

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 28 January 2016.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mrs T Carpenter, Mrs P T Cole, Ms S Dunstan, Mrs S Howes (Substitute for Ms C J Cribbon), Mrs C Moody, Mr B Neaves and Mrs J Whittle

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Segurola (Director of Specialist Children's Services), Mr G Gurney (Interim Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting), Ms G O'Grady (Participation Co-ordinator, Specialist Children's Services), Mrs S Skinner (Service Business Manager, Virtual School Kent) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

**126. Apologies and substitutes**  
*(Item A1)*

Apologies for absence were received from Mr R E Brookbank, Ms C J Cribbon, Mr S Griffiths, Mr G Lymer, Ms B Taylor, Mr M J Vye, Mrs Z Wiltshire and Mr P J Oakford.

Mrs S Howes was present as a substitute for Ms C J Cribbon.

**127. Minutes of the meeting of this Panel held on 8 December 2015**  
*(Item A2)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Panel meeting held on 8 December 2015 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

**128. Chairman's Announcements**  
*(Item A3)*

The Chairman announced that Teresa Carpenter and her husband Peter had recently won a national award for their work as Permanency Foster Carers. The awards had been run by FosterTalk magazine and were presented in London at the end of October 2015. Teresa and Peter had been nominated for the award by their foster children, who had lived with them for 7 years. Mrs Carpenter received the Panel's congratulations on the award and their thanks for her work over 18 years as a foster carer, during which she had cared for 35 children and young people.

**129. Verbal Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)**  
*(Item A4)*

1. Ms Dunstan gave a verbal update on the following:

**Christmas Treat** – OCYPC Members had attended a production of Peter Pan at the Hazlitt Theatre in Maidstone.

**Forthcoming regional meetings** – on 15 February for West and North Kent, and 17 February for East and South Kent. North and West Kent had a core membership of 30 but the East Kent group was still trying to grow its membership and increase interest.

**Challenge cards** – challenge card responses had recently been updated but the publication of business cards for social workers was outstanding. A response would hopefully be ready for the February meetings.

**Young Adults Council (YAC) developments** – the next meeting would take place on 4 February, to consider pathway plans, a review of the Kent Cares Town website and launch of the new YAC Facebook page.

**Apprentice staffing** – The remaining Level 2 Virtual School Kent (VSK) apprentice had recently finished her apprenticeship and there were now four VSK apprentice vacancies, which were being advertised.

**Activity Days 2016** – as reported to the last Panel meeting, the money originally earmarked for a trip to the Hardelet Centre in Normandy had been re-directed to a number of activity days, to reach a wider audience. These would be funded by contributions from Member grants and, so far, pledges had been received from seven Panel members and the Cabinet Member. Activity days would take place as follows:

**16 February** – North and West Kent – bush craft, zip line, archery and high ropes at Wide Horizons: 40 expected participants – all places taken up.

**18 February** - East and South Kent – Expressions art: 20 expected participants and 10 spaces still to fill.

**19 February** - East and South Kent – skating and climbing at Revolution: 20 expected participants and 20 spaces still to fill.

#### **In the Easter school holidays:**

- Gravity Trampolining, Maidstone – *this and the following two events would be advertised later.*
- East and South Kent – activity day at Kingswood: 48 places, not yet booking.
- North and West Kent – climbing, mountain biking and stand-up paddle boarding at Bewl Water: 36 places, not yet booking.

#### **Other work:**

- making more links with Kent children and young people placed out of the county.
- developing the 'recruit crew' – a training session on 17 February would aim to encourage more young people to take part in interview panels for social workers and foster carers.
- raising awareness of the importance of participation: Sophia and Bella had so far delivered four 25-place training sessions for social workers, Independent Reviewing Officer (IROs) and foster carers, with excellent feedback on the interactive approach taken.
- assistance with the evaluation process in the procurement of new supported accommodation, with the commissioning unit.
- supporting the Winter Fayre event in Thanet on 30 January, which would be open to children in care, foster carers, County Council staff and their families.

2. Ms Dunstan responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) Ms Moody reported that her husband had attended the participation course and found it 'excellent';
- b) the upcoming Winter Fayre event might help raise the level of engagement in East Kent, which had historically been low;
- c) Mr Gurney confirmed that the winning design from the business card challenge was shortly to be printed; and
- d) Ms Dunstan was congratulated for the amount of work she and her colleagues were undertaking.

3. RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted, with thanks.

**130. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member**  
*(Item A5)*

1. In the absence of the Cabinet Member, who was engaged in media interviews about unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC), Mr Segurola updated the Panel on the announcement made by James Brokenshire, Minister of State for Immigration, on visits to camps being used to house migrants, to assess the number of children likely to need to come to the UK and access care services, eg those with family in the UK. Funding had been made available to help cover the costs of their transit to the UK. Reference had also been made to a national scheme of dispersal for UASC, in which Kent had been mentioned as having a particularly heavy burden of UASC. There would undoubtedly be much media coverage of these issues in the near future.

2. The verbal update was noted, with thanks.

**131. Adoption Service update**  
*(Item B1)*

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

1. Ms Shah introduced the report and added the most up-to-date figures for the end of January 2015 (compared to the same point in 2015), as follows:-

- 75 children had been placed for adoption (122 in 2015),
  - 83 had been adopted (163 in 2015),
  - 61 adopters had been approved (113 in 2015).
- In addition,
- 76 children currently had placement orders, and
  - 92 children had adoption plans.
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- There were currently 39 adopters ready and waiting to accept a child, most of whom had been waiting for more than one year to adopt, with one having waited more than two years. Five adopters had chosen to delay going ahead for personal reasons.
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- There were currently 11 children waiting for adoption, which included three sets of siblings, one disabled child, who had been waiting for 14 months for a

placement, and one child with complex needs, who had been waiting only since November 2015. The overall trend was a steady decline in numbers.

2. Ms Shah set out the priorities for work for the coming year, as follows:-

- the 'foster to adopt' scheme, which involved work with partners such as CAFCASS. Five children had so far been placed in this scheme and the projection was for eight to have been placed by the end of the 2016/17 financial year;
- the prompt revocation of adoption orders for children no longer seeking adoption;
- diligent monitoring of the quality of 'life story' documents and 'later-life letters'. Documentation was being completed but the quality of the information attracted complaints from other professionals. It would also be useful to ask adopters what they thought of the material presented; and
- further work was also needed on adoption forecasts. An historical backlog of cases had now been cleared so the service could move forward and improve, but diligent monitoring would be needed. The 'foster to adopt' scheme and concurrency were now both included on performance monitoring scorecards.

3. Recruitment of new adopters had been suspended when the number waiting to adopt outnumbered the children waiting for adoption, but would re-start in April 2016. Adopters had asked for the establishment of a mentoring scheme, in which experienced adopters would support newly-approved adopters. Medical checks for new adopters would need to be completed promptly, and an electronic system for this would help. The post-adoption support service would continue to provide a team of skilled social workers and clinicians and was expected to make a very positive impact. Work priorities for this area included increasing participation, a parenting programme for adolescents and closer working with schools.

4. Mr Gurney updated the Panel on work with adoption panels. Work was still ongoing to establish paperless panels. Adoption panels were seeking to increase the inclusion of more County Council Members and education representatives. An ongoing challenge was the quality of recording of information to make it both timely and more accurate.

5. Ms Shah emphasised that the improvements Coram had been able to make to the adoption service would simply not have been possible without the work of Kent's foster carers, and she praised their excellent work in supporting children through pressures and challenges and preparing them for adoption. She acknowledged also the contribution made by Specialist Children's Services staff, IROs, the Health service and the Judiciary. She thanked the former Cabinet Member, Mrs Whittle, for her leadership and support at the time when the Coram/KCC partnership was starting, and the current Cabinet Member, Mr Oakford, and the Director of Specialist Children's Services, Mr Segurola, for their help and support in developing the partnership and the mutual trust and respect which had been most evident in the working relationship. She emphasised that it was committed individuals which made such work possible and successful. She added that she was sad that the job she had come to Kent to do was now ending and thanked Corporate Parenting Panel members for their support during this time.

6. The Chairman thanked Ms Shah for her work in improving Kent's adoption service and said that, because of her commitment and expert direction, the future excellence of the service was now assured.

7. Mrs Whittle said that working with Coram to improve the adoption service had been the most rewarding part of her time so far as an elected Member of the County Council. The service's reports which had been considered by the Panel spoke for themselves as a demonstration of the improvements in the service. Four years ago, Kent had had to face the poor state of its adoption service as well as a poor Ofsted rating of its Specialist Children's Services, but all services had now been transformed, the adoption rate was now three times higher than it had been and the public and Judiciary view of Kent's service were now very different. She added that she was pleased that Ms Shah would be continuing some work with the County Council through the proposed development and innovation partnership with Coram. She thanked Ms Shah for the work she had done and said that she hoped the County Council would be able to continue and maintain the quality of work that Ms Shah had established;

8. Mr Segurola added that the whole system of Specialist Children's Services now delivered a better service than it had 3-4 years ago, with a better service as well as better engagement with partners, eg foster carers and the Judiciary, which was vital. Coram's work had improved areas of the service which had been a shortcoming, historically, eg placement orders remaining in place for children no longer destined for adoption. He thanked Ms Shah and the Coram team for their work and said the adoption service was now in good shape to move forward under Mr Gurney.

9. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted and Ms Shah and the Coram team be thanked sincerely for their work on improving Kent's adoption service. Ms Shah was also congratulated on her recent award of an MBE for her work with local authorities to improve the adoption process.

**132. Progress report - Sufficiency, Placements and Commissioning Strategy, 2015 - 2018**  
*(Item B2)*

*Mrs M Hall, Commissioning Manager (Children), was in attendance for this item.*

1. Ms Hall introduced the report and explained that the progress reported had been based on data collected from March to the end of November 2015, relating to the four challenges and eight measures set out in the Strategy. Ms Hall, Mr Segurola, Ms O'Grady and Mr Gurney advised the Panel of the arrangements made for a fostering activity day for children, with their foster carers and social workers. Also attending would be prospective foster carers and adopters who may be able to offer permanency for those children. This was being arranged by Coram/BAAF and Kent staff, using lottery grant funding. This would take place in March 2016 at Oakwood in Maidstone and was expected to be attended by some 15 children and up to 50 carers. Work was underway to identify and prepare the children and their current carers.

2. This type of event was the first such to be arranged by a UK local authority, and there were some issues around safeguarding and protection of the children

talking part which would need to be thought through. This new type of event would seek to address the needs of children who had just missed adoption and were now seeking permanence via fostering. It would be the same kind of event as had been run successfully in the past to boost adoption rates. A child's current foster carers would attend with them, and feedback on the event would be sought from carers attending. This new departure would be a learning opportunity for Kent. Mrs Whittle referred to the first adoption day she had attended and the chemistry between children and prospective adopters which had been immediately apparent in the relaxed atmosphere, proving that the model did work. Mrs Carpenter agreed that chemistry was important and added that being able to spend time with a prospective foster child was very helpful in identifying potential matches.

3. In response to a question about how long a child might be with a foster carer before being offered a chance to attend a permanence event, Mr Gurney explained that this would be part of the progression planning. A child's foster carer would be given plenty of notice that the child was approaching the stage at which they would be considered for permanence, and preparing a child for that next stage would require careful thought. It was suggested that it would be useful for the foster carers on the Panel to attend and observe a permanence event and give some feedback on the format and arrangements, which could help to shape future events. Mr Segurola added that the process would need to be carefully managed to minimise the emotional impact on the children. He undertook to report back to the Panel on the outcome of the event.

4. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to questions and comments be noted, with thanks.

### **133. Performance Management Scorecards** *(Item B3)*

*Mrs M Robinson, Management Information Service Manager, was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mrs Robinson introduced the report and highlighted the following:-

- the measure of placement stability showed a high number of changes of placement but this included planned moves and positive steps forward, eg a young person moving on to independent living.
- the indicator of the number of children participating in review meetings currently included UASC. However, the participation rate would be higher if UASC were to be excluded from the count.
- the number of initial health assessments completed on time (ie within five days of a child coming into care) had previously been low but focussed work with Health colleagues had improved this.

2. Mr Segurola added that the County Council was required to undertake an initial review within 28 days of a child coming into care, but the Council's ability to meet this requirement for every child would inevitably be diminished by a large number of UASC arriving at one time. The Council was currently preparing for the number of UASC arrivals to start to increase in April, in line with the seasonal pattern observed in previous years.

3. Mrs Skinner explained that the number of initial health assessments completed on time was a challenge particularly with regard to UASC. Ensuring that UASC were seen in a timely way could be difficult, both in terms of the volume arriving at any one time and challenges around language barriers and cultural differences. However, NHS commissioners were talking with the Service Manager for the UASC Service. Much work had been done on re-drafting the Health Assessment Guidance for social workers to reduce bureaucracy and smooth the process. Each adoption panel included a medical advisor, to ensure that a child's health issues were given appropriate priority. A child's initial health assessment would be done by a doctor and subsequent assessments by a nurse.

4. Mr Segurola advised that the scorecard now included the number of children who had been in care for 18 months or more who had had the same social worker for 12 months, which the Panel had previously asked to be included. The rate had risen from 30% to 58%, not including UASC, and this increase indicated increasing stability for young people. When considering figures for participation, it had to be borne in mind that some children, eg UASC and disabled children, found it difficult to participate and engage, and there was more work to do to improve opportunities for them. Ms O'Grady added that a new App, 'MOMO', would be used to aid engagement between social workers and children aged between 8 and 17, and use of this could be extended to include disabled children, as it was known to be helpful for children with autism and other conditions. MOMO was already being used successfully by other local authorities and would go live in north Kent on 18 February. However, to be truly successful, its use would have to become common, and social workers would need to be issued with suitable devices and given training to allow them to access and use it effectively. The Panel asked that a demonstration of MOMO be given at a future meeting.

5. **RESOLVED** that the information set out in the report and given in response to questions and comment be noted, with thanks.