

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, 26 May 2016.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mrs Z Wiltshire (Vice-Chairman), Ms H Carpenter, Mrs T Carpenter, Mrs P T Cole, Mr T Doran, Ms M Emptage (Substitute for Ms S Dunn), Mr S Griffiths, Ms B Haskins, Ms N Khosla, Mr G Lymer, Mr T A Maddison (Substitute for Ms C J Cribbon), Mrs C Moody, Ms C Mutton (Substitute for Ms S Dunstan), Mr P Segurola, Ms S Titchner (Substitute for Ms B Taylor), Mr M J Vye and Mrs J Whittle

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs S Skinner (Service Business Manager, Virtual School Kent) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

144. Apologies and substitutes

(Item A1)

1. Apologies for absence had been received from Mr R Brookbank, Mr S Collins, Ms C J Cribbon, Ms S Dunn, Ms S Dunstan, Mr S Gray, Mr B Neaves, Mr P J Oakford and Ms B Taylor.
2. Mr T Maddison was present as a substitute for Ms C J Cribbon, Ms M Emptage for Ms S Dunn, Ms C Mutton for Ms S Dunstan and Ms S Titchner for Ms B Taylor.

145. Minutes of the meeting of this Panel held on 15 March 2016

(Item A2)

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Panel meeting held on 15 March 2016 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman.
2. Arising from minute 138, The Vice-Chairman, Mrs Wiltshire, reported that the group of young people in Thanet who had made a DVD about local crime issues and how these could be addressed had won a national Crime Beater award in March. They had been shortlisted, with 11 others, out of 55 original entrants, and the award was accompanied by a cash prize of £1,000. The young people concerned were warmly congratulated by the Panel and Mrs Wiltshire was commended for encouraging them to submit the DVD for an award, with the involvement of the High Sheriff of Kent, whose projects for 2016 included tackling crime and drugs. Mrs Wiltshire added that she was very proud of the young people.
3. The Chairman suggested that the winning DVD be shown to a future meeting of the Panel.

146. Minutes of the meeting of the Kent Corporate Parenting Group held on 29 February 2016
(Item A3)

1. In response to a request for reassurance that merging the Kent Corporate Parenting Group and the Corporate Parenting Panel would not inhibit scope to discuss operational activity in the future, Mr Segurola explained that this issue had been considered when planning the merger. He assured the Panel that existing links with operational partners and 'behind the scenes' multi-agency joint working would continue as before. The Panel had agreed that it would review its operation after six months, and this would give an opportunity to check that frank discussion was not being inhibited.
2. In response to a question about potential challenges in engaging social workers from abroad, Mr Segurola explained that good English language skills were a basic requirement. Some overseas recruitment campaigns in the past had not been successful, and experience had shown that the level of support given to new social workers, including the quality of induction, a low initial caseload and help in finding accommodation, was a major factor in the success of such a campaign.
3. RESOLVED that the minutes of the final meeting of the Kent Corporate Parenting Group, held on 29 February 2016, be noted.

147. Chairman's Announcements
(Item A4)

1. The Chairman welcomed new Panel members to their first meeting and emphasised that, although the County Council membership was cross-party, discussion of business was non-political.

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

1. Ms Titchner and Ms Mutton introduced themselves and gave a verbal update on recent work undertaken by the VSK participation team on behalf of the OCYPC and Children in Care Council (CICC).

Recruitment:

- Ms Titchner had started work in March 2016 as a Participation Support Assistant.
- Ms Mutton had started work in April 2015 as an Apprentice Participation Worker.
- A new Apprentice Participation Worker, Reece, would start employment in June.
- Two more VSK Apprentices were still being sought, to fill vacancies in North and West Kent.

Meetings:

- In East Kent, membership and attendance at meetings was gradually increasing. Attendance in North and West Kent was still strong.

- At the last meeting of the Super Council, discussion had taken place of what qualities a good social worker should have, with trustworthiness being judged the most important.
- At the last meeting of the OCYPC, service managers had attended to answer questions about the challenges faced by social workers, and this session had been very useful.
- It was hoped that more UASC could be encouraged to attend Young Adults Council (YAC) meetings.
- Recent meetings had included a basic first aid course by the St John's Ambulance Service and a masterclass in CV preparation and interview skills.
- A county-wide CICC meeting would take place on 5 August, to celebrate the achievements of the Council. Panel Members would be invited to attend this.

Other Activity:

- A team of YAC and VSK staff would undertake the Thames Bridges 25km Trek on 10 September, for which Panel members were invited to sponsor them. The aim was to raise £3,000.
- The OCYPC would continue to work on tackling stigma around being in care, for example, the way in which schools approached a child's care status. It was planned that this work would include making a DVD about identity, in which young people would describe themselves in three words. This would help challenge stereotypes of children in care and would emphasise that there was so much more to a young person's identity than their care status. It was hoped that the finished DVD would be premiered at the awards ceremony.
- A programme of activity days was planned for the summer and details of this would be sent to Panel members when complete. Activities would include art days, gliding, horse riding, a sports day and a trip to Dover Castle. Activity days were an excellent opportunity for young people in care to meet and network.
- Work would continue on training a recruit crew to take part in interview panels for social workers and foster carers, and Skills to Foster panels.
- A county-wide art competition was planned, sponsored by the Director of Specialist Children's Services.
- A newsletter would be re-designed to be printed and posted direct to young people rather than via social workers or foster carers. This would ensure that it reached a wider audience.
- Social workers' business cards had now been printed and were being circulated via children in care teams across the county.

2. Mrs Skinner added that a challenge card for young people in care to be able to meet their siblings, either at home or in another placement, was now being followed

up by the IRO and fostering services. The issue would be referred to the CICC for discussion at the end of May.

3. Ms Titchner responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) invitations to Panel members to attend OCYPC and YAC meetings could be wider so more would have an opportunity to participate;
- b) notice of, and an invitation to attend, activity days, was welcomed;
- c) some County Councillors had been able to support activities via their individual Member Grants, but this was limited, so any applications for funding should be submitted as soon as possible;
- d) in response to a question about stigma and schools' treatment of children in care, the Panel was advised that teachers sometimes made allowances for children in care and treated them differently from other pupils, for instance, by reprimanding other pupils involved in misbehaviour but avoiding reprimanding them, as it was thought that this would distress them. It was difficult to find the right way to approach the subject but the YAC could help with advice for teachers;
- e) it would be useful to show the finished DVD about stigma to the full County Council, and the Chairman undertook to look into arranging this. She suggested that the VSK apprentices write to the Chairman of the County Council, sending the DVD, when complete, and asking him to allow it to be shown at a County Council meeting. Mrs Skinner added that the Leader of the County Council had asked to attend a future meeting of the OCYPC, which would add an opportunity to raise the promotion of the DVD;
- f) Mr Doran spoke about his experience as a teacher needing to address issues around trauma for young people. Specific training in this issue would need to be continually updated. A conference – 'Good Emotional Health Equals Good Learning' - in June 2016 would include discussion on understanding of the impact of trauma and attachment on learning and behaviour; and
- g) Foster carers praised the VSK apprentices for their excellent work in encouraging children in care to engage and participate, particularly in East Kent and for children with a disability.

4. The verbal updates were noted, with thanks.

149. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member

(Item A6)

1. In the absence of the Cabinet Member, Mr Lymer gave a verbal update on the follow issues:-

Drive to increase foster carers – in relation to National Foster Carer Fortnight, the County Council was seeking to attract more foster carers. Mr Lymer referred to the

immense contribution made by the county's foster carers to the support and development of young people in care and the rewarding nature of the role. He cited the VSK apprentices as examples of what young people in care could achieve when they benefitted from the support and guidance of good foster carers.

UASC – the number of UASC arriving in Kent in recent weeks and months had been lower than had been anticipated. The Panel would be further updated on the situation at future meetings.

2. Ms Smith added that the two-week targeted foster carer recruitment campaign had included online and social media, local press and radio. In addition, a fostering activity day had sought to match prospective foster carers to children seeking permanent placements. This was an innovative approach, and Kent was the first local authority to hold such an event. In response to a question about the drop-out rate for prospective foster carers who started but did not complete the assessment and training process, Ms Smith explained that it was important to be clear and frank at the outset about the requirements and demands of the role so applicants could see a realistic picture of what they were going into. In Kent, approximately 40% of applicants were successful in completing the process, and this compared well to the success rate nationally.

3. The verbal updates were noted, with thanks.

150. Kent County Council Foster Carers Annual Survey 2016, in consultation with Kent Foster Carer Association (KFCA)
(Item B1)

Ms C Smith, Acting County Manager, Fostering, and Ms L Wray from the Kent Foster Carer Association, were in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Smith introduced the report and said that the single biggest issue identified by the survey had been the vital importance of good communication between the County Council and its foster carers. Ms Wray added that, due to the low response rate - only 23% of foster carers – any dissatisfaction voiced in replies should not be taken as an indication of general dissatisfaction among foster carers as a whole. It had often been found that those most likely to respond to a survey were those who wished to complain.

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

- a) concern was expressed that the questionnaire had been accessible only online, which some people might have found difficult;
- b) good engagement with foster carers was indeed vital, as they formed the 'front line' of the County Council's services to children and young people in care. To gain a clear picture of their views and concerns, a much higher response rate would be needed;
- c) foster carers' lack of awareness of appreciation events indicated that social workers should be more proactive in communicating with foster carers, and there was clearly not a coherent approach across the county to advertising appreciation events. Ms Smith agreed that her priority was to act on the

feedback given. Foster carers were generally satisfied with their level of engagement with social workers; those voicing complaints tended to be those who had had many changes of placement or were caring for young people with complex needs;

- d) a view was expressed that it should not be assumed that those who had not replied were necessarily happy. Kent had to compete with independent fostering agencies to recruit good foster carers so could not afford to be complacent, and the Panel, as corporate parents, should be proactive in identifying the issues which needed to be addressed. Placement stability was currently a concern, and if foster carers did not have good information about services available they were not best able to support a child. Ms Smith responded that work was currently going on about how to improve matching and information, as good matching at the outset would lead to a more stable placement. Ms Khosla agreed that good planning before the start of a placement would increase the chances of a placement remaining stable. Work to support placements was being undertaken with the VSK and the adolescent teams. A funding bid was being made to the DfE Innovation Fund in the hope of developing a more multi-disciplinary approach to personal support;
- e) the survey had shown that 10% of foster carers thought that communication was a problem, but perhaps this was because they were caring for children with the most challenging or complex needs. To get a true picture, the County Council would need to engage with those foster carers who had not responded;
- f) asked when the fostering review in June would be ready to report to the Panel, Ms Khosla explained that the review would involve much work and was expected to be ready to report back in September, with an action plan setting out areas of future work. The peer review was being undertaken by a senior manager from the Tri Boroughs, which received an 'outstanding' Ofsted judgement;
- g) asked if the former foster carers conference could be revived, to allow an opportunity for networking, Ms Smith explained that the Kent Foster Carer Association conference had recently taken place and there were plans for another in October 2016. In addition, news of the issues raised in the survey could be communicated to foster carers via their annual reviews. Clarifying the purpose of the annual review and running the programme would both be helped by a new separate foster carer review team which would operate independently of the rest of the Fostering service;
- h) asked if there was scope to explore the foster carer voice within the health service, perhaps by linking to Looked After Children nurses, with the aim of improving health assessments and health services to children in care, Ms Smith confirmed that there was indeed scope to do this. The health assessment service had improved in recent years, with the result that CAMHS had been easier to access, but this service had scope to improve further;

- i) the annual report on the fostering service considered by the Panel in September 2015 had identified the need for foster carers to be given more training on working with UASC, and Ms Smith agreed that the training package could be improved;
- j) the survey had reported a lack of awareness among foster carers of Signs of Safety, and there was no current training on this for foster carers. However, Mr Segurola explained that Signs of Safety was a model of social work practice and, as such, was not something that would need to be included in foster carers' training, as long as foster carers were aware of its existence as a model; and
- k) The foster carers on the Panel contributed the following comments:-
 - To make the outcome more representative, and to capture the views of those who were less proactive in providing feedback, completion of the annual survey could be made compulsory, and could be tackled as part of a foster carer's annual review;
 - The fact that so few had completed the survey did not seem to give a good impression of the enthusiasm of Kent foster carers, although the timing of the survey – January/February – had been a busy time for many foster carers, and it was easy to put a survey aside to tackle later and then not go back to it;
 - The questions could be improved by being more specific; and
 - the survey was an opportunity for foster carers to comment on and shape their service, and its importance in this regard could be highlighted.

3. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report, and given in response to comments and questions, be noted, and a report on the outcome of the peer review of the fostering service be considered by the Panel in Autumn 2016.

151. Kent County Council response to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing Children
(Item B2)

Ms P Denney, Head of Safeguarding, and Mr P Startup, LADO Manager, were in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Denney introduced the report and highlighted its key points, including the need to raise awareness of the issues among foster carers, the need to conduct, or ask other local authorities to conduct and report the outcomes of, return interviews when a child had returned from being missing, and the need to coerce other local authorities placing children in Kent to comply with the requirement to undertake pre-placement planning and checks, and to give the County Council advance notice of a planned placement. Ms Denney stressed the importance of having a complete and accurate picture of the CSE and vulnerability profile in Kent.

2. The CSE conference held in October 2015 had highlighted the need for constant improvement in the information made available to foster carers, to young people and to professional partners. An audit of cases, undertaken by Nick Stacey in 2015, had been followed by an audit in April 2016 of 70 cases, of which, 23 were of children in care. The outcome of this later audit was yet to be published but was expected to be good. Mr Startup added that the new multi-agency CSE team had now been operational for six months and would prioritise children identified as being at the greatest risk of CSE. Appropriate and relevant information sharing amongst professionals was important but required careful consideration by the officers concerned.

3. Ms Denney, Mr Startup and Mr Segurola responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) in response to a question about the extent to which the lack of co-operation of other local authorities placing children in care in Kent could be viewed as negligence or perverting the course of justice, and the extent to which the County Council could hold other local authorities to account about their lack of co-operation, Mr Segurola explained that the County Council's legal powers in this regard were constrained. He confirmed that other local authorities did indeed have a requirement to consult a host authority before placing a child but this often did not happen. Failure to consult had been noted by inspectors in the past, and the issue could be addressed via Ofsted. A view was expressed that one neighbouring authority which had failed to consult or notify Kent had achieved a 'good' rating by Ofsted, so it seemed reasonable for the County Council to ask Ofsted how they rated such practice when inspecting a service;
- b) concern was expressed at the manner in which other local authorities continued to place children in Kent without full consideration as to how their needs could be met. It was suggested that the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, be invited to visit Kent to discuss this issue with Members and officers;
- c) the involvement of representatives of the County Council's multi-agency partners in that meeting would help to emphasise that the Council was not the only body affected by the issues. As Thanet was a destination for many children in care placed by other local authorities, the challenges it faced should be highlighted at that meeting;
- d) at the CSE conference in October 2015 it had been disturbing to hear the extent of CSE and examples of cases. A briefing for all County Council Members, updating them on the Lakeland review and subsequent progress of CSE work, had been arranged for 21 June 2016. Discussion followed of the previous CSE conference held in 2015, which had included compelling accounts of the experiences of an adult survivor of CSE. It was suggested that all Members have access to this type of presentation as it was so powerful. When asked about the suitability of the content of this for young people, due to its disturbing content, Mrs Skinner advised that it might be appropriate for some but not others and that officers would consider on an individual basis which young people they would suggest be shown the presentation;

- e) some children affected by CSE would not report the issue, while others would. Schools were surely the major route for referrals. Mr Segurola assured the Panel that school staff had had training on how to handle reports of CSE and how to direct referrals. Another speaker commented that a local school had refused a police briefing about CSE as they felt the content of the material was too disturbing for their pupils. Mr Segurola advised that the issue should always be handled in a way which was age-appropriate for the audience concerned. Mr Doran assured the Panel that schools took the issue very seriously; there was an officer in Education, Rebecca Avery, dedicated to addressing it;
- f) the presence of health representatives on the multi-agency CSE team would help health to link the work of the CSE team with the work of its specialist children in care commissioning team and services such as CAMHS. Mr Doran added that the more professionals who became involved, for instance by viewing the presentation previously mentioned, the higher a profile the issue would acquire;
- g) foster carers were often the last people to be consulted about issues such as CSE, yet they were well placed to observe behaviour and had access to information about the children and young people in their care that other professionals simply did not have. Ms Denney agreed that foster carers had a vital role to play in tackling CSE, as indeed they had in so many other issues relating to children in care; and
- h) Ms Denney confirmed that the report of the Lakeland inquiry was due to be published at the end of June, and a Member briefing about its content would be arranged shortly after that.

4. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information set out in the report, and given in response to comments and questions, be noted; and
- b) the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, be invited to come to Kent to meet with Members and officers to discuss the issues set out in para 3 b) above.

152. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service Annual Report
(Item B3)

Mr T Stevenson, Service Manager, Quality Assurance, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Stevenson introduced the report and highlighted key areas of progress in the past year. It had been difficult to undertake the added-value work which had been planned, due to higher caseloads arising from the increased numbers of UASC arriving throughout the year. To accommodate the additional workload arising from this, and to enable the service to deliver its action plan, seven new IROs had been employed. Mr Stevenson responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) the CSCH Cabinet Committee, at its May meeting, had asked the Panel to look into placement stability, and the IRO service could perhaps assist with an in-depth piece of work around this. Mr Stevenson emphasised that some changes of placement were necessary and constructive, for example, when a child recently coming in care moved from an initial temporary placement to a long-term placement. Ms Denney added that some children could be placed with their parents but would still show up in statistics as being 'in care'. To give a placement the best chance of being stable and resilient, good initial matching was important;
- b) very few young people took up the option of 'staying put', and it would be helpful for the Panel, as corporate parents, to be able to understand the reason for this, and have a better understanding of other patterns in care. It was suggested that the Staying Put policy be reviewed, and Ms Khosla commented that any review would need to consider the rates paid to foster carers and the practicalities and cost to foster carers, for example, of committing a room for the use of a care leaver staying put, which would then be unavailable to another child coming into care and needing a foster placement;
- c) some foster carers did not know about the Staying Put policy so could not advise young people about it. Some young people were not ready to leave care at 18 and could benefit from Staying Put, if they knew about it;
- d) disappointment was expressed that so few foster carers had taken the time to fill in the survey questions to feed back about statutory review meetings. Providing feedback on services, and taking up issues on behalf of young people, was part of the caring role to which they had committed themselves;
- e) the Panel should have an overview of issues and services provided to Kent's 2,330 children and young people in care. Members could perhaps use Local Children's Partnership Groups to look at this as all these groups included the local County Council Members;
- f) it was good to see that IRO workloads in Kent were now around the national average;
- a) the deterioration in performance around children in care Care Plans in 2015/16 was queried. The figure fell from 93% in 2014/15 to 61.8% in 2015/16. This was largely attributable to the impact of the UASC situation and the difficulties in providing a fully-rounded children in care service, including the provision of timely, comprehensive care plans to the large number of UASC arrivals in 2015. This affected the grading on individual cases and brought the overall grading down year on year. Subsequent investigation found that the 93% figure quoted related to Quarter 4 of 2014/15 rather than the annual total, so was not a like-for-like comparison. Care planning could be delayed by the number of UASC arriving at any time, sometimes in large numbers at once. Mr Segurola added that IROs aimed to encourage more young people to chair their own care reviews, to raise their confidence; and

- g) many young people did not understand their care plans but these included large numbers of UASC, for whom the future was more uncertain as they awaited the outcome of their asylum appeals. Involving young people in a review of the pathways template would help their understanding. Many children and young people were also not very aware of the Kent Pledge to children in care, although all children in care were issued with a card setting out the details of the Pledge.
2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report, and given in response to comments and questions, be noted.

153. Head Teacher of Virtual School Kent update report
(Item B4)

1. Mr Doran introduced the update report and explained that Kent's proposed Pupil Premium Policy for Children in Care for 2016-2017 was being presented to the Panel for comment and endorsement. The new policy responded to DoE guidance and was based on a hybrid model of deployment, ie part direct-fund, part application process, which had proved the most popular in consultation. Implementation of the policy would be monitored by VSK Assistant Head Teachers.
2. In terms of a regular update on educational attainment of children in care, Mr Doran advised the Panel that last year's results had now been verified and showed a general overall improvement on the previous year's results. Kent was above the national average score in five of the eight categories, level with the national average in one category and marginally below in two.
3. Mr Doran responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-
 - a) although the Panel was listed as contributing members to the appeal panel which would hear appeals against Pupil Premium funding allocations, the VSK Head Teacher was surely better placed to judge allocations. Members were advised that, in the year since the appeal process started, no appeals had been received;
 - b) Pupil Premium would not apply to non-mainstream settings, such as Pupil Referral Units, as these were funded differently. The hybrid model of Pupil Premium was designed to respond flexibly to a child's needs, to help narrow the gap in attainment between children in care and their peers, and Mr Doran assured the Panel that, if a child met the criteria for an additional payment, they would receive the funding they needed; and
 - c) in response to a question about Pupil Premium funding following a child placed outside their home authority, Mr Doran explained that not all local authorities would have chosen the same model as Kent. Dealing with the varying policies of neighbouring authorities added a complexity to out-of-county placements, as the model used by the host authority and placing authority may differ, and Kent would need to keep track of the different models in use in all of the other local authorities placing children within Kent.

4. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information set out in the report, and given in response to comments and questions, be noted; and
- b) the Virtual School Kent Pupil Premium Policy for Children in Care for 2016-17 be endorsed.

154. Performance Scorecard for Children In Care

(Item B5)

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

1. Mrs Robinson introduced the report and explained the performance for those indicators for which a red RAG rating applied. Additionally, there were some performance measures rated as amber that were very near to meeting the Target set. Definitions for the Adoption performance indicator and those for Care Leavers would change for the 2016/17 reporting, and these changes were explained.

2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the dashboard be noted.