

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 20 July 2016.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mrs Z Wiltshire (Vice-Chairman), Mrs T Carpenter, Mrs P T Cole, Mr S Collins, Ms M Emptage (Substitute for Ms S Dunn), Mr S Gray, Mrs S Howes, Ms N Khosla, Mr G Lymer, Mrs C Moody, Mr B Neaves, Mr P Segurola, Ms B Taylor, Mr M J Vye and Mrs J Whittle

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P J Oakford

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms G O'Grady (Participation Co-ordinator, Specialist Children's Services) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

**As the Chairman had been delayed, the Vice-Chairman presided over the first part of the meeting**

#### **155. Membership** *(Item A1)*

The Panel noted that Mrs S Howes had joined the Panel in place of Ms C J Cribbon.

#### **156. Apologies and Substitutes**

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr R E Brookbank, Ms H Carpenter, Mr T Doran, Ms S Dunn, Ms S Dunstan, Mr S Griffiths and Ms B Haskins.

Ms M Emptage was present as a substitute for Ms S Dunn.

#### **157. Minutes of the meeting of this Panel held on 26 May 2016** *(Item A3)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Panel meeting held on 26 May 2016 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

#### **158. Announcements** *(Item A4)*

1. The Vice-Chairman welcomed Mr Collins and Mr Gray to their first meeting of the Panel.
2. A flyer had been tabled for 'Party in the Park', which would take place on 25 August in Sandwich. Panel Members were invited and asked to contact the organiser if they wished to attend.

3. The Panel was advised that Sarah Skinner had taken up a new post as the Head of the County Council's Adoption Service, and Caroline Smith had taken up the post of Head of the Fostering Service. The Panel was pleased to hear that these key posts were both now filled.

### **159. The MOMO (Mind Of My Own) app as a tool for engagement with young people in care**

*(Item 1)*

1. Ms O'Grady presented a series of slides which set out the content and role of the MOMO (Mind Of My Own) app. Examples of the screen layout and content showed the information that young people could record on the app and how this recording linked into and helped them prepare for care reviews and other meetings. A related app called MOTO (Mind Of Their Own) was to be launched in December 2016 for younger and disabled children, and the content and layout of this was also displayed. Ms O'Grady demonstrated use of the app, using the combination of click options and free-text fields and showing the range of information covered, including young people's feelings and wishes, likes and dislikes, fears and concerns. She reassured the Panel that the app had been tested by the County Council's IT team and that information entered on it was secure. Information entered could not be saved to a smartphone; it could only be accessed via a mobile phone, tablet or computer. A young person could choose to whom they wished to send the entered data, for example, their social worker or independent reviewing officer (IRO), and could see when the information had been read by them.

2. Ms O'Grady then presented an activity report which set out patterns of use, summarised the range and type of issues that young people chose to record using the app, and examples of entries, as well as the views of professionals. This information had been gathered from the period during which the app had been piloted in Kent. Although the app was used by many other local authorities, Kent had won an award for the speed at which it had adopted it, and most feedback from young people about it had been positive. There were, however, a few things still to be addressed: the facility to translate to and from other languages, the fact that tablets used by IROs and social workers were not all internet accessible, and the fact that some young people did not have internet access.

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

- a) it was sad to see on the overview of points raised that relationships were placed below school on the list of 'likes';
- b) the growing popularity of MOMO as a tool may lead to a whole new workload for social workers and IROs, in terms of the time needed to read and respond to the posts sent to them, as acknowledgements and replies would need to be sent quickly;
- c) assurances about the security of the app and the data entered were welcomed. The app could be accessed on a smartphone but data would not be saved on the SIM card, and young people, social workers and IROs would need to log in to access information. In this way, the app was as safe as any other computer system. Young people could choose to send

the information to another third party but would have to type in an email address to send to, so the risk of accidental sending was minimised, and social workers and IROs receiving the information would be able to see where else it had been sent. Ms O'Grady reassured the Panel that any young person considered to be particularly at risk of online 'grooming' or inappropriate contact would not be offered the use of MOMO;

- d) inconsistency of reception and broadband speed across the county may mean that young people in some areas were less able to access and use the app;
  - e) adoption of the MOMO app was a major step in the right direction in allowing young people in care to record and communicate, in their own words, their feelings, hopes and fears, and allowed social workers and IROs to access this information as a useful lead-in to discussing these issues with young people and preparing for their review meetings. Ms O'Grady explained that, as a way of reflecting on feelings and expressing concerns, MOMO was a useful tool for a young person to use, as and when they felt they wanted to. They could vent about a bad day and make negative comments as a way of expressing anger, upset and frustration, but could then choose not to send the record to anyone, using it instead as a private release mechanism. Ms O'Grady reassured the Panel that a young person would never be pushed to share anything they did not wish to share, or feel ready to talk about, whether by using MOMO or in a face-to-face meeting;
  - f) foster carers on the Panel welcomed the use of MOMO as being much better than forms or surveys for gleaning the views of young people, and its roll out was supported. The advent of MOTO was welcomed as this would be particularly useful for disabled children. Ms O'Grady explained that the use of both apps would be covered in foster carer workshops and training;
  - g) in response to a question about the extent to which Kent could model the content of the app, Ms O'Grady explained that the questions and sections used were designed to reflect the nine elements of the pathway plan. Feedback on the MOMO app could be submitted to its creators, so although it was not a bespoke product, it was adaptable. Mr Segurola added that Kent was seeking to add 'immigration status' to the 'key anxieties' option from which young people could choose; and
  - h) in response to a question about other organisations subscribing to the MOMO app, Ms O'Grady explained that the County Council's initial license covered everyone with an '...@kent.gov.uk' email address, but she undertook to look into the possibility of adding staff from other organisations, such as the Young Lives Foundation, who provided advocacy services to young people.
4. RESOLVED that the information on the MOMO app set out in the presentation and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

**The Chairman took the Chair at this point**

## **160. Verbal Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)**

*(Item A5)*

1. Ms B Taylor gave a verbal update on recent work undertaken by the participation team on behalf of the OCYPC and the Children in Care Council (CICC).

### **Super Council, OCYPC and Young Adults Council (YAC):**

- Promotion work in East Kent was going on and membership and attendance at meetings were gradually increasing. Participation in North and West Kent was still positive and there were plans to establish a South Kent group in October.
- The Super Council had chosen a winning logo in bright primary colours, which was shown to the Panel.
- At the most recent Super Council meeting, Members had been asked to write down eight things which they loved about their placement and the family they lived with.
- At the most recent OCYPC meeting, young people expressed to Naintara Khosla their feelings about their placements. It was decided that there should be a new feedback forum, run by young people for young people, and work was starting on setting this up, possibly by including the use of MOMO.
- It had come to light that pledge cards and business cards were still not being distributed to young people. Mr Segurola undertook to ensure that this was addressed and that Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) specifically addressed this issue in children in care reviews.
- A presentation by the Young Lives Foundation on advocacy had been very well received, and young people had said they felt confident that they were adequately informed about this service.
- Work was progressing on a DVD to address the issues of stigma felt by young people coming into care and of the stereotypical view that many people had of children and young people in care. Each participant was asked to describe themselves in three words, none of which related to their care status, and these descriptions would shape the film's content.
- Following the meeting, a discussion highlighted that many young people taking part did not feel confident in contributing to discussions. Some of the most experienced previous participants at the OCYPC had since moved on to the YAC. To address the issue, the subject of the August meeting would be a discussion around the purpose of the OCYPC and the importance of voicing opinions.
- The most recent YAC meeting had been replaced with a summer barbecue, at which young people could network and meet new friends.

### **Challenge Cards:**

- One outstanding challenge was the issue of savings accounts for young people in care. *An update on this issue would be made at the Panel's next meeting.*

**Planned Summer Activities:**

- A list of activities in July and August was circulated to the Panel. These activity days covered all areas of the county and a range of sports, creative and cultural activities, some negotiated at no cost or very low cost. An art competition with the theme 'the Garden of England' would also be run by Mr Segurola.
- Sponsorship for the Thames Bridge Trek taking place on 10 September had been slow in coming forward. The team needed to raise a minimum of £1,000 to take part in the event, and Panel members were asked to support the event by using the justgiving page.

**Participation and Engagement Team updates:**

- Sarah Skinner had left VSK to become the new Head of Adoption.
- Reece Graves had started work in June and was working towards a level 2 qualification in business and admin.
- Amelia Kury would be leaving the VSK team in September to take up a role outside the County Council in recruitment.
- Three new apprentices would start work in September but it was not yet clear where in the county they would be based.

**Other activity:**

- Work to support the summer activity programme.
- Work on the art competition and stigma DVD, mentioned above.
- Participation in interview panels.
- Recruitment and training days for the Recruit Crew, which was growing well.
- Work to support participation workshops.
- Re-design of the newsletter with the County Council communications team.
- Regional work with the office of the Children's Commissioner to support local authorities' Children In Care Councils.
- Work to introduce the Kent Children's University Passport to OCYPC members aged 7 - 11. This involved Saturday attendance at a range of local businesses to contribute to collecting stamps on a 'passport' of experience, which would lead to 'graduation' when the passport was full. Companies currently taking part included Halfords, Pets at Home, Asda and Sainsbury's.
- Work with Gemma O'Grady on a range of projects.

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

- a) in response to a question about the stigma DVD being included in training for foster carers, Ms Taylor explained that the project was currently at an early stage and its use for this purpose had not been considered, but she undertook to look into possibilities. She reassured the Panel that young people taking part in the film would not be identifiable;
- b) adding more detail about the Kent Children's University Passport project, Ms Taylor explained that businesses would teach young people useful skills. For instance, Halfords would teach them how to change a bicycle tyre and Pets at Home would teach them how to care for a range of different pets. Participation in the project would have the benefit of building confidence and gaining skills which could contribute to future career choices. More businesses across the county were being encouraged to sign up to the project and contribute time and resources to hosting young people;
- c) Members sought reassurance on progress made in respect of the issue of savings accounts and pocket money. Ms Khosla advised that a new policy had been issued to all Kent County Council foster carers in June which set out guidance on the proportion of the maintenance allowance that should be set aside for pocket money and savings. Children needed to be made aware of the new policy and resourcing entitlements; and
- d) on 22 July, the Young Lives Foundation, Catch 22 and others were to attend a meeting of foster carers to talk about support issues around leaving care.

3. The verbal updates were noted, with thanks.

**161. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member**  
(Item A6)

1. Mr P J Oakford, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services, gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

***Visited Children's Centres in the Ashford and Swale areas***

***Visited Children's Centres in the Thanet area with a local GP*** to explore how specialist children's services and health could integrate and work more closely together in using children's centre facilities.

***Children's Centres Working Group*** – this group had recently been established with officers from Property, Public Health and Early Help services to ensure that optimum use was being made of children's centres premises, both in terms of the services based there and the number of days per week on which the premises were used, to achieve best use of public money. For instance, in Tonbridge, the youth centre and children's centre previously occupied two separate buildings but had combined to share the space and make full use of the children's centre building.

***A recent County Council Member briefing on child sexual exploitation*** had been well attended.

***Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) national dispersal scheme*** – two recent meetings at the Home Office had addressed the need for and the establishment of a national dispersal system for UASC. It was disappointing that the scheme was still voluntary rather than mandatory, and that, of the 12 other local

authorities which had indicated a willingness to help, only West Sussex had ultimately come forward to take a maximum of 15 UASC from Kent. If the Home Office calculation of the ideal maximum population of UASC as a percentage of the overall population of a local authority were applied, it would mean that Kent should have no more than 300 UASC, yet it currently had three times that number. Monthly arrival rates were much lower than for the summer of 2015 but the 30 or so UASC arriving each month still had considerable impact on accommodation, policing, health and education services. Mr Oakford said he would write to the new Immigration Minister and seek further meetings to continue to lobby for a mandatory national dispersal scheme.

2. Mr Collins told the Panel of a recent incident in which a member of staff at Tonbridge children's centre had had her staff identity pass card stolen outside the building, which effectively gave the thieves access to all areas of the premises. Another Panel member reported that, in the past, people had pretended to be health visitors to try to gain access to staff-only premises. The foster carers on the Panel complained that staff kept identity badges on in their homes when visiting their foster children, and at meetings, for instance at school, which marked them out as being officials visiting a child in care.

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

## **162. Progress report - Sufficiency, Placements and Commissioning Strategy 2015 - 2018**

*(Item B1)*

*Mr T Wilson, Head of Children's Strategic Commissioning, was in attendance for this item.*

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

- a) disruptions to education caused by change of placement, and the number of young people in care with part-time timetables, were both areas of national concern. Young people who were not productively occupied could become disruptive and drift into anti-social or criminal behaviour. Mr Segurolo confirmed that the data collated by the Management Information Unit confirmed that too many children in care were not attending school full time, and that many were attending Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Ms Emptage added that addressing the issue of young people out of school was part of a larger piece of work to tackle the number of NEETs (those not in education, employment or training), in which schools would be held to account for pupils who were not on-roll in year 11. Young people should be dually-registered with the school and the PRU;
- b) the recent Select Committee on Grammar Schools and Social Mobility had highlighted the importance of children in care achieving five good GCSEs, including English and maths, to be able to compete equally in the employment market;
- c) the recent appointment of an out-of-area placement officer was welcomed. Mr Segurolo suggested that the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's

Services send a letter to the Children's Commissioner to re-assert the pressures on education places and other services caused by high numbers of children being placed in Kent by other local authorities, beyond the 20 mile limit from their family homes;

- d) a foster carer outlined an example in which a child who had been excluded from school had been taken back into school on the direction of the Virtual School Kent. Young people missing school were also missing the opportunity to develop social skills; and
  - e) a view was expressed that it would be better for a young person to be attending a PRU, where they would at least have an opportunity to access vocational courses, than to be out of the education system completely.
2. RESOLVED that progress made on implementing the Sufficiency, Placements and Commissioning Strategy 2015-2018 be noted, with thanks.

### **163. Placement Stability Report**

*(Item B2)*

*Ms V Best, Data Analyst, Management Information Unit, was in attendance for this item.*

1. Ms Khosla introduced the report and highlighted the parallels between this and the previous item in terms of the range of factors affecting placement stability. Pre-placement work by social workers would seek to identify children who were most at risk of placement breakdown and would prepare in advance to help the placement, once made, to be as stable as possible. Careful matching of a child and a foster carer would be part of this preparation. Although statistics for placement breakdown were improving, young people over 14 and with those with 'hard to manage' behaviour (for instance, going missing) were still areas of concern. In such cases, VSK's equivalent of Education Welfare Officers would seek a meeting with carers to seek to support them in starting to address issues.
2. Ms Best introduced the appended report of statistics on those children who had had three or more placements, in a range of profiles, including age, gender, disability, asylum status, time in care and placement type.
3. Ms Best and Mr Segurola responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-
  - a) a foster carer commented that the team dealing with foster carers of disabled children were quicker than the mainstream fostering team to respond to reported problems; this may be because they worked with fewer foster carers. Mr Segurola advised that maintaining workforce stability was a challenge;
  - b) a question was raised about the effect that a child's adoption status might have on the stability of their foster placement. Some children, knowing they were not later to move into the adoption process, might settle better into their foster placements than those who knew they would be leaving their foster placement to enter the adoption process;

- c) for some children experiencing three or more changes of placement, those changes were planned and welcomed, so the number of changes was not necessarily a problem. Coping with planned and expected changes was always easier, both for the child and their foster carer;
  - d) Mr Segurola advised that statistics showed that children placed with in-house foster carers experienced fewer changes of placement than those placed with foster carers from independent fostering agencies; and
  - e) Mr Segurola and Ms Khosla responded to a question about the number of cases of, and the process for, a child being returned to their birth family. Regular meetings with the Judiciary sought to ensure that such decisions were made carefully and addressed any and all concerns which had been raised. Mr Segurola assured the Panel that, in cases in which there was any ongoing concern, managers would push for them to go back to court for further consideration.
4. RESOLVED that the areas for development and the proposed actions to improve placement stability be endorsed.

**164. Overview of the Laming Review - 'In care, out of trouble'**  
(Item B3)

*Dr J Maiden-Brooks, Policy Adviser, and Mr M Powell, Improvement Manager, were in attendance for this item.*

1. Dr Maiden-Brooks and Mr Powell introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-
- a) the Laming review had looked into the over-representation of children in care in the judicial system and had made a number of recommendations, and one of the findings had been that the corporate parenting role of local authorities needed to be strengthened;
  - b) the 2014 Kent and Medway Joint Protocol, between the Youth Offending Service, social workers and Kent Police, and its impact, particularly upon foster carers and children's homes, would need to be evaluated. Also, the unnecessary criminalisation of young people should be avoided, by carefully assessing the need for police involvement;
  - c) concern was expressed that many young people who came to the attention of the police had mental health problems, which would not be helped by spending time in police cells, and this would also place extra pressure on their foster carers. Mr Powell advised that any vulnerable young person detained at a police station would always be accompanied in interviews by an appropriate adult, and it was clarified that a young person would not be placed in a cell but in a detention room with an appropriate adult; and
  - d) a view was expressed that the way in which children and young people in care were reported as missing could be reviewed. To report someone too early could waste police time. Some children were known to have a habit of

going away from their foster family for a while to recover from an argument or to take some time to themselves to think, so surely in some cases it was wise to wait a while before involving the police. Some young people did not respect or accept the authority of the police, so to involve them unnecessarily could exacerbate the situation. Mr Segurola explained the way in which missing children were viewed by police. If a child was not at their home when they should be, they counted as 'missing', even if they were visible nearby within the neighbourhood. A view was expressed, however, that, if a child was not reported missing and something then happened to them, there would be questions about why nothing was done sooner, so a cautious approach was needed. Mr Powell added that, after a disappearance, the reasons for it would be identified so patterns of behaviour could be borne in mind when dealing with any future disappearance.

2. Dr Maiden-Brooks suggested that it would be useful to revisit the Laming report once other current reviews had finished and reported, so each could be seen in the context of the others. This was agreed and *an item added to the work programme for a future meeting.*
3. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

#### **165. Tribute to Jane Cribbon**

The Chairman paid tribute to Jane Cribbon, noting how sad it was to lose someone who had been so devoted to children's welfare and development, both as a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel and as a County Councillor. Jane's constructive contribution to the work of the Panel was always highly valued and would be very much missed.