



December 2015

# Corporate Parenting

Select Committee report: Executive Summary

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## Foreword

One of the most important duties that elected members accept when they take office is to assume the mantle of corporate parent.

The children and young people who have come into local authority care are some of the most vulnerable in our society; many have suffered significant levels of abuse and neglect prior to coming into care, and it is the collective responsibility of the whole council – members and officers alongside our partner agencies - to ensure that they receive the best possible support and protection.

All good parents want the very best for their children, and it is our statutory duty to ensure that every child we look after is able to flourish by being safe and happy, doing well at school, having good health and enjoying fulfilling relationships with their peers. As they grow towards adulthood, our young people should be equipped to lead independent lives and to make their way as young adults with good jobs, access to higher education and financial security.

Indeed, our primary aim is to ensure that our children achieve as well as those who do not require our intervention.

It is the responsibility of all members, not just the lead members for children's services, to work hard to ensure that our children receive the right support to enable them to reach their full potential.

The purpose of this report is to consider the quality of the involvement and oversight of Kent's corporate parents and to determine how we can make maximum impact in improving outcomes for children and young people in care. It also highlights a number of areas where we can improve our oversight as corporate parents and identifies some areas where further investigation is needed.

At Kent County Council (KCC), we take seriously our moral duty as well as our legal responsibilities to our children and we will continue to strive to improve our services so that our young people can experience happy and fulfilling lives.



**Zita Wiltshire**  
Chair of the Corporate  
Parenting Select  
Committee

## Members of the Select Committee

The Select Committee consisted of nine members of Kent County Council: five members representing the Conservative Party, two members representing the UK Independence Party, one member representing the Labour Party and one member representing the Liberal Democrats Party.



**Mr Robert Brookbank**  
Conservative  
Swanley



**Ms Jane Cribbon**  
Labour  
Gravesham  
East



**Mr George Koowaree**  
Liberal  
Democrat  
Ashford East



**Mr Bob Neaves**  
UKIP  
Folkestone  
South



**Mr Michael Northey**  
Conservative  
Canterbury  
South East



**Mr Richard Parry**  
Conservative  
Sevenoaks  
West



**Mrs Paulina Stockell**  
Conservative  
Maidstone  
Rural West



**Mrs Jenny Whittle**  
Conservative  
Maidstone  
Rural East



**Mrs Zita Wiltshire,  
Chair**  
UKIP  
Broadstairs  
and Sir Moses  
Montefiore



## Kent: Key Facts



Children in care  
on 31 March 2015



Children who started  
to be looked after by  
KCC on 31 March 2015



Children who ceased to  
be looked after by KCC on  
31 March 2015

- 69** % the placement of our children in care population are in foster placements with our in-house services (69% of 1,870).
- 900** the number of registered foster carers in Kent in September 2015.
- 8** % the proportion of Kent children in care who are disabled (September 2015; 8% of 2,206 or 173 children).
- 48** % the proportion of disabled children in care living in foster care (September 2015; 48% of 173 children).
- 10.3** % the proportion of children in residential care (August 2015; 10.3% of 1,948 or 200 children, including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)).
- 21** % the proportion of KCC's children in care population that were adopted (year ending March 2015; 21% of 870 children, or 180 children)
- 81.3** % the proportion of children in foster care placed within 20 miles from home (as at August 2015; 81.3% of 1,378 children or 1,121 children).
- 74.2** % the proportion of children in care in the same placement for 2+ years as at August 2015 (74.2% of 561, or 416 children).
- 43** % the extent of the attainment gap between children in care (whose results are eligible to be counted) and their non-cared for Kent peers in achieving 5 grade A\*-C GCSEs including English and Mathematics (provisional figures)
- 75** % of Kent residential homes for children and young people were rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted in 2014/15.
- 82.9** % the proportion of all Kent schools that were rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted on 2 October 2015.
- 0.6** % the proportion Kent children in care that make up the under 18 Kent population.

## Introduction

Through this report we are reaffirming our longstanding commitment to continue to discharge our corporate parenting responsibilities to all our children in care. The principal focus of this review is to examine the vital role that all elected members, as elected corporate parents, should play in championing the rights and in appropriately engaging with our children and young people.

The launch of the Corporate Parenting Select Committee (*referred to as the Committee throughout this document*) reflects our acknowledgment that it is time to restate our political and officer corporate parent responsibilities, so that any necessary changes we agree to make as an organisation to improve the experiences and outcomes of our children in care are implemented successfully.

We remain resolute that our children in care should always be at the centre of service provision, whoever the provider may be. To enable us to do this, we will listen to the voices of our children and we will use their feedback to inform our service delivery. We will also continue to work with our local partners to ensure our provision is as effective as possible. The children in our care, like all children, need positive adult encouragement, to be cared for and supported to make the most of their talents, skills, abilities and to make the most of their educational opportunities as they grow into adult life. It is our statutory duty as corporate parents to ensure that our children are nurtured and that they benefit from the emotional and practical support, that all good parents wish to give to their children to ensure their best possible development in life.

The terms of reference for the review are as follows:

- **to consider the definition of 'corporate parent' and the variety of roles and duties associated with it**
- **to engage with, amongst others, children and young people in care to better understand what works well for them and what KCC can do to improve the fulfilment of its corporate parenting responsibilities**
- **to investigate best practice across the country and abroad of how elected representatives within local government engage with and support children in care**
- **to examine the extent to which the monitoring mechanisms available to KCC members are effective in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children in care**
- **for the Corporate Parenting Select Committee to make recommendations after having gathered evidence and information throughout the review.**

## Key Findings and Recommendations

This review highlights some of the key topics and issues that have the most significant impact on the health, wellbeing and education of the children within our care.

This examination provides KCC with assurance that real progress is being made throughout our frontline services, as well as in relation to key performance areas across social care and education, to support our children and young people in care. We consider there are areas where we have made significant improvements (in relation to our Virtual School Kent and adoption, for example). However, there are other areas (Other Local Authority looked after children placed within Kent and CAMHS) that require further improvements to ensure we are making a real difference and doing as much as we can to enhance the life chances of our children and young people.

The following section gives an account of our key findings and recommendations against each of the main areas outlined in the terms of reference for the review.

## Corporate Parent Roles and Duties

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### Corporate parent: roles and responsibilities

#### **Corporate parenting is a shared responsibility between politicians and officers:**

Although the Select Committee review focuses mostly on Member roles and responsibilities as corporate parents, the national legal and policy frameworks place joint responsibility on both politicians and officers to safeguard and support the children within their care. In high level terms, the role of elected members is to take a strategic overview and to set the organisation's direction in relation to promoting the wellbeing of children and young people. They also have a role in challenging services where there is emerging evidence of worsening performance. It is also to seek assurances where necessary that KCC is actively managing critical matters with the aim of further improving outcomes for children and young people. In order to do this effectively, the core member role must be delivered at a strategic level rather than being drawn into the detailed day-to-day operational management of children's services. We believe that a comprehensive corporate parenting guide (handbook) should be developed to reinforce these joint responsibilities and to crystallise the distinctive role which all members need to play in providing for our children.

### Recommendation 1

**KCC should adopt a simply-worded and practical corporate parenting guide (handbook) for all members that clearly sets out what we need to know, including information about the fundamental areas crucial to running an effective children's services in fulfilment of our corporate parenting responsibilities. The handbook must include contact details of key officers within each division.**

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## Information about children in care

### Wide-ranging performance management framework, systems and processes:

We are of the view that KCC has wide-ranging performance management frameworks, systems and processes in place for monitoring how well all children's services are doing. However, our review has highlighted that in spite of the myriad of performance dashboards that exist, all members as political corporate parents do not have access to accurate and meaningful information ie data that has been analysed and interpreted and which is readily available on a regular basis.

### Recommendation 2

KCC should make available information about the fundamental areas of children's services such as education and health outcomes, placement stability and support for care leavers for all members on a regular schedule starting from March 2016.

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## Training for members

### Appropriate and timely training for all members that is focused on our corporate parent roles and responsibilities:

We reached the conclusion that although training sessions for members have been organised in the past, there is a compelling need for the current training to be reviewed and replaced with a new, regular training programme which should be compulsory for all members to attend. This should take account of the necessity for refresher sessions and the need for new members to understand the particular responsibilities placed on them as corporate parents.

### Recommendation 3

KCC should introduce a refreshed training programme for all KCC members as part of their induction after every county council election or upon their appointment. In the event of significant changes to corporate parenting, KCC members should be updated through additional training. All members are strongly advised to take advantage of this training offer. Consideration should be given to the best option for overseeing and reporting on training attendance.

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## Children in care from other local authorities living in the Kent area

### Other Local Authority 'looked after' children are particularly vulnerable and the high number in Kent puts additional pressure on KCC and partner agency resources:

We heard from a number of key witnesses that the additional and wider impact of other local authority looked after children living in Kent is longstanding and of extreme concern. We understand that the revised Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Regulations 2010) that came into force in January 2014 has strengthened requirements on local authority 'distant' placement decisions (notification of placement). We also understand that the revised Children's Homes Regulations 2015 has placed additional requirements on children's homes, though we are aware that Ofsted does not report on this on a routine basis. We believe more needs to be done to hold other local authorities to account in relation to their corporate parenting responsibilities to appropriately safeguard children within their care who are living out of area.

## Engagement of Children and Young People

### Recommendation 4

KCC should write to the Children's Minister to ask that a review of compliance to the new Regulations 2010 and the sufficiency duty should be carried out to ensure that responsible authorities are held to account in maintaining the welfare of children in their care.

### Corporate governance structure

We are aware that we currently have a number of statutory and non-statutory groups, each with oversight roles in relation to children in care and children subject to protection measures. These include the Corporate the Corporate Parenting Panel, the Kent Corporate Parenting Group and the Children's Health and Wellbeing Board. With increasing pressure on resources and the need take a proportionate approach to avoid any unnecessary drain on members' and officers' resources, the Select Committee believes that it is necessary for KCC to streamline the corporate parenting governance arrangements.

### Recommendation 5

KCC should adhere to the 'simplification' principle and merge the Corporate Parenting Panel and with the Kent Corporate Parenting Group to strengthen the focus on corporate parenting for a more powerful and streamlined oversight.

This is to be backed by the development of a memorandum on governance between the new group and relevant existing groups to reduce any avoidable overlap and/or duplication.

### Participation opportunities for members

#### Knowledge of local arrangements, together with promoting the wellbeing of children in our care, is paramount:

Apart from Cabinet and a few other members with some specific responsibilities for children's services, the evidence suggests that few members fully understand their corporate parenting responsibilities. More needs to be done to ensure that all members fully engage with their role as corporate parents. Members need to take practical steps to hear directly from the children in our care and their carers and to work with officers to assess how well we are undertaking the corporate parenting role. Members also need to understand how services can be further improved to ensure that our children and young people receive the best support to live happy and healthy lives both during their time with us and into adulthood.

### Recommendation 6

All KCC members should commit to actively championing and engaging with divisional and countywide participation events (eg Virtual School Kent activities, Achievement Award ceremonies and organised foster carer events) to hear about the achievements of our children and young people as well as finding out about emerging issues that concern those in our care. It must always be made the responsibility of the relevant service managers to extend an invitation to all members to events and meetings and ensure that this automatically happens, and that relevant information is included in the Member Bulletin (or the Members' Calendar) to give all members adequate notice and opportunity to attend.

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### Coordination of participation across children's services (*voice of the child*)

#### Management and oversight of different participation activities and capturing the experiences of children in care and their carers:

Whilst we acknowledge that a good range of participation events take place at individual and service levels, our review has highlighted that there are issues with the effective coordination of a variety of participation and involvement activities across the whole of children's services. Also, we think steps should be taken to evidence how this feedback informs service delivery and redesign. Additionally, KCC must consistently provide feedback to children, young people and their carers about the difference that their contribution has made.

#### Recommendation 7

KCC should identify a lead participation officer to coordinate how the views of children, young people and their carers are taken into account at the service level and for such information to be made available to members annually.

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### Care leavers' readiness for independent living

#### Suitable housing and adequate support for care leavers in gaining the relevant skills for independent living:

We heard from witnesses that access to suitable housing for our care leaver population can be challenging. We also noted a survey of our children in care which reported that a quarter of them felt they were not adequately supported in gaining the relevant skills needed for independent living. Our conclusion is that access to suitable housing and preparing care leavers with the right life skills and training in order to transition successfully into adulthood needs to be urgently addressed.

#### Recommendation 8

KCC should continue to strengthen work with our district partners (through council leaders and Joint Kent Chief Executives) to prioritise the needs of care leavers in gaining access to social housing and support. This partnership work should consider district partners supporting corporate parenting responsibilities in relation to the accommodation needs of care leavers through mechanisms such as the Kent Housing Strategy and the Joint Housing Protocol.

#### Recommendation 9

KCC should review the independent living skills support arrangements for care leavers (including the training provision and who care leavers to contact for support at whatever time).



## Investigation of Best Practice

There are a number of activities and initiatives which take place in Kent that enable members to engage with and directly speak to children and young people in care. These include Virtual School Kent activities, awards events and other local events. Some examples from other areas which KCC could learn from include:

### Elected members visits

Ofsted's 'From a distance' report 2014 identified members in good authorities that paid attention to children living in local authority children's homes (through Regulation 33 visits) and those living in homes that were run independently. The report also mentioned that some members paid particular attention to children living out of area as part of carrying out their corporate parenting responsibilities.

### Integrated corporate parenting approach

Ofsted cited Trafford Council in the Children's Social Care report in England 2015 as an authority that has been judged to be outstanding. The council has developed an integrated corporate parenting strategy which has enabled councillors to acquire a broad understanding of the children within their care by having the most salient information at their fingertips without being overwhelmed with data.

### Innovative training for county and district councillors

In Staffordshire two innovative training events were recently held to raise awareness of the corporate parenting role. These brought together county and district councillors and senior officers, as well as a range of practitioners and professionals who interacted with the audience and gave participants an insight into the lives of looked-after children.

## Monitoring Mechanisms

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### Fostering services

#### Overseeing quality fostering service provision is an essential part of corporate parenting:

We recognise the important part that the fostering service plays in ensuring that children in our care benefit from good physical and emotional health, good or excellent education and, for those that need it, a good preparation for independent living. However, in the course of our review we heard about several areas (training, lack of access to CAMHS therapeutic support for young people, support for carers, stability and/or breakdown of placements, types and location of fostering) of the fostering service which require further attention. This has led us to make the following recommendation:

#### Recommendation 10

**KCC should conduct a review of the fostering service with the objective of improving the matching process and reducing the number of placement breakdowns. The review should take place six months after the county council has endorsed this Select Committee Report and report back to the Corporate Parenting Panel.**

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### Emotional and mental wellbeing

#### We wish to ensure that our children and young people receive timely access to effective emotional and mental health support when they need it:

We are aware of the reasons why it is vital for good mental health services to be available to all children and young people when they need it. Nonetheless, we are deeply troubled by the negative impact that the lack of timely access to support can have on the cognitive development and educational outcomes of the most vulnerable young people. We are aware that the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board is overseeing the delivery plan which underpins the Emotional Wellbeing Strategy. We also know that work is progressing on a new service specification prior to a re-tendering exercise. However, we feel that all members need to have oversight of the process. Therefore, we recommend that:

### Recommendation 11

KCC and its commissioning partners produce regular progress reports to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health services, including evidence of the impact in relation to children in care – particularly the support offered to care leavers, disabled children and UASC and adopted children. Updates are to include key performance information, including waiting times and any geographical variances in access to services.

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### Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)

#### Prioritising children in care in the selection process for KCC apprenticeships:

Data indicates that children in care experience major barriers to their achievement and attain less well academically than their peers. Not being in education, employment or training between certain ages is a key predictor of later unemployment. Being NEET has an impact on later job security, physical and mental health, youth offending and homelessness. We note that a NEET strategy and action plan is in development to support closing this attainment gap. It is important that we have regular updates of the initiatives that are being put in place, or that are planned to be implemented, in order to address the high numbers of care leavers not in education, training or employment.

### Recommendation 12

**KCC should investigate what further measures can be adopted as part of the NEET strategy development to address the high numbers of care leavers not in education, training or employment and to improve the life skills 'offer' for the post 18s. Measures should be defined and implemented to address any areas in need of improvement. A report on progress should be brought to the Corporate Parenting Panel by June 2016.**

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### Apprenticeships and other employment opportunities

#### Promoting apprenticeships and other employment opportunities to all young people in care:

We found that young people in care value apprenticeships very highly and we believe that this vocational training offers an important pathway to acquiring valuable skills that can underpin long-term employment security for young people. We believe that the county council should go one step further with its private, public and VCS sector partners to explore how young people could gain greater access to apprenticeship schemes and other employment opportunities.

### Recommendation 13

**KCC and our partner agencies should explore the viability of developing opportunities for care leavers to have apprenticeship positions with KCC and/or partners thus increasing the range and access to further education and employment opportunities for young people in care who are in the NEET position.**

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### Promoting the physical, emotional and mental health of children in our care

#### Children in care are likely to need additional and ongoing support:

We know that as corporate parents we should act on any early signs of emerging health issues in order to prevent the onset of illness where possible, and to improve the lifetime health and wellbeing of children and young people in our care. Yet we currently lack up-to-date data on the rates and profiles of mental health problems in Kent's children and young people. We also don't have a strategic, detailed understanding of the health needs of the children and young people in our care.



## Recommendation 14

KCC should ensure that work is undertaken to improve the information we collect regarding our children in care and care leavers and their health needs. The result of this work should be fully reflected in the revised Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and future commissioning arrangements.

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## Recruitment and retention of social workers and other care staff

### Recruitment and retention of social workers and other staff with the right skills to support our children and young people in care is paramount:

KCC should continue to strive to ensure that social workers from across the UK view us as an 'employer of choice' with a competitive offer that attracts the right numbers of experienced and skilled qualified staff to do the challenging but rewarding job of working alongside Kent's children and young people.

## Recommendation 15

Processes need to be established to ensure all members take an active role in getting to know our frontline staff and their concerns, informally as well as via formal consultation exercises. We should also ensure that feedback from our social workers is informing the development of activities and planning at all levels of the organisation. Protocols must be established to clarify this process.

December 2015

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on 10 December 2015*

This publication is available in other formats and  
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