision and oversight, including deep analysis of statistics:- good practice management would be reflected in good quality care plans;
- stability of social work allocation and good quality handover:- internal audit should look at how many changes of social worker there had been in any one year for each child. This could be identified in monthly quality assurance reports, to assess how a change in social worker could impact on practice. The OCYPC had been asked to measure the number of changes of social worker and the impact of these changes. *A report on the outcomes of this research would be considered by a future meeting of the Panel;*

2. Mr Brightwell and Ms MacNeil responded to comments and questions from Members and explained the following:-

- a) Ofsted was not subject to any formal audit process, and variance in the quality of some inspectors and inspection standards had caused the County Council concern in the past. The majority of Ofsted practice, however, was good;
- b) it was not possible to say when the next Ofsted inspection might come but the County Council had to be prepared for such an inspection at any time. Mr Brightwell emphasised that the County Council's social work practice was driven not by Ofsted but by its need to support and make a difference to the lives of children and young people in its care;
- c) at a recent meeting of the KCPG, it had been stated that approximately one-third of the young people in the youth justice system had had more

than three care placements. This statistic was a useful indicator of the importance of making good placements;

- d) the Safeguarding Board had taken on the oversight of practice from the Children's Services Improvement Panel (CSIP), and Mr Brightwell undertook to clarify to Corporate Parenting Panel members the role of the Safeguarding Board in monitoring the four action plans;
- e) Independent Reviewing Officers' quarterly reports were based on more than 5,000 case audits a year. Good core practice accounted for a very high percentage of a 'good' assessment, and the way in which a local authority responded to being given an 'inadequate' rating was also a telling indicator of the quality of its practice;
- f) Panel members asked that the Panel be given a report of the number and causes of placement breakdown over a 6-month period, including the potential contribution of changes of social worker to the number of breakdowns, and the role that the IRO service could play in supporting children and their foster families through breakdown; and
- g) Panel members expressed a commitment that an 'inadequate' rating should not be allowed to happen again.

3. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the progress made be noted;
- b) a report on the outcomes of this research be considered by a future meeting of the Panel; and
- c) the Panel be given a report of the number and causes of placement breakdown over a 6-month period, including the potential contribution of changes of social worker to the number of breakdowns, and the role that the IRO service could play in supporting children and their foster families through breakdown.

17. Trafficking Issues in Kent County Council Specialist Children's Services
(Item B3)

1. Ms Hammond introduced the report and highlighted key issues and challenges in working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and other children at risk of being trafficked (ie moved around for purposes which were not in their best interest). She highlighted to the Panel some patterns of behaviour and areas of practice, as follows:-

- young people entering the country could not be searched but border staff would always remove their mobile phones so they could not make arrangements with anyone who was waiting to meet them;
- most young people who intended to abscond would do so within their first 24 hours in the country;
- the largest group which tended to abscond was young men at the end of their asylum seeking process, who chose to go missing rather than be repatriated;

- most UASC did not tend to abscond; the percentage of this group which went missing was very small, and there was evidence that those who did were not trafficked but made their own decision to abscond; a very small proportion of the UASC with whom the County Council worked had been trafficked; and
- some UASC would abscond sporadically and then return; identifying and working with these patterns was an important part of the team's work.

2. In response to comments and questions from Members, the following points were highlighted:-

- a) all children with whom the team worked were unaccompanied and most were over 16, and very few had relatives in the UK with whom they could be reunited. The Home Office would verify the identity of relatives very carefully before sending a child to them. Young people with genuine relatives tended to arrive with good information about them and were easier to reunite with confidence; those arriving with vague details about 'relatives' were generally less likely to be genuine;
- b) the Home Office was very vigilant in identifying and challenging young people who might have been told to attach themselves to a family travelling together so they did not appear to be unaccompanied, and the Home Office would not hesitate to query genuine-looking families if they were suspicious that this may have happened;
- c) any young person under the age of 18 might have adult status and responsibility in their home country but would always be treated as a minor in the UK, and this would be clearly explained to them upon arrival;
- d) the County Council had a duty of care to any young person under 18 arriving in the country unaccompanied, and, until their claim could be assessed by the Home Office and their immigration status confirmed, they would be assumed to come under the care of the County Council;
- e) mobile phones removed from new arrivals would be passed to the Police, who could then use them to track their movements and contacts. Young people not wishing to be traced or found would usually discard their phone so they could not be tracked in this way; and
- f) patterns of UASC immigration from any country tended to relate to civil unrest in that country; numbers would increase during unrest and decrease once the conflict had ended. Immigration tended also to rise in the summer months, when travel was generally easier.

3. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks.

18. Position Statement: Fostering (Item B4)

1. Ms King and Mrs Vickers introduced the report and highlighted key areas of progress, including the establishment of new teams and a continuing drive to recruit more foster carers. For the latter, and for foster placements, challenging targets had been set. The County Council's fostering service had to compete with independent

fostering agencies (IFAs), and to help with this it had made its fostering website more dynamic. Ms King and Mrs Vickers responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) Kent had to compete with IFAs in both London and Kent, and with London Boroughs to recruit foster carers. This had been a challenge for many years;
 - b) one Panel member expressed concern at the level of payment made to private foster carers in a neighbouring authority, and said this could attract people who may take up the role primarily for the income. Mrs Vickers said she believed the package that Kent offered to its foster carers was very competitive;
 - c) Ms King advised the Panel that feedback from foster carers who had attended training events had been very positive; and
 - d) the availability of respite care was also a long-standing challenge, although Mrs Vickers pointed out that many foster carers did not use it. Good respite care was often difficult to arrange as many children would not want to leave their foster family to stay for a week or two weeks with someone whom they did not know.
2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks, and the Fostering team be congratulated on the progress they have made in improving the service.