

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 Friday, 20 January 2017.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mrs Z Wiltshire (Vice-Chairman), Mrs T Carpenter, Mrs P T Cole, Mr T Doran, Ms M Emptage (Substitute for Ms S Dunn), Ms L Fisher, Mr R Graves (Substitute for Ms S Dunstan), Mr S Gray, Ms B Haskins, Mr A Heather, Mrs S Howes, Ms N Khosla, Mr G Lymer, Ms D Marsh, Mrs C Moody, Mr P Segurola, Mr M J Vye and Mrs J Whittle

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P J Oakford

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms M Hall (Commissioning Manager - Children Living Away From Home), Ms G O'Grady (Participation Co-ordinator, Specialist Children's Services) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

187. Apologies and substitutes

(Item A1)

Apologies for absence had been received from Sue Dunn and Sophia Dunstan.

Marion Emptage was present as a substitute for Sue Dunn and Reece Graves as a substitute for Sophia Dunstan.

188. Minutes of the meeting of this Panel held on 9 November 2016

(Item A2)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Panel's meeting held on 9 November 2016 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

189. Meeting dates 2017/2018

(Item A3)

1. The Democratic Services Officer reported that, since publishing the list of meeting dates shown on the agenda, it had become necessary to move the May 2017 meeting to 1 June 2017.

2. RESOLVED that, taking account of the above, the dates reserved for meetings of the Panel in 2017 and 2018 be noted, as follows:

Friday 20 January 2017 – 10.00 am
Monday 20 March 2017 – 1.00 pm
Thursday 1 June 2017 – 10.00 am
Friday 21 July 2017 – 10.00 am
Monday 18 September 2017 – 1.00 pm

Thursday 9 November 2017 – 10.00 am
Monday 29 January 2018 – 1.00 pm
Thursday 22 March 2018 – 10.00 am

All meetings will take place at County Hall, Maidstone.

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

(Item A5)

1. Mr Graves 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 questions from the Panel by Mr Graves, Ms O'Grady and Mr Segurola, and in subsequent discussion, the following points were raised:-

- a) challenge cards, seeking a free young person's railcard for members of the YAC, and asking about the possibility of corporate parents acting as guarantors for young people's rent, were passed around the table for Panel members to see. These and a previous challenge, asking that young people in care be given a free provisional driving licence at 17, were welcomed by the Panel as constructive suggestions which would encourage independence, and corporate parents' support of them would echo the support and help that a young person's own parents might normally offer them as they approached adulthood and needed to become independent. However, it was important to look carefully into the legalities of the County Council as corporate parent taking on the role of guarantor;
- b) more challenge cards were to follow and would be introduced to the Panel gradually. Mr Segurola asked how the Panel wished challenge cards to be handled, as the former Kent Corporate Parenting Group had previously received them, and there was general agreement to the Corporate Parenting Panel being the recipient of them and acting as a conduit by which they could be passed on to the appropriate Portfolio holder to deal with, eg the railcard request would be passed to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport;
- c) it was suggested that, in addition to supporting the previous challenge for a free provisional driving licence, the Panel write to driving schools to seek discounted fees on driving lessons, seek funds from the County Council with which the costs of driving lessons could be subsidised and/or approach reputable second hand car dealerships to help young people to afford a first car. This was another way in which corporate parents could offer the type of support that any other parent might offer;
- d) another view was expressed that young people be made fully aware of the costs of maintaining, insuring and running a car and a suggestion made that young people be encouraged instead to start with a moped. This would have the added benefit of allowing them to learn about and become aware of road conditions and safety before moving up to owning a first car;

- e) County Council Members had previously used part of their Members grant to help fund participation events, and attended and enjoyed various events in their role as corporate parents. It was hoped that this would continue and that new Members joining the Council in the May 2017 elections would take up this option;
- f) the Panel was advised that the VSK apprentices continued to be involved, as the Recruit Crew, in the recruitment and training of social workers and foster carers, and were involved in preparing guidance on good practice in this field. For this they would receive accredited training in recruitment and selection issues, and this would help them build up useful employment skills and something good to add to their CV. The possibility of approaching universities to help train social work students was also being considered;
- g) the number of young people accessing advocacy services had increased, showing that young people's awareness of such services was good. However, the Young Lives Foundation was working with the Young Adult Council to further promote the use of this service;
- h) the Chairman referred to the County Council staff lottery, the Kent Fund for Children, which raised money from which small occasional payments could be made to families to help them cover expenses such as school uniforms;
- i) the challenge card about corporate parents acting as guarantors for young people's rent costs found support among Panel members, as this would help young people to afford better quality accommodation than they might otherwise manage on their own. However, the experience of one Panel member who had been a guarantor for a young person's rent, but had been left to pay off their debts, showed that anyone considering such an arrangement needed to be fully aware of what they could be letting themselves in for if the young person failed to manage their money properly or keep up with the required payments. It was generally agreed that such an arrangement should not be entered into lightly;
- j) Mr Segurolo suggested that, as the provision of accommodation for young people was a complex and changing area and had not been discussed recently, an item be added to the Panel's work programme for a future meeting. He said he would shortly be attending a multi-disciplinary housing group and would start to address the need to prioritise care leavers' accommodation;
- k) it was suggested that the Panel write to John Littlemore at Maidstone Borough Council in his capacity as co-ordinator of district housing officers in Kent, to lobby for the issue to be addressed by district and borough councils; and
- l) the Chairman suggested to Mr Graves that VSK apprentices might like to suggest a topic affecting young people in care or care leavers to be looked at in depth by a County Council Select Committee.

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

191. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member

(Item A6)

1. Mr P J Oakford then gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

Foster Carers Mr and Mrs Upton of Canterbury had each been awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours list. Over 32 years they had fostered 151 children and young people.

Takeover challenge day in December – young people had taken over Specialists Children's Services for a day and had run meetings and questioned officers and the Cabinet Member. The day had been challenging but successful and very useful for both sides.

Early help team scorecard shared with young people for their comments – challenging questions had also been asked about this.

Visit to Montague House social work team – here he had met social workers, management and the administrative team and had been able to see at first hand the challenges faced at all these levels.

Children's Commissioner – a recent meeting had successfully highlighted the issue of large numbers of children in care being placed in Kent by other local authorities. This issue had now been added to the Commissioner's Business Plan.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) - The number of new arrivals had dropped dramatically, with only 20 arriving over the last 5 weeks, giving a current UASC population of 600. However, the pressure on services was now transferring to the 18+ service as large numbers of UASC turned 18. There were currently 700 young people in this category and this would rise to 1,000 by the end of May 2017. The former reception centre at Swattenden had now closed and only Millbank was still in use, currently housing 10 young people. Under the national dispersal programme, all UASC arriving since July 2016 had been successfully accommodated by other local authorities around the UK.

2. In response to comments and questions from the Panel, Mr Oakford explained the following:-

- a) training on child sexual exploitation given by Kent Police had been very well received and a film used as part of the training was praised by those who had seen it as being frank and hard-hitting. However, suggestions that this film be shared with a wider audience, including Kent MPs, foster carers and County Council Members, had been met with the view from the Police that its content was considered too disturbing. One particularly shocking aspect of the film was gangs' apparent awareness of vulnerable children in care; the first question they would ask of a child would be their care status;
- b) the issue of other local authorities, particularly London boroughs, placing large numbers of children in care in Kent had long been a concern, and an added concern now was from media coverage that some of these young people may be bringing drug habits and other problems into Kent. Placing authorities were known not to be diligent in undertaking the necessary risk assessments ahead of placing a child out of their area, and concern expressed about what corporate parents in the receiving area could do, realistically, to address the issue. A view was expressed that it should not be the responsibility of the receiving authority to lobby the Government;

instead, the Secretary of State and Children's Commissioner should take an overview and take on this responsibility. Mr Oakford advised that he was a member of the Children's Board of the Local Government Association and undertook to raise this issue there;

- c) a school governor on the Panel spoke of a case of a 14-year-old being placed in Kent and smuggling drugs into the school in which she had been placed. The safety of the placed child and of other children in the school was of great concern, and it was suggested that this issue be referred to the Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee. Mr Segurola added that, at the time of a child in care being placed into Kent, if the County Council felt that the school placement found for them was inappropriate, it would be challenged. Mr Heather added that educational professionals in Kent were aware of the highly organised nature of gangs which sought to infiltrate schools with drugs. Ms Emptage added that the Kent education service had a support system for its own children in care but had no knowledge of issues potentially coming in with children placed by other local authorities. She confirmed that schools were rarely given any briefing prior to a placement being made, and there had been no application by a placing authority to set up any support system in advance of placing a child. It was suggested that a survey of schools be undertaken to identify the scale and breadth of the problem;
 - d) Mr Doran added that it was difficult for anyone outside Kent to understand the scale of the challenge Kent faced. The national average population of children in care in secondary schools was 6%, but some areas of Kent had rates as high as 50%. Ms O'Grady added that Kent had a population of 1,300 children in care placed by other local authorities, yet placed only 300 of its own children in care out of the county;
 - e) a view was expressed that young people should be helped to see and understand the whole issue of drugs and the damage they did to society and to individuals' physical and mental health. Any media or entertainment giving the impression that drugs were glamorous in any way should be banned;
 - f) Mr Oakford was thanked for raising this important subject as the Panel had been able to have a frank and useful discussion about it; and
 - g) the takeover challenge was welcomed as a good engagement exercise. If this were repeated, it would be most useful for the Panel to be involved.
3. RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted, with thanks, and that the danger of drugs and gang culture coming into Kent with children placed by other local authorities be referred to the Local Government Association Children's Board and the County Council's Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee, as set out above.

192. Review of operation of the new Corporate Parenting Panel model
(Item B1)

1. Mr Segurola introduced the report and sought views on how well the revised Panel was working, following its merger in summer 2016 with the Kent Corporate Parenting Group. In discussion, the following comments were made:-

- a) it had been a concern that the new, larger Panel might prove too large, and perhaps be too daunting for young people to attend, but this concern had not been borne out;
- b) the broader Panel membership had been able to have useful, in-depth conversations about issues of concern, for example the preceding discussion arising from the Cabinet Member's verbal update. This allowed Panel members to share and understand issues;
- c) the inclusion of corporate parenting training in the induction pack for newly-elected County Council members had long been an aim, and training would be included for new entrants following the May 2017 elections;
- d) the Panel's work programme was perhaps too focussed on social care issues. Suggestions for areas for inclusion were health and the voluntary sector; and
- e) it was suggested that the Panel's membership should include representatives of the Police and professionals working with disabled children and young people.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the report be noted;
- b) the Police and disabled children's service in the Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Directorate be approached to identify representatives to join the Panel;
- c) the work programme be shared with the whole Panel to seek items for inclusion; and
- d) the operation of the Panel be reviewed again in January 2018.

193. Review and Update of the Sufficiency, Placements and Commissioning Strategy - 2015 - 2018

(Item B2)

Ms M Hall, Commissioning Manager, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Hall introduced the report and highlighted key areas of work and progress since the Panel had last received an update, including much work on an intense review of the Strategy since December 2016. The Panel had been receiving updates twice-yearly on progress against achieving the eight measures in the Strategy, and this would continue. There were currently two areas in which improvement was sought – measures 3 (placements beyond 20 miles from a child's family home) and 6 (children having three or more placements). In response to comments and questions from the Panel, Ms Hall, Mr Segurola and Ms Khosla explained the following:-

- a) in response to a concern that the present measures were not sufficiently robust or precise, worded as 'we expect to see..' rather than 'we will...', Ms

Hall explained that work was in hand to revisit and tighten these in the light of changing provision, eg the number of independent accommodation providers had increased greatly in the last 2 or three 3 years. Mr Segurola added that it would also be necessary to revisit the breadth and variety of provision, linking to the 0 – 21 and 0 – 25 strategies;

- b) in terms of placement stability, work was ongoing with VSK and the new Head of the Fostering service, Caroline Smith, under the 'Sense of Belonging' programme, to increase stability. Additionally, in the 'Mocking Bird' model, one respite household would be established for every three care households;
- c) all children's commissioning activity was now undertaken by one combined commissioning team under a new Interim Head of Children's Commissioning, Karen Sharp, which had made it more possible to achieve an overview of activity;
- d) Ms Khosla added that the County Council needed to use the Strategy to promote its activity in housing care leavers, particularly UASC, and could liaise particularly with district councils' housing departments. To get a clear and full picture of need and provision, which was a complex service area, it would be necessary to take account of patterns of adoption and special guardianship orders and their effect in freeing up foster care placements. In that way, the County Council could 'future proof' its service;
- e) safety pods were welcomed as a new initiative which would avoid the need to use bed and breakfast accommodation to house young people. Any shared accommodation would be used only for a maximum of 28 days while a young person's needs were being assessed;
- f) in response to a question about the provision of training accommodation for young people, in which they could learn cooking and budgeting skills, Ms Khosla commented that this would be a good project to take on;
- g) a request was made that future performance reports give actual figures, eg of the numbers of young people using a service, rather than the percentages shown currently; and
- h) in response to a concern about the rate of placement breakdown, and how breakdown could be avoided if signs were noticed early enough, Mr Segurola advised that support for foster carers taking on children with challenging needs was provided by the Sense of Belonging programme and Mocking Bird model. More support would also be given to foster carers at the start of a placement, and work currently being done to improve CAMHS would also help placement stability.

2. RESOLVED that the reviewed and updated Sufficiency, Placements and Commissioning Strategy 2015 – 2018 be welcomed and endorsed.

194. Head Teacher of Virtual School Kent (VSK) Annual Report 2015 - 16
(Item B3)

1. Mr Doran introduced the report and pointed out that the 2015/2016 academic year had been a successful one for VSK. He highlighted the difficulty of comparing that year with previous as it had been the first year of Ofsted's new performance measures and monitoring system. He updated the Panel on some latest figures, as follows:

- a) the number of children who were NEET had dropped from 53% in September 2015 to 25.7% in September 2016. The 'snapshot' figure for January 2017 was 19.8%;
- b) attendance and absence showed a variable picture across Kent. Attendance falling short of 90% was classified as 'persistent absence', but this threshold had been increased from 85%;
- c) VSK was collaborating with the Fostering service on the Sense of Belonging programme and had added to its monthly performance dashboard the number of children experiencing two or more changes of placement. The Head of Fostering attended VSK team meetings and there was good two-way information sharing;
- d) the VSK apprentices had continued their excellent work on increasing participation and engagement. One apprentice had taken a permanent post in the VSK team. Memberships of the various committees had increased, as follows:- Our Children and Young People's Council: 42, Young Adult Council: 19, Junior Council: 15 – making an overall total of 76, which was very pleasing. There had been 19 activity days in the 2015/16 academic year, attended by a total of 450 children and young people. The number of activity days for young people aged over 16 had increased; and
- e) Kent continued its record of innovative, collaborative support of individual pupils using Pupil Premium Plus (PP+).

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

- a) Mr Doran received congratulations for the VSK team's work and many years of dedication to supporting the educational success of children and young people in care. It was suggested that this work should be shared with a wider audience by the VSK annual report being reported to the County Council's Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee;
- b) spending of PP+ was carefully monitored and Mr Doran offered to supply more detailed information outside the meeting. There had been much good practice and improvement since the inception of PP+ and it was hoped that more improvement would be achieved in the future. Examples were given of young people who had benefitted personally from PP+ investment;
- c) Mr Doran explained that the figures quoted in the VSK dashboard and the scorecard presented to the Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee at its December meeting, in terms of the number of care leavers who were NEET, were not based on the same information or the

same cohorts of young people. Figures used in the VSK report were concerned with 16–18 year olds only, whereas the scorecard was concerned with 18–21 year olds;

- d) it was requested that induction training for newly-elected Members in May 2017 include details of the programme of participation events, so that all elected Members would have the opportunity to attend and become involved. Current Members who had attended such events had found them very enjoyable; and
- e) it was important to look at patterns of demand across the county and ensure that services were provided where young people wanted and needed them and could make the best use of them.

RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks;
- b) Mr Doran and his team be congratulated on the work of VSK; and
- c) the annual report be referred to the County Council's Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee so that committee could be kept up to date with the work of VSK.