

From : Peter Oakford, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services
Andrew Ireland, Corporate Director - Social Care, Health and Wellbeing

To: Corporate Parenting Panel – 9 April 2015

Subject: **PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE**

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway: None

Future Pathway: None

Electoral Division: All

Summary: This report provides an update to the report presented to the panel in October 2014. It includes a summary of strategic and operational actions taken within Specialist Children's Services (SCS) during the last six months and it provides an opportunity for the Panel to hear about some of the opportunities available for young people to participate and to read some of their comments.

Recommendations: The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

- a) **NOTE** the report and the proposed action
- b) **AGREE** to receive a report on progress in six months.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Participation and Engagement of children in care and care leavers is a key work area of development within Specialist Children's Services (SCS). There have been several developments since the last presentation on this subject to the Corporate Parenting Panel at both a strategic and operational level.

2. Strategic Work Streams

2.1 The appointment of an Interim Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting has been made who has the strategic lead for Participation and Engagement. Consideration is being given to making this post a permanent position within the Directorate's establishment.

2.2 Currently a review is underway of the SCS Participation Strategy and this will be discussed with Senior Officers and Members in the near future. A revised

Participation Strategy is in development and will include children in care and care leavers.

- 2.3 A working group has been established to take forward the whole Participation agenda, including recommendations arising from the recent LILAC assessment
- 2.4 The working group has representation from across SCS, The Commissioning Unit and the Communications Team.
- 2.5 A decision has been made by the Divisional Management Meeting to create a new permanent Participation Officer role within SCS which will focus on developing participation and engagement across the Directorate, so this will include children in need, children subject to a child protection plan and children in care and care leavers. The post will initially sit within the Safeguarding Unit.
- 2.6 Two Participation Workers will be appointed on twelve months contracts within Virtual School Kent and their role will be to support the Participation and Engagement work stream alongside the apprentice. This work will include developing further feedback mechanisms for all children in care and care leavers.

2. Operational Work Streams

2.1 Summary of activity over the last six months within Virtual School Kent (VSK)

2.1.1 **Developments within Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)**

- The OCYPC has continued to develop with regular meetings taking place during each school holiday. A taster day took place in October 2014 with a view to encouraging more young people to join and this was very successful. Currently the OCYPC has twenty members, but the vision is to increase membership and have greater representation by establishing local and more specialist groups.
- A taster day will be held in the East of the county on 13 April, with a view to the Council being more geographically representative of the whole county.
- Development of a post 16 OCYPC / 16+ - responsibility for this now falls within the remit of VSK and the first meeting since the re-design of the leaving care service took place on 7 April.
- These four groups will then constitute Countywide OCYPC and whilst they will continue to meet as smaller groups on a six weekly basis, county wide events will be organised twice yearly.

2.1.2 **Participation Activity Days**

- Have continued to be a key focus of the work of the apprentices within VSK. Since October 2014, there have been activity days held at:

Event:	Area:	No of YP attended
Hever Castle Visit	Tonbridge	23
Outdoor Adventure Activities	Ashford	24
Residential Trip to Kent Mountain	Wales	10

Centre		
Outdoor Adventure Activities	Cranbrook	20
Outdoor Adventure Activities	Cranbrook	20

- The following activities have been planned for the Easter holidays:

Event:	Area:	No of YP attending
Theatre Workshop	Canterbury	50
Bushcraft Activities	Wrotham	24
Gliding	Ashford	12
Kent Life Museum	Maidstone	24

2.1.3 District events

- Activity events for children in care are also organised and supported by district teams. These have included a 'Leading the way' event where young people were encouraged to attend to think about how they might be able to influence their lives. Topics covered included helping them to greater control of their Looked After Review, encouraging them to talk with their social worker about their hopes and dreams for the future, discussing their school and if they feel they are supported, plus talking with their foster carer to ensure they get to know the 'real' child.
- Other activities have included creating a calendar for children in care with photographs of other children on it. (*This will be presented for Members to read during the meeting as it contains photographs of children*).
- Christmas and spring fun days have been organised plus a day especially for teenagers which involved a trip to Dover Castle with a fish and chip lunch included

2.2 Apprenticeship Work stream

2.2.1 Currently there are seven apprentices working within VSK, with another absent due to maternity leave. Of these six are Kent care leavers. Their work stream continues to grow and expand beyond the development of the OCYPC. This includes:

1. Work with social care teams-The apprentices are developing relationships with social workers in the district teams and deliver participation updates at service meetings to encourage more interaction with social workers.
2. Work with Designated Teachers and other multi agency colleagues – The apprentices are included in VSK Multi-agency training days and they deliver a presentation to a multi-agency audience about their role and opportunities for children in care to get involved with them.
3. Foster carer support groups: the apprentices have attended a number of foster carer support groups to develop links and encourage discussion about how children in care can

participate in activities and become part of the children in care council.

4. Meeting with County Council Members - the apprentices have had an opportunity to meet with Members several times during the last six months. These have included presenting to the Select Committee Review, having lunch with the Chairman of Kent County Council and other Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel, informal discussions with Members who joined in the participation activity days in February.
5. Assisting with recruitment campaigns - Two apprentices have undertaken recordings with a Kent radio station at the request of the Fostering Service to promote foster carer recruitment, which has been aired.
6. Promoting apprenticeships- One apprentice was interviewed and appeared on Meridian News and spoke about her apprentice experience which was aired on 10 March 2015. This apprentice sits on the leadership team of the National Society of Apprentices and she has been an ambassador for the County Council by describing it in Parliament as a trailblazer for good apprenticeships in the UK.
7. Being part of a range of recruitment and fostering panels with the County Council.

3. Opportunities for hearing the voice of the child

- 3.1 A key part of the Social Worker's role is listening to children and there is evidence from audits that children are being visited within statutory timescales and are seeing children on their own during home visits. The voice of the child is impacting upon service delivery, for example, one Service Manager has reported how two siblings were able to select a replacement social worker when their allocated worker was due to commence maternity leave.
- 3.2 At the OCYPC meeting in January, young people spoke about issues that they would like to discuss in more detail at future meetings. They also asked if relevant members of staff who would be able to answer their questions could also attend.

4. Changes

- 4.1 Young people felt that changes in social worker, foster carers and schools are really disruptive in their lives. They stressed the importance of transition work so changes are less sudden. In addition to this, if possible, to be given warning of when things will change. It has been suggested that a social worker comes to an OCYPC meeting to explain their job role and why social workers have to change so often.

5. Raising awareness of the care system

- 5.1 Many feel that their peers, teachers and other adults around them do not really know what it means to be in care. R said many young people "had to become

adults when they are still children". 'J' said he gets annoyed when people use "your mum jokes". Most agreed that they sometimes felt labelled and that less is expected of them. Young people said they would like to raise awareness – this could be with the 'Who Cares? Trust' or through local radio and news or through producing a poster or leaflet.

6. Respecting space

- 6.1 A few young people felt that their personal belongings and space were not fully respected by carers and social workers. We understand that this is sometimes to protect young people but they are not happy if there is no reason to go through personal belongings

7. 16+/18+ changes

- 7.1 Young people are worried about moving on and losing support and 16+ young people described how it can be done differently. D said he was lucky his current carer in supported lodgings has been so supportive but knows people that have had very different experiences. All agreed that young people should be taught before they are 16 to budget, clean and cook (for example, by making a meal once a week in their placement).

8. Information for children in care

- 8.1 One child in care has made a booklet describing her experiences of coming in to care and how she found her first five weeks living in a foster placement. She is in agreement to this being used to inform and support other children and young people. (*This will be presented for Members to read during the meeting as it contains confidential information*).

9. Interview panels

- 9.1 Young people were included on interview panels for all new posts created within the leaving care service between November 2014 - January 2015.

10. The Independent Reviewing Officer Service

- 10.1 Continues to capture information from children in care during their Looked After Reviews. Performance reporting by Management Information shows participation at children in care reviews at 95.5% (December 2014).
- 10.2 The IRO Service produces quarterly reports which are then compiled in to an annual report. The most recent report for Quarter 3 (October – December 2014) (Appendix 1) outlines the views of children in care in preparation for their Child-In-Care Review and compares this with data captured in Quarter 2 – (July – September 2014).

11. The views of children in care - during or after participation activity events-

- 11.1 Comments made by a young person after attending the Swattenden Activity Day:

“...We then went for a short break before returning to the next activity- the tree zip wire or for group 1 rock climbing... On the third person they took 5 minutes deciding whether to go and finally jumped of the edge to “fly” through the air... Soon after there was a whole queue, masses of children eager to soar through the air...The day ended after we had been through the uphill/ downhill obstacle course. This involved getting very muddy going through a post box, under an army type net through a puddle and then into a tunnel to be lead into yet another tunnel and by going through a series of tunnels...We all totally enjoyed and embarrassed ourselves but laughed it off as we changed from disgusting, dirty clothes into nice fresh clean ones. We then all chilled out and calmed down by playing an enjoyable game of ;-) wink murder ;-). Our parents soon collected us and we realised how quickly the day had gone.

11.2 Comments made by a young person after attending the Kent Mountain Centre Residential:

“Our trip to Kent mountain centre was action packed, we had our ups and downs in the group but over all a great experience it was nice to spend time with the OCYPC members and the newer people. I learnt so much and i hope to continue using the skills that Jez and Gerry taught. If i had the opportunity i would go again and have even more fun. I would also like to thank all the staff for a wonderful week and helping support everyone in a shape or form.”

11.3 Some comments sent through us by a foster carer following the residential trip to Kent Mountain Centre on behalf of an unaccompanied asylum seeking young person via his translator:

He said he thought the trip to Wales was the best thing he had ever done in his life so far! He thought the activities were brilliant. He has so much fun and warmth from instructors and other YP. He liked the food. He was amazed that children in this country get to do such wonderful things. He was amazed by the snow and the fun you all had. He would love to go again and certainly wants to go with you all again please! All future trips book a place now!

I can't capture his face and gestures as he said this but he was so genuine. He feels so lucky and privileged to have had the support and fun that you all gave him. When he goes back to Egypt this will be one of his most cherished memories I'm sure. Thank you all!

12. Conclusion

12.1 Participation and engagement of children in care and care leavers is a continuous journey and is undoubtedly high on the agenda of Officers within SCS. There is a great deal of activity taking place to strengthen this work both at a strategic and at an operational level. A reporting structure is in place to ensure this agenda is dynamic and further develops. Communication is crucial to ensuring children are able to actively participate and access information designed for them. Necessary improvements in this area have been identified and are included within current

work steams. These include child focused leaflets regarding the Kent Pledge, (*based on the views of children in care*) being re-branded with the support of the Communication Team, opportunities for children in care and care leavers to meet up regularly being strengthened and ensuring that good social work practice is disseminated and shared across teams and services so that this can be fully embraced and every child in care receives the same opportunity to express their views and feel they have been heard and their views acted upon.

13. Recommendations

13.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

- a) **NOTE** the report and the proposed action
- b) **AGREE** to receive a report on progress in six months

14. Report Author

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Background documents: none