

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 Wednesday, 9 November 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 M Heale (Substitute for Mr B Neaves), Mr A Heather, Mrs S Howes, Ms N Khosla, Mr G Lymer, Ms D Marsh, 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 Hammond (Assistant Director of Specialist Children's Services, West Kent), Mrs S Skinner (Head of Adoption Service), Ms Y Shah (Coram/Kent Partnership Project Manager) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

176. Motion to exclude the press and public for exempt business

The Panel resolved that, under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

EXEMPT ITEMS (OPEN ACCESS TO MINUTES)

177. The views of Young People in Care on post-Adoption support

(Item 1)

1. A party of five young people attended the meeting to tell the Panel about their experiences of being adopted and, with two of their adoptive parents – Debbie and David – and three members of staff – Rebecca, Clare and Lindsay, the services available to support children and families following adoption.
2. The young people gave an introduction about the range and type of work undertaken by Coram's 'Adoptables' team, including a drama group which had filmed productions to help with training in the issues facing young people going through adoption and the support they would like to have.
3. They then presented 'interviews' in which they asked each other about the benefits they had each gained from being part of the Adoptables group, how they wished to see it develop in the future and how they would promote the group to new members. BENEFITS included being able to talk to and network with other young people of the same age, who had experienced the same process, and being in an environment in which they felt safe and able to express their opinions about those experiences. FUTURE WISHES included expansion of the project to reach more young people.

4. They also spoke about their achievements as members of the group, including learning presentation skills as part of being in a theatre group, and the boost in confidence and self-esteem that this had brought. *A video clip of the theatre group was then shown to the Panel.*

5. Clare added that feedback from adoptive parents had emphasised the increase in confidence and self-esteem their adopted children had gained from being part of the Adoptables, as well as help to overcome their feeling of being 'different' from friends and classmates. Rebecca added that the group's drama productions had been a great success and had been very well received, and the young people involved said they had gained a sense of belonging by being in a group.

6. Debbie said the services Coram were now delivering were ones which she had been seeking since becoming an adoptive parent 15 years ago. She thanked Rebecca, Clare and Lindsay for their work and for the great support they gave to adoptive parents. Young people felt safe at Adoptables activities.

7. David added that being part of the Adoptables had been a positive experience for his daughter. As an adopted child, she had felt different from friends and classmates, and being part of the group and being able to share her experiences had helped her to build confidence, feel 'normal' and fit in. He added that having friendly and accessible staff working with adoptive parents made a big difference to parents' experiences. However, adoptive parents had to work with many different agencies, and finding their way through this could be difficult and confusing. He also placed on record his thanks to the adoption team for all their work and support.

8. Lindsay explained that the Adoptables were part of a national network of similar groups, in which the Kent group stood out as an example of best practice. She commended their work and said that good practice developed in one area would be shared with and spread to other areas of the country. The groups were started to address issues being faced by adopted children at school and to increase understanding among teachers and pupils of adopted status, increase awareness of 'non-standard' family set-ups and deal with how to broach questions about adoption. To achieve this, educational materials developed by the Adoptables had been included in PHSE lessons.

9. *A video clip of interviews with Adoptables 'Ambassadors' was then shown to the Panel.* This featured young people speaking about their experiences of being adopted and what they had gained from it, how they viewed their adopted status and what support they had received, and wished to receive. They also spoke about their experiences at school, how they presented their adoptive status among friends and classmates, and how many of their problems they had as young people were the same as those experienced by any young person. Managing adoptive status could become more complicated as young people grew older, but once friends knew and understood their status, the situation tended to become easier. They spoke about their status and how they felt about it, and what they would like other young people to understand about it. To be asked questions about being adopted was generally OK, but to have jokes made about it was not OK.

10. Lindsay added that the Adoptables had interviewed all young people who wished to take part and speak about their experiences, even if they did not want their

faces to be shown in the video, which some had not. She advised the Panel that the video was available to view on the Coram website, and offered to send a link to it to Panel members, via the Democratic Services Officer.

11. Clare and Rebecca spoke about their vision for the future of the Adoptables, to continue to benefit young people and help them to express their ideas and develop confidence. It had taken time to build up the Adoptables project and for it to bed in, working with Coram and the County Council's new Head of Adoption, Sarah Skinner, to increase engagement, make young people's voices part of the process and establish links to other young people's groups.

12. Lindsay added that the schools toolkit had been developed nationally, and included an element by which young people could develop learning programmes for adoptive parents. Young people's knowledge of social media and input into clear and engaging literature would help in raising awareness, and they would be directly involved in developing workshops and training materials. Other work included a social group, run with the Young Lives Foundation, which had added advocacy to the engagement role, increasing levels of participation by young people aged 7 – 12 and the development of an apprenticeship scheme.

13. Clare, Rebecca and Lindsay thanked the Panel for allowing them to attend with the party of young people to tell the Panel about their work.

14. The visitors then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) some children were more used to having school friends who were adopted and so accepted the idea more readily. Children would naturally compare and express curiosity about friends' families, and efforts to 'normalise' adoptive families and other set-ups, such as same-sex couples, could help children to accept them. However, many children had not come across adoption, so the toolkit for teachers would help to address questions asked by children at school;
- b) Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs), which existed in each district of Kent, were suggested as another forum with which the Adoptables group could make useful connections to engage young people in care. It would also be useful to try to get some adopted children on to Youth Councils as ambassadors;
- c) Mr Segurolo asked the young people how good the County Council was at listening to them and was told that listening was 'pretty good' but that the process for providing a response was slow;
- d) Rebecca explained that the schools toolkit had grown from young people's enthusiasm to tackle issues around approaching adoption status at school, and they had developed it themselves. David added that he would like to see greater awareness in the education system of the issues faced by adopted young people. The conference held by Coram at County Hall on 7 October, about adopted children and education, had been good, but still it was difficult to get many schools to engage with the subject, and there were some areas of the county in which the education system was simply not set up to support adoptive parents. The Chairman suggested that a

module on adoption could be included in teacher training courses, in the same way that it was in social work courses;

- e) Debbie advised that all children in care, not just adopted ones, could experience challenges around attachment and trauma, with which they would need support, both at home and at school. She added that the Adoptables group was fantastic at helping adopted children to find a voice. It would be good to extend involvement to the NHS, to tackle issues around CAMHS;
- f) a Panel member who served as a school governor commented that she had not previously known much about adoption. The schools toolkit would be excellent for raising awareness among governors and teaching staff and she requested that a link to it be sent to all local authority schools;
- g) the young people who had attended today's Panel meeting were able to speak out and express their feelings, but many young people were not so able to express themselves in this way. It was suggested that more confident young people could mentor and encourage others to find their voice. Rebecca advised that a mentoring scheme among adopter parents was being developed but there was not yet one for young people. It was important to bear in mind that young people were at different stages in their journeys through the adoption process, and some may simply be more ready than others to engage and start to tackle issues;
- h) Debbie advised that, as a result of the support received from being part of the Adoptables, her adopted son had built up sufficient confidence to take up an apprenticeship, for which he commuted to London every day. Two years ago this simply would not have been possible for him; and
- i) concern was expressed that the videos shown to the Panel, being accessible on the Coram website, might place participants at risk of potential exploitation. Lindsay assured the Panel that anyone seeking to access the videos on the website would be required to register and state their purpose in wishing to view the films, and that access was carefully monitored. In that way, the site operators would know who had access to it and for what purpose, and had contact details for all those who had requested access. Every young person involved in making the films had consented to share them.

15. The Chairman thanked the visitors for attending and said it would be helpful to see them again in perhaps a few months' or a year's time to see how they were getting on.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

178. Membership

The Panel noted that Louise Fisher had taken over the role of Strategic Lead for Youth Justice from Stuart Collins and had replaced him as a member of the Panel.

179. Apologies and substitutes

(Item A1)

Apologies for absence had been received from Sue Dunn, Sophia Dunstan, Louise Fisher, Stuart Griffiths, Bethan Haskins, Carolyn Moody, Peter Oakford, Bob Neaves, Gemma O'Grady and Bella Taylor.

Martyn Heale was present as a substitute for Bob Neaves.

180. Minutes

(Item A2)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Panel's meeting held on 23 September 2016 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

181. Chairman's Announcements

(Item A3)

1. The Chairman commented that the preceding session with young people had been both enjoyable and very useful. She suggested that it be repeated regularly with the same or a similar group of adopted young people and adopters so the Panel could see how those involved were getting on and how the issues they had raised were being dealt with. Participation in such meetings was a useful thing for a young person to be able to include on their CV, and the Chairman undertook to write to them for this purpose.

2. The Chairman also announced that one of the foster carers on the Panel, Carolyn Moody and her husband Derek had won a national award for their work as permanency carers. The Panel congratulated them and the Chairman undertook to write to them on behalf of the Panel. *A letter was subsequently sent by the Chairman of the County Council.*

182. Verbal Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)

(Item A4)

1. Ms Titchner and Ms Mutton gave a verbal update on recent work undertaken by the participation team on behalf of the Children in Care Councils (CICCs), the Super Council and Young Adult Council (YAC). *The text of the update is appended to these minutes.*

2. In response to a question about the suggestion that young people in care be given a free provisional driving licence when they reached 17, Ms Titchner explained that this had not been the subject of a challenge card but was something that young people felt would be useful to have as proof of identity and address. This would be easier than carrying a passport around with them, which would be more difficult and more expensive to replace if lost.

183. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member

(Item A5)

In the absence of the Cabinet Member, Mr Segurola reported that the Leader of the County Council, Paul Carter, had attended a very good meeting of the Young Adult Council (YAC) in October, at which young people had been very vocal in expressing their opinions to him. The issue of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) had also been discussed.

184. Kent/Coram Partnership Report - Post-Adoption Support Team

(Item B1)

1. Ms Shah introduced the report, which covered the partnership's first year's work, and highlighted key events and plans for future work. Ms Shah, Mrs Skinner and Ms Khosla responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) the children and young people's participation group was seeking to increase its membership and range of activities and the plan was for a group for young adopted children to be established in the new year.
- b) the progress made in a very few years was warmly welcomed. Mr Segurola added that Kent's adoption service had benefitted greatly from Coram's involvement;
- c) the number of adopter-mentors was currently 14. Their role was to give short-term support to new adopters and act as a sounding board for any problems or concerns that adopters did not feel able to, or wish to, share with their social worker. This scheme had much support from social workers;
- d) demand for new post-adoption therapeutic and social work services had grown rapidly. However, as the adoption support fund was recently limited to £5,000 per child, its use in purchasing such services for a child was very limited. It was hoped that the £5,000 cap would not be reduced in the 2017-18 financial year. Ms Shah advised that charges for therapeutic assessments and interventions varied greatly. Ms H Carpenter advised that the health service did not pay the highest rates and offered to provide any Panel member who wished it with details of the rates paid; and
- e) it was clarified that the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services, Peter Oakford, was a member of the Adoption Improvement Partnership Group, which looked at the strategic development of adoption services. The Adoption Advisory Board was composed of adopters only. A view was expressed that elected County Councillors should have first-hand involvement, wherever possible, in the development of the County Council's adoption services.

2. RESOLVED that the progress made be welcomed and the future priorities be noted.

185. Kent Clinical Commissioning Groups update report on the Health of Looked After Children
(Item B2)

1. Ms H Carpenter introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) completion of health assessments for children coming into care, and the health services they received whilst in care, were both subjects about which the Panel had been concerned in the past and wished to see reviewed, and the information set out in the report about the improved delivery of these services was welcomed;
- b) it was confirmed that the information about health services was publicly available and it was suggested that links to it could be shared on social media;
- c) there was a good working relationship between the NHS and the Police, in the context of young people experiencing mental health problems and possibly displaying anti-social behaviour as a result, but a view was expressed that this could be given a higher profile in the report. The new Police and Crime Commissioner had highlighted young people's mental health issues as one of his main concerns; and
- d) the Corporate Parenting Panel had long championed the provision of good mental health services for children and young people via CAMHS, and had received regular reports in the past, particularly about waiting times across the county. Ms Carpenter assured the Panel that the service was closely monitored to see that target times were being met. She confirmed that waiting time targets were being met in most CCG areas and that a new specification for the service would be applied from September 2017. She undertook to respond outside the meeting to a specific query about waiting lists in Thanet. Mr Segurola added that the County Council intended to further strengthen CAMHS for children in care in its future commissioning. It would be possible to give more detail on latest work in future reports to the Panel, *and an item would be added to the Panel's work programme for a future meeting.*

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

186. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) - update report
(Item B3)

1. Mrs Hammond introduced the report and updated the Panel on activity since the issue had last been reported to the Panel in September:

- social workers from Kent were currently in France, assisting French authorities to place the children from the Calais 'jungle'.
- since the start of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) in July 2016, 117 of the 152 UASC who had arrived in Kent since July had been moved on to other local authorities in the UK.

- the County Council would continue to lobby the Home Office about the challenges of coping with large numbers of UASC and the inadequacy of government funding to cover the demands of caring for them, particularly those over 18, for which funding did not cover the costs of providing leaving care services.
- an ongoing challenge for UASC in Kent was access to suitable school and college courses, including English as a Second Language (ESOL).

2. Mrs Hammond and Mr Segurola responded to comments and questions from the Panel, as follows:-

- a) Kent would have the costs of placing four social workers and two team managers in France refunded by the Home Office. This work had been progressing well and was helping the County Council's relationship with the Home Office, which now seemed to be understanding the challenge facing Kent and the legacy of long-standing UASC cases upon which the NTS would have no impact;
- b) it was confirmed that the staff in France were from the central UASC service which has been set up in 2015. Their absence from their usual posts in Kent would not impact on the support and services available to Kent's own children in care and those facing the challenges of leaving care, which continue to be a struggle for young people and the foster carers supporting them;
- c) the central UASC team had been set up to support and look after the high numbers of unaccompanied children who entered Kent's care last year, who would otherwise have been supported by the mainstream children in care services (already looking after 1,400 children in care from across the county). As the majority of UASC who entered Kent's care in 2015 were older teenagers, and were now passing their 18th birthdays and becoming eligible for leaving care services, the County Council was seeing the impact on the 18plus service. The number of UASC care leavers was gradually increasing from a baseline of 300 to the present 600, and would reach 1,000 by the end of 2017. The structure and capacity of the 18plus service was being reviewed to meet this increased demand, to avoid detriment to Kent's citizen care leavers;
- d) if all local authorities in England, except London Boroughs, were to take a share of UASC so that no one local authority had more than the Home Office's calculated minimum of 0.07% of the population, there should be places for 11,000 UASC. However, currently only 4,000 UASC had been placed out of Kent;
- e) concern was expressed about the County Council's scope to support care leavers wishing to continue their education at university, in terms of helping them to pay fees or find accommodation; and
- f) more detail was requested of the number of UASC over 16 in education or training, and Mrs Hammond undertook to provide this information to the Panel via the Democratic Services Officer.

3. The Chairman thanked Mrs Hammond and her team for their work in the pressured and trying field they worked in and acknowledged the much extra work they undertook to help and support UASC arriving in Kent.
4. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks.