

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, 3 September 2015.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mrs Z Wiltshire (Vice-Chairman), Mr R E Brookbank, Mrs P T Cole, Mr C Dowle, Ms S Dunstan, Mr S Griffiths, Mrs S Howes (Substitute for Ms C J Cribbon), Mr G Lymer, Mrs C Moody, Mr B Neaves, Ms B Taylor, Mr M J Vye and Mrs J Whittle

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P J Oakford

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Segurola (Interim Director of Specialist Children's Services), Mr G Gurney (Interim Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

92. Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies had been received from Mrs T Carpenter and Ms C J Cribbon. Mrs S Howes was present as a substitute for Ms Cribbon.

93. Minutes of the meeting of this Panel held on 18 June 2015 (Item A2)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Panel meeting held on 18 June 2015 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

94. Chairman's Announcements (Item A3)

1. The Chairman proposed that the Panel's minutes be sent to full Council for information, as well as to the Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee, as at present. This would raise the profile of the corporate parenting role of all elected Members. Miss Grayell undertook to look into taking this forward.

2. The Chairman also referred to Democracy Week, starting on 17 October, and suggested that this would be an opportunity for young people to find out about standing for election as councillors and be able to take part in shaping future services for young people in care.

95. Meeting Dates for 2016/2017 (Item A4)

RESOLVED that the dates reserved for the Panel's meetings in 2016 and early 2017 be noted, as follows:-

Thursday 28 January 2016 – 1.00 pm
Tuesday 15 March 2016 – 1.00 pm
Thursday 26 May 2016 – 10.00 am
Wednesday 20 July 2016 – 1.00 pm
Wednesday 7 September 2016 – 1.00 pm
Wednesday 9 November 2016 – 1.00 pm

Friday 20 January 2017 – 10.00 am
Monday 20 March 2017 – 1.00 pm

96. Verbal Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)
(Item A5)

1. Ms Taylor and Mr Dowle gave a verbal update, as follows:-

Sophia Dunstan had now returned from maternity leave.

OCYPC Summer Countywide meeting - this had had a good attendance of 22 young people and had looked at the Participation Strategy, with the aim of producing a version written specifically for young people.

OCYPC Junior Council – this was being established for young people aged 7 – 11.

Youth Adult Council (YAC) – young people were being trained and encouraged to participate in interview panels, monthly evening meetings were planned and the first newsletter was due to be launched by the end of September.

Challenge Cards – these gave young people an opportunity to issue a challenge to the Kent Corporate Parenting Group (KCPG) to make improvements to their care experience. Some examples of challenge cards had been tabled for the Panel to see. Mr Segurola clarified that if 'no reply' to a challenge card had been recorded, this was because cards were reported to KCPG meetings, and a reply would be made at the next scheduled meeting of the KCPG.

Publishing updates - the OCYPC was working with young people and the County Council's communications team to develop the pack of information about being in care, to be given to young people in the first few days after they come into care. The pack would also be available to download from the Kent Cares Town website.

Summer Participation Activity Days – there had been five of these across East and West Kent during August, mostly well attended. A total of 167 young people had taken part, some for the first time.

Leading Improvements for Looked After Children (LILAC) – young people attending events through the summer had been encouraged to record their views by submitting a LILAC assessment, ahead of the LILAC assessment on 21 – 23 September.

A DVD was being made by the VSK apprentices, about the experience of being in care. It would be useful to compare the experiences of young people in the care system with those of their peers not in care. The participants would be drawn from an older age bracket so they could consent to their contributions being used on YouTube and in other media, to spread the message further.

A visit to the Hardelot Centre in France, which the Panel had heard about at an earlier meeting, was being arranged. Mr Doran reminded the Panel that resources previously available from Youth Opportunities funding to support VSK events was no longer available. Ms Taylor reported that fundraising for the Hardelot visit would include a quiz night and other events.

2. In response to a question about scope for Members to support fundraising using their combined Members grants, Mr Oakford clarified that individual Members could make a contribution from their grant to support a project (but not an individual), in response to an application from the project organiser. Members were pleased to hear this and re-stated their wish to support fundraising.

3. The verbal updates were NOTED, with thanks.

97. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member
(Item A6)

1. Mr P J Oakford gave a verbal update on issues around unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC):

- Kent still had a large number of UASC, currently 729 (having increased from 368 since March 2015)
- There were currently two reception centres being used to accommodate UASC – Millbank and Swattenden - and one very shortly to come into use – the former Ladesfield Care Home in Whitstable.
- Almost all UASC were young men and these centres were all exclusively for young men. There were very few girls among the numbers, and any girls arriving would be placed with foster carers until they were 18, rather than at a centre.
- Plans to use the Ladesfield building had been leaked by the media and had attracted unpleasant reactions on social media and from local residents. 600 complaints about its use had been received within 24 hours of the news being leaked.
- News of the intention to use the Swattenden centre at Appledore had been carefully managed and local reaction had been much better. A select number of media representatives had been taken to visit the Millbank centre to see the basic but good facilities there, and the County Council had made a film about the work of the centre. No cameras had been permitted at this visit, and reporting rules had been very stringent, so the reporting of issues could be controlled. The media were able to hear at first hand from the young men housed there, to show the reality of their situation. UASC had stated their priorities as being to feel that they were safe, to know that their families were safe, and to join and contribute to Kent society.
- Mr Segurola said that he and Mr Ireland were seeking, via the Association for the Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Local Government Association (LGA), to establish a voluntary national dispersal programme, via which other local authorities would volunteer to take responsibility for the accommodation and support of small numbers of UASC from Kent, to spread the number around the country and make the burden easier to manage. Mr Segurola expressed his gratitude to those authorities who had already provided support and said that a more formal scheme would hopefully soon be established.

- Mr Oakford and Mr Segurola had taken part in media interviews about UASC. The Chairman added that she had been asked by Radio Kent to comment on the issue, and had emphasised that UASC were children, first and foremost, and the County Council had a duty to do its best for them.
- A foster carer on the Panel said that his family was currently caring for some UASC. This brought challenges, not least in being able to communicate with them in a language they understood.

2. In response to questions:-

- a) Mr Oakford clarified that UASC under 16 would be placed in foster care and those aged 16 and 17 would be placed in a reception centre for a period of 6 to 8 weeks, during which they would undergo a health assessment, and then in supported lodgings or shared accommodation with outreach support. Any requiring more support than this would be placed in foster care; and
- b) Mr Segurola added that there were currently 130 UASC housed with the County Council's in-house foster carers and another 80 with independent fostering providers. In addition, a small number had been placed out of county.

3. The verbal updates were NOTED, and the Chairman thanked all those involved in working with and supporting UASC for the excellent job they were doing.

98. Adoption Service Annual Reports for 2014 - 2015
(Item B1)

Ms Y Shah, Interim Head of Adoption, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Shah introduced the report and, with Mr Segurola, responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) Ms Shah was thanked for the work of the Adoption team and for the clarity and fullness of the reporting to the Panel. She emphasised that joint working was important and that the role played by foster carers and colleagues in the childcare, health and education teams was as important in supporting the improvement of the adoption process;
- b) the 2015 adoption summit had been fascinating and it was hoped that all County Council Members would attend next year;
- c) a view was expressed that the judiciary should be subject to the same scrutiny as adoption teams and others involved in the adoption process. Ms Shah explained that a piece of work by Coram, Kent County Council and the University of Bristol was currently underway, looking at the appropriate use of special guardianship orders. Mr Segurola added that the County Council needed to be clear about the risks of granting special guardianship orders and better prepared to challenge their use in court. He added that a national benchmark for the time taken for family law proceedings had been set at 26 weeks, and that Kent had met this target;

- d) in comparing Kent's performance to that of other local authorities, it was important to take account of the care populations of the areas being compared;
 - e) asked about the percentage of cases turned down for adoption and what effect this had on the way in which future cases were considered, Mr Segurola explained that, when an adoption had not gone ahead, it was usually because either the child returned to their birth family or someone else from the birth family had come forward to adopt them. This pattern would not deter the County Council from pursuing adoption proceedings if this was considered to be the right option for the child;
 - f) asked about post-adoption and peer support, Ms Shah explained that a countywide Adoption Advisory Board was based in Maidstone and local adoption support groups were available around the county; and
 - g) asked about the sufficiency of adopters from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, Ms Shah explained that, as many children coming forward for adoption had dual heritage, matching them to adopters of the same race had never been an issue. Focus had always been on matching a child with suitable adopters who could meet their needs rather than on matching them by ethnicity.
2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks, and that Ms Shah and the adoption team be congratulated on their excellent work.

99. Kent Fostering Annual Report 2014 - 2015
(Item B2)

1. Mr Gurney introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:
- a) the work on the transformation programme undertaken by the County Council's efficiency partner, Newton Europe, had resulted in the County Council making more use of its in-house foster carers. The percentage of children placed with in-house foster carers had risen from 60% to 83%, and the target was to increase this further, to 85 - 87%. Newton Europe would also leave Kent with some useful tools with which it could shape future work;
 - b) asked about what opportunities there were for foster carers to comment on the fostering service, Mr Gurney explained that he spoke regularly with foster carers about key issues, including getting financial support for staying put, help with understanding and preparing young people for their options beyond 18, UASC and the need to increase the number of foster carers willing and able to take them, and claiming expenses. He assured the Panel that he was fully aware of the excellent work that foster carers undertook in supporting children in care in Kent;

- c) the Corporate Parenting Select Committee had identified the need for elected Members to meet foster carers to increase their awareness of the foster carers' role;
- d) a foster carer on the Panel added that good communications were a key issue, and being able to help young people to obtain a passport;
- e) a view was expressed that the Panel should receive regular update reports on progress against the fostering improvement plan. The location of the Fostering Support Teams within the Children in Care Service worked well operationally but it was important that an overview of the Service as a whole could be retained. Mr Gurney added that staff were receiving training to help them make the best use of the Liberi data management system to support the improvement plan. The Liberi system had been in place for only 18 months and some of its features were only just being used fully, for example uploading electronic files; and
- f) responding to a question about how allegations against social workers were recorded, Mr Gurney explained that the aim was to record allegations on the spot or within 48 hours of the allegation being made, but practice varied. The speaker expressed concern that 48 hours may be too long for the details to be recalled and recorded clearly, and may not stand up to scrutiny, for instance if the issue were to proceed to court proceedings. Mr Gurney reassured the Panel that the number of such cases was very small but undertook to look into how the recording process could be improved.

- 2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks, and an update report on the fostering improvement plan be made to the Panel in a year's time.

100. Review of Terms of Reference for Corporate Parenting Panel
(Item B3)

- 1. Mr Segurola introduced the report and explained that the main reasons for reviewing the Panel's terms of reference were to review and update the links to the Kent Corporate Parenting Group and to strengthen the engagement element of the Panel's role.
- 2. The Panel then discussed its work, particularly the way in which it engaged with young people. Comments made were as follows:-
 - a) approximately half of the Panel's work took the form of monitoring, and a question was asked about the extent to which this helped the Panel to fulfil its role. Mr Segurola explained that monitoring was a statutory responsibility of the Panel but was only part of its work;
 - b) Mr Segurola suggested that the Panel could get a useful perspective by asking young people what the Panel meant to them;
 - c) the Chairman suggested that a shadow Corporate Parenting Panel or Board of young people could meet in advance of the main Panel meeting,

perhaps attended by two or three Members of the main Panel, and feed into and comment on the agenda for the main Panel;

- d) it was suggested that Panel Members could try a 'rapporteur' role, for example attending meetings of the Fostering Advisory Board. Panel Members already had the habit of attending OCYPC meetings and participation days. However, feedback from such events needed to be in a structured format;
 - e) the role of the Panel in developing expertise and actively raising the awareness of other Members was featured in the Panel's original terms of reference but was not in the revised version. This role was an important part of the Panel's work and should be explicit in the revised terms of reference. Suitable regular training would also be required to keep Members' knowledge up to date, including updates on changes in legislation pertinent to the subject area. Paragraph 7 d) in the revised terms of reference needed to be strengthened;
 - f) the Chairman suggested that the minutes of the Panel be submitted to the full Council for information, once approved by the Panel;
 - g) to gain feedback from young people and their carers in a relaxed atmosphere, the Panel could organise a 'funday' once or twice a year. OCYPC meetings were useful for gaining feedback but did not take place at weekends, when families were more able to attend together; and
 - h) it was suggested that the agenda for every meeting of the Panel include an item on the experiences of young people in care, either by inviting some young people to attend or by the regular feedback report that the Panel had established as part of its work programme.
3. RESOLVED that the revised terms of reference be agreed, with the caveat that the wording around developing expertise and actively raising the awareness of other Members (paragraph 7d)) be strengthened.

101. Review of Health Services for Children Looked After in Kent
(Item B4)

Ms N Sayer, Designated Nursed for Looked After Children, and Ms H Carpenter, Accountable Officer for Thanet and South Kent Coast Clinical Commissioning Groups, and Chair of the Kent Joint Children In Need Health Commissioning Group, were in attendance for this item.

- 1. Ms Sayer introduced the report and highlighted key areas of work and, with Ms Carpenter, responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-
 - a) Panel members were reassured that the clinical commissioning groups' (CCGs') role in providing health services for children in care extended to all children in care in Kent, including those placed by other local authorities. A reciprocal arrangement with CCGs in other areas meant that any Kent children placed out of county would be covered in the same way. Any child

being placed would have a health assessment undertaken first, to ensure that the placement could meet their healthcare needs;

- b) the joint working arrangements set out in the report were welcomed, and the existing links would be strengthened when the Health Visitor service came under County Council control in October 2015;
 - c) the concept of having a 'key nurse' for children in care was welcomed, as having one consistent contact within the complexity of the NHS would help children, and having one person responsible for keeping a child's healthcare plan up to date would be easier and provide continuity. Ms Sayer added that a nurse was the best person to take on this role as they could understand information from both the social work and medical perspectives, and a GP would not have the time to take on this role;
 - d) asked about children placed in care by other local authorities not being able to access mental health services, Ms Sayer said she shared Members' frustration about the number of children placed without checks first being made about the availability of suitable healthcare. She said she would expect the designated nurse in the placing authority to contact her before a placement, to check the availability of health services. The next financial year should show an improvement in this pattern. If proper advance notification of an intended placement were made, this would help resource planning and service provision. Mr Segurola confirmed that the onus was indeed upon the placing authority to consult Kent about social care and health services before placing a child, particularly considering that many of the 1,300 children placed in Kent by other local authorities needed emotional health and wellbeing services. Placing authorities had been reminded of their responsibilities but still the problem persisted. Ms Carpenter reminded the Panel that much work was going on regarding CAMHS, and having a clearer picture of the demand for services could only help this work. She would shortly be contacting CCG colleagues in neighbouring authorities to take this forward; and
 - e) Ms Sayer and Ms Carpenter directed the Panel's attention to a chart in the report which showed the relationship between a new group – the Kent Joint Adoption and LAC Health Commissioner Group – which Ms Carpenter chaired, and other health bodies. This Group's agendas were subject-based, and the next would be looking at issues around adoption.
2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks, and a further update report on health services for Children in Care be provided in twelve months' time.

102. Head Teacher of Virtual School Kent (VSK) update report *(Item B5)*

Mr T Doran, Head Teacher of Virtual School Kent, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Doran introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

a) it was too early as yet to report this year's complete GCSE exam results for children in care as only 60% of results had so far been received. These would be reported to the Panel's October meeting;

b) provisional Key Stage 2 SATS results had been the best ever for Kent:-

71.1% had passed Level 4 reading, a 6% improvement since 2014 and 3% above the national average for children in care;

61.8% had passed Level 4 writing, a 3% improvement since 2014 and 2.8% above the national average for children in care;

64.5% had passed Level 4 maths, a 7.5% improvement since 2014 and 3.5% above the national average for children in care; and

GCSE potential, ie the percentage of young people likely to pass GCSE at A – C, a combination of all the above scores, was 52.6%, an 8.6% improvement since 2014 and 4.6% above the national average for children in care.

c) in response to a question about access to therapeutic work via the Young Healthy Minds service, Mr Doran explained that VSK would use the Southern Trust model to identify the costs, value and impact of this service;

d) a foster carer expressed concerns about services for young people over 16 who were trying to adjust from full-time school attendance to a part-time college course, and the challenge of filling the rest of their time usefully. Mr Doran said that VSK had limited resources so could not provide activities *per se*, but could help identify gaps in provision and signpost young people to possibilities;

e) if a young person had too little to fill their time constructively, this could put a strain on the placement and relationship with their foster family, possibly leading to the placement breaking down. Finding suitable activities for young people with special needs or disabilities was an added challenge; and

f) finding part-time employment could fill the gap but this was sometimes not a workable option for a young person with disabilities or special needs.

2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks, and the VSK team be congratulated on the scores achieved by children in care at Key Stage 2.