

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, 24 October 2014.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P J Oakford

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Segurola (Interim Director of Specialist Children's Services), Mr P Brightwell (Head of Quality Assurance, Children's Safeguarding Team), Mr T Doran (Head Teacher of Looked After Children - VSK), Mrs S Skinner (Service Business Manager, Virtual School Kent) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

38. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item A1)

The Democratic Service Officer announced that apologies had been received from Stuart Griffiths, Geoff Lymer, Roger Truelove and Jenny Whittle. No substitutions had been announced.

39. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2014
(Item A2)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Panel meeting held on 4 September are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

40. Minutes of the meeting of the Kent Corporate Parenting Group (KCPG) held on 4 September 2014
(Item A3)

1. RESOLVED that these be noted.
2. Matters arising: Mr Vye raised two issues:-
 - a) Foster Carers often needed and sought a different type of support from CAMHS from that given to the children in their care, and their needs would need to be covered in any future debate of this issue; and
 - b) the KCPG had received a useful presentation from the Share Foundation about Junior ISAs for children in care, and the Panel was due to consider the same issue at its December meeting, with the aim of raising the profile of the issue. Mr Brightwell added that the County Council was hoping to be able to encourage Kent businesses to offer additional support to Kent children in care, in the form of charitable donations to savings, which would be shared between all children in care for them to access when they turned

18. The Chairman asked about the possibility of making a bid to Children in Need for a contribution to children in care but Mrs Skinner explained that this had previously been considered and discounted. The Share Foundation had been set up by the Government with the express purpose of helping children in care to prepare financially for their future.

41. Chairman's Announcements

(Item A4)

The Chairman made the following announcements:-

- a) Sophia Dunstan had recently given birth to a beautiful baby girl and the Panel agreed to send its congratulations and best wishes to her;
- b) the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been looking into CAMHS and had received a report to its 10 October meeting, which would be copied to all Panel members. Mr Brookbank added that Greg Clarke MP had taken a great interest in CAMHS and had committed to press for the issue to be debated in Parliament; and
- c) the Panel had a number of afternoon meetings planned for 2015 (listed on the agenda and in minute 44, below) and she hoped that the start times could be brought forward to 1.00 pm wherever possible, to help those Panel members who needed to collect children from school.

42. Verbal Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)

(Item A5)

1. Mrs Skinner gave a verbal update, as follows:-

- a) while the Chairman of the OCYPC, Sophia Dunstan, was away on maternity leave, the Vice-Chairman would take over her role;
- b) an agenda for a 'Speak Up, Be Heard' workshop to be held in half-term, on 30 October, was tabled. The aims of the workshop were to increase awareness and the effectiveness of the OCYPC, to write a constitution for it and to encourage new members to join. A good attendance was expected;
- c) events arranged for half-term included a taster day for the work of the OCYPC, a Halloween event at Hever Castle and an event at Kingswood activity centre;
- d) three new VSK apprentices were shortly to be recruited, making a total cohort of six by the end of November. Two of the new apprentices were care leavers and the other had first-hand experience of the issues faced by care leavers. VSK also supported the care leavers apprentice scheme as part of the assisted apprentice scheme; and
- e) Sophia's replacement on the Panel would attend the Panel's December meeting. An informal meeting would first take place between the new VSK apprentices, the Panel Chairman and Mr Segurola.

2. In response to a question about trying to integrate young people in care with other young people in their area, perhaps by encouraging them to enrol in projects such as the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, Mrs Skinner said that some young people in care did not wish to be picked out as such or treated differently from any other young person. Some children in care were on the Youth County Council and

attended bodies such as Youth Advisory Groups, but not as representatives of the care population. Their participation in such groups gave them a way of expressing a view on issues which were part of 'normal' teenage life. However, many young people were unaware of the issues faced by their contemporaries who were in care, so could benefit from some awareness-raising.

3. Panel members expressed a wish to resurrect the meetings which had taken place between young people in care and the former Children's Champions Board, at which informal discussion had been possible. It was important that the Panel should be able to hear first-hand how young people in care wished to relate to and be supported by their corporate parents.

4. The verbal updates were noted, with thanks.

43. Cabinet Member's Verbal Update (Item A6)

1. Mr P Oakford gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

Ofsted review of Children's Centres – the outcome of this review had been varied, with some centres scoring well and some not.

Adoption Activity Day – this had been a great success, with 12 or 13 of the 19 children who attended being matched with prospective adopters. The children involved had been those who were traditionally harder to place, and the success of this day challenged the previous negative media criticism of adoption events.

Meeting with Tim Smith, lead Police Officer for child sexual exploitation (CSE) and Trafficking – Mr Smith had offered an informal briefing for members and Mr Oakford asked Panel members to contact him if any wished to take up this offer.

Day out with principal social worker – a day spent at the local office, at a disability centre and on house calls around the Swale area with a principal social worker had been very enlightening, and he recommended that other elected Members take up the opportunity to do the same. He expressed his admiration for the professional and calm way in which the young female social worker dealt with the aggressive parents of a difficult family. He had seen at first-hand how much of a social worker's time (approximately 70%) was spent on administrative tasks.

Ofsted CSE review – Mr Segurola added that Kent had been one of eight local authorities to receive a thematic review of safeguarding practices and the way in which it dealt with child sexual exploitation issues. Four inspectors had spent a week in the directorate in mid-October, and initial verbal feedback had been very useful. Operation Lakeland and multi-agency working had been praised and there were constructive points around the quality of practice. There would be no formal written report for each local authority but an overall written report on all eight authorities.

2. Mr Oakford and Mr Segurola responded to comments and questions, as follows:-

- a) Mr Segurola undertook to follow up a request by a Panel member to spend a day shadowing a social worker. He supported Mr Oakford's comments about the value of accompanying a social worker for a day and added that social workers were also very pleased to be accompanied as it made them feel valued and supported;

- b) concern was expressed about the level of liaison between Ofsted and the Home Office about the placing of sex offenders. The pattern of placements in Kent by other local authorities meant that children with complex needs and higher risks were concentrated in some areas of the county. Mr Segurola explained that a placing authority was now required to consult the host authority before placing a child, and the effectiveness of this new requirement would hopefully soon be seen; and
- c) a related concern was raised about other local authorities placing vulnerable children in privately-run children's homes in Kent, and the difficulties of monitoring standards of care and safeguarding in those homes. Ofsted needed to be persuaded of these difficulties. Mr Segurola assured Panel members that the issue of other local authorities placing large numbers of children in Kent had been raised as part of the recent inspection, and Mr Oakford said that he and Mr Ireland would be writing to the Government to continue the lobbying about this issue and its impact, particularly in Thanet, which Mrs Whittle had pursued as the previous Cabinet Member. It was vital that the restriction upon placing children further than 20 miles from their home was enforced and taken seriously. Mr Doran added that the placement of many children with complex needs also had an impact on the schools in which they were placed. The new schools inspection regime meant that all schools would now be judged in the same way, with no account being taken of the disproportionate number of children in care or UASC which some Kent schools were required to accommodate.

3. The verbal updates were noted, with thanks, and the concerns expressed were generally supported by the Panel.

44. Meeting dates 2015

(Item A7)

1. The Panel noted that the following dates had been reserved for its meetings in 2015:-

Friday 13 February - 10.00 am
Thursday 9 April – 2.00 pm
Thursday 18 June – 2.00 pm
Thursday 3 September – 2.00 pm
Friday 23 October – 10.00 am
Tuesday 8 December – 2.00 pm

2. The Chairman said she hoped that the start times of afternoon meetings could be brought forward to 1.00 pm wherever possible. *This change was made following the meeting.*

45. CQC Review of Health Services - West Kent, Dartford, Gravesham & Swanley and Swale CCGs

(Item B1)

Ms N Sayer, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, Kent and Medway, and Mr G Wheat, Chief Nurse of North Kent CCG, were in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Sayer introduced the report and summarised the key parts of the CQC report, in particular the areas which had been praised as good, such as initial health assessments to measure a child's state of health when entering care, and areas identified as needing improvement, such as health services for UASC and a central record of a child's health history to which they could refer back in later years. Ms Sayer, Mrs Skinner and Mr Brightwell responded to comments and questions from Panel members, as follows:-

- a) Mrs Carpenter said that, as a Foster Carer, she was always careful to keep medical records for her foster children so they could take complete and reliable information when they moved on. Maintaining good medical records would be helped if there were a requirement in the placement plan to check that records were up to date. Mrs Skinner clarified that every child in care had an extended version of the 'red book' which was issued to any mother upon the birth of a child, in which the child's medical records and other information could be recorded for posterity. She clarified that the new Liberi data management system included a facility to 'cut and paste' medical and other information about a child from one record to another so records could be kept complete and up to date. She reassured the Panel that if a foster carer did not receive such information at the start of a new placement they were encouraged to ask the social worker to provide it;
- b) in response to a question about checking that a child attended medical appointments, Ms Sayer explained that, for a statutory health assessment, it was the joint responsibility of a social worker, foster carer and health visitor to ensure that a child attended, and for other types of appointment, eg outpatients, it was a shared health and social care responsibility. She added that a child would be encouraged to view attendance at a health check as a positive activity, although the difficulty and discomfort experienced by some children having to attend frequent health checks, perhaps due to frequent placement changes, was acknowledged. Mr Brightwell added that, as part of their role, an IRO should check that medical checks for any child had been undertaken and were up to date;
- c) Mrs Skinner explained that all local authorities were required to return the carers' section of the 'strengths and difficulties' questionnaire. Kent had a good record of returning these. A new carer could find it difficult to complete the carers section for a newly-placed child whom they did not yet know well. For this reason, the strengths and difficulties' questionnaire was not the most reliable record;
- d) responding to a question about the responsibility for encouraging good health among UASC, Mr Brightwell explained that there were IROs who specialised in the issues experienced by UASC and who would take on issues around health, as well as educational attainment, eg by reviewing after-school activity. As the number of UASC had increased, the challenge of keeping abreast of these issues had also increased. However, challenges in maintaining good health and fitness were not limited to UASC. Mr Segurola added that impending structural changes to UASC services would seek to integrate them more closely with services for all children in care early in 2015;

- e) the importance to all children in care of undertaking the initial health assessment was emphasised, as they would be coming into care at a particularly vulnerable time of their lives. Initial health assessments should be completed within 20 days of a child coming into care;
 - f) in response to a question about the priority placed upon a UASC's mental health when coming into care, Ms Sayer explained that the initial health assessment would cover all aspects of health and a joint health and social care plan would be established to address any issues arising from the assessment. Vaccinations were a particular priority as many UASC would have come from countries in which organised vaccination programmes did not exist. Mental health issues were not a particular priority. An assessment of all issues would be undertaken at once and referrals to specialised services made, all at the same time. It was possible that some services would take up the referral earlier than others;
 - g) the challenges in addressing mental health issues for UASC were outlined. For support to be effective, a young person would need to be ready to talk about their mental health issues and be open to accepting support. To attempt to address issues too early might lead to the young person withdrawing and refusing to engage. Mr Brightwell added that a fine balance was needed. UASC may have witnessed and experienced traumatic events but could often appear to be less traumatised by them than might be expected. It was very difficult to judge the ability of UASC to cope with trauma. A green paper produced as part of Care Matters in 2006 had included a good description of emotional and physical health issues of UASC and children in care, which had estimated that some 60% of children in care had some existing emotional health and wellbeing issues, and coming into care could add to these. *Mr Brightwell undertook to supply a copy of this paper to Panel members. This was done following the meeting;*
 - h) the Panel had heard previously about the challenges of assessing the true age of UASC, partly due to a lack of formal paperwork available and partly because UASC often did not wish to reveal their age. Ms Sayer added that newly-arrived UASC had apparently been well informed about the checks which would be made when they arrived in the UK and would often refuse to attend dental appointments as this would involve the taking of X-rays, which could reveal their true age;
 - i) the Panel asked that a follow-up report on the outcomes of the CQC review be submitted in six months' time, and that this report include the review work being undertaken by Newton Europe.
2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, the action plan be supported, a follow-up report on the outcomes of the CQC review be submitted in six months' time.

46. Head Teacher of Virtual School Kent (VSK) Annual Report
(Item B2)

1. Mr Doran introduced the report and highlighted the key areas of progress against national performance indicators and the challenges in meeting some of these, including:
 - a) Kent had three times the national average number of UASCs in its schools but no account was taken of this in measuring its GCSE results (many UASCs arrived at a time when they could not reasonably be expected to have settled sufficiently to score well at GCSE);
 - b) the method of measuring GCSE outcomes had changed in the last year, so a clear comparison this year had not been possible; and
 - c) the drop in the rate of GCSE passes had been exacerbated by the fact that resits in November could not be counted towards the overall total.

2. He responded to comments and questions from Panel members, as follows:-
 - a) special schools had a different financing structure to state schools and would apply the pupil premium differently. Foster carers wishing to help children to access services such as music therapy could apply for pupil premium plus. Mr Doran clarified that statutory guidance stated that pupil premium plus was to be used only to support attainment or accelerate progress. *He undertook to send information to Foster Carers about the website which detailed how to apply for such funding, and the Chairman asked that social workers also be reminded of how to apply for this so they could advise other foster carers.* Mrs Carpenter confirmed that many foster carers had struggled to access such funding, for example to help build social skills. *Mr Doran also undertook to respond to individual queries about access to specialist funding outside the meeting;*
 - b) arising from the apparent lack of clarity around the purpose of the pupil premium plus, Panel members asked that an explanation of the use of this fund, the challenges of accessing it, and how its use could be audited, be included in the next report; and
 - c) VSK had recently acquired responsibility for working with 16 to 18 year olds, and Panel members asked that the next report also include an explanation of how engagement with this age group would be approached.

3. RESOLVED that the progress made be noted, and that the next update report to the Panel include an explanation of the use of pupil premium plus, the challenges of accessing it, and how its use could be audited, and an explanation of how engagement with the 16 to 18 age group would be approached.

47. The Views of Young People in Care *(Item B3)*

1. Mrs Skinner and Mr Brightwell introduced the report and summarised the key points, in particular the ongoing challenge of finding ways of engaging with young people and seeking their views without adding to the 'survey fatigue' which had become apparent in recent years. Use of social media and instant messaging technology was an obvious alternative way of engaging, and the IRO service was currently developing an app, but encouraging social workers to embrace new technology was an ongoing challenge. Mr Brightwell responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) a new medium called 'liquid drop' would potentially be very useful as it could convert text to email. This had the advantage of being quick and easy to access and use from a mobile while giving a written record of conversations in the form of an email string. Kent already had a licence to use this technology as it was used by other services;
- b) key corporate parents and service directors needed to find a means of meeting up with young people informally to hear their views. It was suggested that the custom of the former Children's Champions Board, of meeting regularly with young people from the Young Lives Foundation and the 16+ provider, be resurrected. Mr Brightwell suggested that the Panel invite representatives of the OCYPC to a Christmas meal;
- c) it was important to measure young people's contentment but finding a way to do this would be a challenge. Mr Brightwell acknowledged the challenge of doing this and said that, although those who worked closely with young people could usually identify signs of content and comfort, measuring them was a challenge;
- d) although apps were a good way to communicate and gather feedback, a method of collating that feedback, and who should undertake that role, had yet to be identified;
- e) social networking media were less useful for engagement as they brought with them a level of risk around safeguarding issues;
- f) the way in which questions were worded was important; it was difficult to ask questions in a way which could identify the real picture; and
- g) reducing duplication between surveys by different bodies nationally was also important, as young people would not want to answer the same questions repeatedly. However, co-ordination would be a challenge.

2. RESOLVED that the report and the proposed actions be noted and a further update report be submitted to the Panel in six months' time.

48. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Manager's Annual Report 2013-14
(Item B4)

1. Mr Brightwell introduced the report and explained that it was a statutory requirement that elected Members receive an annual report on the work of the IRO service, with the content of the report being prescribed. The aim of the IRO service was to provide subtle support to social workers and encourage improvement of practice. An ongoing challenge was the drive to reduce caseloads, although the average caseload for each IRO had been reduced from 120 (in 2010) to 86 (in July 2013) to a current target of 74. Caseload size was dictated by the number of children in care, which, it was hoped, could be reduced further, although the high and volatile number of UASC in Kent would make such a reduction difficult to achieve. Another ongoing challenge was to decrease the amount of time IROs spent on administration so the time spent with children could be maximised.

2. In responding to a comment that the challenge which IROs were able to bring to social work practice was robust, with the percentage of cases reviewed having risen from 23% to 30% in the last two years, Mr Brightwell explained that an IRO workshop in November would explore the issue of providing an effective balance of robust challenge and support. The IRO service was the only one to have this important dual role; Ofsted challenged service provision but did not have a support role.

3. RESOLVED that the annual IRO management report, and its findings, be noted, and the Panel's thanks for and appreciation of the role that IROs undertake in supporting young people in care, be recorded and conveyed to them.