

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, 13 February 2015.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mrs P T Cole, Mr G Lymer, Mr B Neaves, Ms B Taylor, Mr R Truelove, Mr M J Vye, Mrs J Whittle and Mrs Z Wiltshire

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P J Oakford

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Segurola (Interim Director of Specialist Children's Services), Ms S Hammond (Assistant Director of Specialist Children's Services, West Kent), Mrs S Skinner (Service Business Manager, Virtual School Kent), Mr C Dowle (Virtual School Kent Apprentice) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

58. Membership
(Item A1)

The Chairman reported that Bella Taylor had been co-opted onto the Panel in place of Sophia Dunstan.

59. Apologies and Substitutes

The Democratic Services Officer reported that apologies for absence had been received from Robert Brookbank, Stuart Griffiths and Carolyn Moody. No notice of any substitutes had been received.

60. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2014
(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Panel's meeting held on 9 December 2014 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

61. Minutes of the meeting of the Kent Corporate Parenting Group (KCPG) held on 4 December 2015
(Item A4)

1. Mr M J Vye, who served on the Group and had attended the meeting, highlighted some key points of the Group's discussion, as follows:-

- **Challenge cards** – he would seek a report on these to the next meetings of the KCPG and the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP). Mr Segurola added that Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC) used to cover this issue.

- **Pathways plans** – This Panel would need to know about the recent changes to the format of these. Mr Segurola added that changes to the Pathway Plans template were currently being considered.
- **Changes to Social worker** – This Panel should look further at this. Mr Segurola added that changes were now included as part of the reporting on the scorecard.
- **Child Sexual Exploitation** – Members reported that they had heard there were some problems with getting Police on board. Mr Segurola advised that he had no evidence to support this and that the County Council was in dialogue with the Police regarding the further development of dedicated resources for Child Sexual Exploitation.
- **KCPG/ CPP links** – KCPG would discuss this at its next meeting to make sure that its and the CPP's agendas were mutually supportive. Mr Segurola added that the issue needed further thought.

2. The Chairman asked Ms Taylor to comment on some of the issues raised and Ms Taylor added the following:-

- **Changes to social worker** – young people always preferred to have one person to contact and deal with so sought minimal change. Some young people had experienced many changes of social worker during their time in care. However, where it was possible to arrange a handover period between changes, this had been helpful. A good social worker could be a great inspiration to a young person, and Mrs Skinner gave an example of a former child in care who was now studying for a social work degree.
- Some discussion then followed on **careers advice for young people leaving care**, and Mrs Skinner explained that, now care leavers' services were grouped together, such advice was easier to deliver and monitor. *A report on this issue would be made to the next meeting of this Panel.* Ms Taylor added that some young people in care had been advised by a social worker that they could not go to university as it would not be funded. Others considering university also worried about where they would stay in the holidays. The Chairman commented that a scheme of supported lodgings for young people attending university could help this, and Ms Hammond agreed that holiday accommodation should not be a barrier to applying for and accepting a place at university. Panel members expressed dismay that such a situation should arise and it was suggested that, as well as looking into a scheme of supported lodgings, holiday employment could perhaps be found which included accommodation, eg in the hotel or leisure industry.

3. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Kent Corporate Parenting Group held on 4 December 2014, and the verbal updates and discussion points arising from them, be noted, with thanks.

62. Chairman's Announcements (Item A5)

1. The Chairman welcomed Chris Dowle, a Virtual School Kent (VSK) apprentice, who was attending the meeting as an observer.
2. She announced that the Corporate Parenting Select Committee had recently started its work and said that it would hopefully be able to make some useful

recommendations about how elected Members could carry out their role as corporate parents.

3. She announced that a second sports day would take place on 28 May, organised by the East Kent Foster Carers' Association, and hoped that it would be as successful as last year's event. She asked Panel members to think of any contacts they had in the sports world who could appear at and support the event.

4. She reminded Panel members that they were invited to a lunch meeting with the County Council Chairman on the rising of the Panel meeting, at which they would be able to meet and chat to the eight VSK apprentices.

63. **Verbal Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)** (Item A6)

1. Ms B Taylor and Mr C Dowle gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

OCYPC Constitution – This had now been agreed by the OCYPC and had been sent round to Panel members. A second venue for OCYPC meetings had been established, in East Kent, so more young people could attend, and another venue was being sought in South Kent.

Input into residential events - ten young people would be attending a half-term residential week at the Kent Mountain Centre in Wales. Feedback from participants at this event would help in planning future events.

Changes to activity – events organised by OCYPC would be distributed across the county so more young people would have an opportunity to take part in them. However, there were still some young people who did not attend and so were missing out on an opportunity to get involved and met other young people in care. To give everyone a fairer chance of attending, each was now allowed to attend only two events a year. If they wished to attend more than two events, their name could be added to a waiting list, and if there were spaces left, they might be able to attend. They might also be able to bring a foster-sibling to the event, if there were spaces available, but the sibling would be required to pay to take part, as the VSK-funded events were run for the benefit of children and young people in care. Mrs Skinner added that, because interest from foster families had been identified, it would be good to be able to arrange a separate family fun day for children and young people in care and their foster families.

Thanet social worker service day on 12 February – this had given the OCYPC an opportunity to spread the message about their work.

Recent activity – arrangements were being made for a gliding event to take place on 16 April. This has been negotiated at no cost to the OCYPC. By getting their name more widely known and respected, VSK could benefit from other free or sponsored events. As VSK had now taken on responsibility for services for YP aged 16 to 18, it would be necessary to arrange events suitable for a wider range of ages, and workshops at the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury had been arranged to suit both older and younger age groups.

VSK apprentices – the eight apprentices could take on much more work between them and cover all areas more thoroughly, with two apprentices in each area. They were also now able to do more work in schools. Their aim was to challenge other young people's perception of being in care as being like the TV series 'Tracey Beaker'. Apprentices would visit school assemblies to give children a better picture

of the experience of being in care and emphasise that children in care were not there because they had done something wrong.

VSK newsletter – the spring edition was currently being prepared and would shortly be issued. Key themes in this edition would be health and education.

VSK apprentices' link to Canterbury College – this was to gain support for a scheme to support children and young people in care into and through college courses.

2. Ms Taylor, Mr Dowle and Mrs Skinner responded to comments and questions from the Panel as follows.

- a) asked if elected County Council Members were able to support OCYPC and VSK events by using their individual Members' budgets, Mrs Skinner explained that this was indeed possible and that she contacted Members periodically to ask if any had any spare money which they wished to use to support events. The Chairman suggested that all Members could use local contacts and influence to attract sponsorship and support for events;
- b) asked how children and young people in care were able to assess the services the County Council delivered to them, as frequent surveying had become unpopular, Ms Taylor explained that, to gain feedback about the upcoming visit to the Kent Mountain Centre, apprentices had been circumspect in gaining feedback via subtle questioning; they asked in advance what participants expected to gain from the event and would ask again afterwards what they had gained from it. One well-worded question could result in some very useful input;
- c) asked how other children and young people could be made aware of the realities of being in care, eg in the same way in which they were educated about religious and cultural diversity, Mrs Skinner added that there was much work to do but good work was already going on in schools by teachers who were aware of and supportive of children and young people in care and the issues they faced. The scheme of designated teachers was working well; and
- d) asked how well-represented children and young people in care were in Kent's Grammar schools, Mrs Skinner explained that they were under-represented as very few took the 11+ test. The decision about whether or not to enter a child for the 11+ would be taken after discussion in a planning meeting between social workers and foster carers, when a child reached the age of 10. The aim was to arrive at a point at which most children in care would sit the 11+ and it would only be necessary to discuss those children who were not taking it as they would be the exception.

3. The verbal updates were noted, with thanks.

64. Cabinet Member's Verbal Update (Item A7)

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

Feedback from all Members' Child Sexual Exploitation Briefing – this briefing had had a good attendance of 35 Members. He commended the work of Mr Segurola

and his team and suggested that a further briefing be held in six months' time to update Members of the latest work.

Essex County Council meeting feedback – He had recently attended a meeting with officers from Kent County Council and Essex County Council to discuss how the latter had achieved a journey from 'inadequate' to 'good'. He had learnt much from this meeting, as Essex County Council was, in 2011, at the stage where Kent County Council was today. An action plan would be prepared on how issues raised at the meeting would be taken forward.

Children's Operating Groups (COGs) update – following complaints that some COGs were not working well, research had shown that all area COGs operated differently. A working group had been formed to look at re-designing and refocussing the COGs and possibly re-aligning them to match districts rather than clinical commissioning group areas.

Visits to Children's Centres in Sevenoaks – visit he had undertaken with the Leader, Paul Carter, had been very successful and allowed an opportunity to meet and chat to parents about the challenges faced by centres.

Attended the Kent Safeguarding Children Board Peer review feedback – this had been an eye opener!

East Kent Foster Carers' Association Sports Day on 28 May – last year's event had been excellent, and well supported by local children in care and their foster families.

2. The verbal updates were noted, with thanks.

65. Care Leavers Support Policy *(Item B1)*

1. Ms Hammond introduced the report and highlighted the key changes made as a result of all services for children in care up to the age of 18 being integrated in the autumn of 2014. Following new statutory guidance, the County Council had now produced a written set of promises to young people leaving care, to set out what they could expect from the County Council as their corporate parent in assisting and supporting them in preparing for adulthood. She and Mr Segurola responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) the County Council had previously accepted too easily the refusal of some young people to engage with support and advice services, and could have been more persistent in its support of them. Its service commissioning had made it too easy to lose touch with young people once they left care, although it had a duty to continue to support them;
- b) the Staying Put policy was welcomed, as foster children needed to feel that they had a room to return home to from university at the end of term, in the same way that most other young people would return to a family home in the holidays. A large number of the young people in care eligible for care leavers' services were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) as some of these had not previously received the support they could have had. As the issues they faced were often complex, they took time to resolve. Young people not eligible to receive this support would be signposted to other agencies;

- c) change management was important to achieve good outcomes for care leavers, but their relationship with the County Council would change when they reached the age of 18. As much support for care leavers was tied to participation in further education, the County Council would encourage as many as possible to stay on and benefit from further education;
- d) the Panel had heard at a previous meeting about care leavers' entitlement to receive the savings which have been held for them, but Ms Hammond reassured the Panel that, if it were believed that a young person was at risk of being exploited when receiving a lump sum of money, the County Council would seek legal advice to protect them and their money. Mr Segurola added that some young people may have received substantial sums of money as a result of criminal injury claims;
- e) young people under 18 may be in supported lodgings and be receiving support from a Foster Carer in managing their finances, but once over 18 they would take on responsibility for managing their own funds; and
- f) the Panel had heard previously about some young people who had experienced problems with accessing benefit payments upon returning from organised youth expeditions abroad, as they had been 'unavailable for work' for that period, and had accrued debts because of this. The County Council could assist in such cases by providing a letter to explain the purpose and importance of the expedition, eg as a development opportunity for care leavers, but resolving the issue and re-instating benefits payments could take time and perseverance. It would be helpful for care leavers to have some guidance about this sort of issue, and Ms Hammond advised that such guidance was available at JobCentrePlus and from the personal advisor service, to which all care leavers had access. Ms Taylor added that, if young people were told early on that this sort of problem might arise, they would be able to make an informed decision about whether or not to take part in the expedition. *Mr Segurola undertook to look into individual cases outside the meeting and address the issue of providing future guidance to help young people avoid the problem.* Panel members commented that it was helpful for them as corporate parents to be made aware of issues like this.

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

66. Leading Improvements for Looked After Children (LILAC) Assessment *(Item B2)*

1. Ms Skinner introduced the report and explained that, as the County Council had achieved four of the seven standards, work was ongoing to address the ones which had not been met; 'style of leadership', 'structure' and 'staff'. She responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) the report was generally very positive but it would be useful to have included in it examples of what was considered to be good practice, so Kent could use these as a model for its future work. Kent's large size was a challenge to co-ordinating its corporate parenting leadership. It had a member Panel (the Corporate Parenting Panel) and an officer group (the

Kent Corporate Parenting Group) to co-ordinate, whereas many smaller authorities may have only one corporate parenting body and thus not have this challenge. It would be useful to know how other authorities organised their corporate parenting governance;

- b) young people in care and leaving care were involved in preparing job specifications and some recruitment panels for social workers. Ms Skinner explained that the aim was that their involvement be increased and embedded at every level of recruitment and for a wider range of staff. There were many formal requirements around writing job descriptions, but it would be feasible to involve young people more informally in the process, eg in setting out what children in care expected of, and needed from, a social worker; and
- c) engagement with young people was a challenge, both of terms of the timing of the Panel's meetings and the content of its agendas, some of which could be a bit 'dry' and limited in its ability to engage much interest. Mr Segurola added that work needed to be done to identify the level of resource which was needed and which it was possible to commit to increasing participation. To engage with all young people for whom the County Council was a corporate parent would mean including engagement with those in care and leaving care, and engagement via child protection work, and it was also important to achieve consistency across all groups and areas of the county.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the assessment and its findings be noted;
- b) the need for work streams to continue to address the standards not yet achieved be agreed; and
- c) National Voice be invited in June 2015 to undertake a revised assessment on the areas requiring development, and a further report be made to this Panel at that time.

67. Update on the Integrated Children in Care and Care Leavers Service
(Item B3)

1. Ms Hammond introduced the report and highlighted the improvements achieved in the integration of services to give all young people in care and leaving care one co-ordinated service. Good progress had been made in staff training in using the integrated system. Panel members made the following comments:-

- a) VSK was currently seeking to recruit a young unaccompanied asylum seeker (UASC) as an apprentice, but there were some barriers to such young people becoming involved, eg language or cultural difficulties. One young man who had been UASC had served as a VSK apprentice but since moved on; and
- b) for a young UASC man who was due to take part in a half-term expedition, apprentices had prepare 'flash cards' to help him with basic English and

build his confidence to take part in and enjoy the trip. The social and leisure activities offered by VSK and other groups in Kent to young people in care simply were not offered in other countries and other cultures, so organisers were keen to encourage UASC to become involved.

2. RESOLVED that the content of the report and the information given in response to comments and questions be noted.