

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, 1 June 2017.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mrs T Carpenter, Mr G Cooke, Mr D Farrell, Ms L Fisher, Mrs S Gent, Mr R Graves, Mr S Gray, Mr S Griffiths, Ms S Hamilton, Mr A Heather, Ms N Khosla, Mr S J G Koowaree (Substitute for Mrs T Dean, MBE), Mr G Lymer, Mr M J Northey, Mrs S Prendergast, Mr P Segurolo and Ms M Smith (Substitute for Mr T Doran)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

2. 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)

3. The views of Young People in Care - update on post-adoption support services

(Item 1)

1. A party of five young people attended the meeting with three members of staff – Rebecca and Clare from the post adoption team and Yashi from KCC/Coram - to tell the Panel about their experience of being adopted and the services available to support children and families following adoption.

2. The young people introduced themselves and gave an introduction about the type of work undertaken by Coram's 'Adoptables' team, including the Ambassador Programme for young people aged 13 to 25, drama projects in national theatres and the Participation Programme that had been set up in September 2015. They organised 2 residential weekends a year, media training, public speaking and other activities to raise confidence.

3. The young people spoke about the benefits that they had each gained from being part of the Adoptables group, how they wished to see the group develop in the future and how they would promote the group to new members. The young people spoke about their achievements as members of the group, including learning presentation skills and the boost in confidence and self-esteem that being part of a group had

brought. One of the young people explained why adoption was important to her personally and the impact that social media has had on the group. The group supplied information to schools using the education schools toolkit to help them to understand how to approach the issue of adoption.

4. A presentation on adoption was introduced to which all of the young people contributed, it summarised what adoption is, the impacts that adoption can have on a child and a parent's life and issues to be aware of.

5. One of the young people explained that a short film was in the process of being created in which he would have the opportunity to share his adoption story with members of the public and other adopted children. He said that he would like to be able to feel that he had helped others and answered questions based on his experiences.

6. Clare told the Panel that the Coram's 'Adoptables' groups worked with the Young Lives Foundation to arrange events and activities for children aged 12+ in Kent. The young people said the workshops were a good opportunity to learn, build confidence, make new friends and have fun.

7. Rebecca added that feedback from adoptive parents had emphasised the increased self-esteem and confidence their adopted children had gained from being part of the group, 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. Rebecca said the growing group had accomplished a lot since last visiting the Panel in November 2016 and had come a long way since being formed. The group hoped in future to create a 'Young People's' page on the adoption website, continue to liaise with the Young Lives Foundation and make short experience films to help others. Clare added that the group were hoping to form other support groups for younger children in the future with a similar focus already described for the other groups. She hoped to come to the panel again in the future to tell them about these new groups.

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

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

a) One Panel Member thanked the young people for sharing their experiences so confidently and then shared a personal adoption experience with the Panel. He asked the young people how they thought adoption experiences differed based on age. A young person responded explaining that he was adopted as a baby but believed certain issues such as attachment to be very similar.

b) A Panel Member questioned whether there was a difference between private agency adoption and KCC. Yashi explained that there were no private adoption agencies in Kent; adoption was either by KCC or the voluntary sector. There were also services for those wishing to adopt from abroad and these were very highly regulated with many checks.

c) Mr Segurola asked the young people about adopted children being able to have contact with their siblings and if the County Council could do any more to help this. Rebecca said more could be done in terms of making arrangements for siblings to meet, every circumstance was different but most adopted young people would meet with their siblings at social events or meetings arranged by the adoptive parents. One of the young people told the Panel about a Christmas party event that was very important to her as she was able to meet with her adopted brother whom she was only able to see once a year.

d) A Panel Member praised the young people for their presentation and asked how the County Council could make a difference to the group's work in raising school's understanding of adoption issues. Clare said the post adoption team were very aware of this issue and was involved in a pilot scheme with schools and head teachers to address attachment issues and support adoptive parents in dealing with schools. Coram's education schools toolkit had been rolled out to schools and was used in planning PHSE lessons. Rebecca followed on from Clare's comments by saying that the workshop was a powerful and very different experience which was guided by the young people and its key aim was to make a change to their lives. The workshop had addressed adoption-related bullying, which needed stronger attention, and schools' awareness of adopted children's needs.

e) Yashi explained that attachment training was something that was very valued by schools and adopters and those adopters felt well supported by schools. The workshops, which had been run in conjunction with Virtual School Kent, focused on developing the education of the young people and allowing them to make new friends in a comfortable environment. There was much work currently starting including a pilot scheme to develop 'educational champions', in which 9 adopters would be trained as champions to work closely with schools, and the establishment of a mentoring group by adopters.

f) The Chairman made reference to a personal experience as a fosterer and said it was important to find the balance between awareness and information whilst making protecting the young person's privacy.

10. The Chairman thanked the young people for attending once again to update the Panel on their experiences and the work they were doing to raise awareness of the issues faced by adopted children and young people.

4. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) film - 'Chairing your own review' (Item 10)

The Chairman explained that, because the film about review meetings featured young people who did not wish to have their identities revealed, this item was moved up the agenda to be considered whilst the meeting was still closed to the public.

1. A short film was shown on Review Meetings for children in care, the value of them, how they were organised and the impact that the meetings can have.

a) Fostered children attended regular review meetings. A foster carer on the Panel confirmed that they found the meetings helpful.

b) Asked how the review meetings were introduced to the young people, Ms O'Grady explained that the video was not public but was available to Social Workers and that the review meetings should be held in an environment in which the young person is comfortable and familiar with at a time that suits them.

c) The fact that the video was available to Social Workers was welcomed. Ms O'Grady confirmed that the video should be used as a tool to educate young people but the young people in care in the video did not want their identities to be revealed and their wishes must be respected.

d) Asked who had the right to attend the review meetings, Mr Segurola confirmed that it depends on the legal status of the child and that each case is taken on its merits. Ms O'Grady added that all arrangements were on a case-by-case basis to meet the needs of the young people.

e) Asked if permanent Fostering arrangements have to have the review meetings. Mr Segurola confirmed that this is a statutory obligation and whilst the review meetings might not be as frequent, they still hold the meetings to ensure that the young people were happy with the arrangement and their needs were being met. A foster carer on the panel said that the young people like to be heard and have a say in what is happening in their lives, it gives them a boost in confidence.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

At this point, the meeting was opened up to the press and public.

5. Terms of Reference and Membership

(Item 2)

The Chairman noted that the Terms of Reference had been updated to show the new Cabinet Portfolio titles.

6. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 3)

Apologies for absence had been received from Carolyn Moody, Trudy Dean, Tony Doran and Hazel Carpenter.

George Koowaree was present as a substitute for Trudy Dean and Marian Smith was present as a substitute for Tony Doran.

7. Election of Vice-Chairman

(Item 4)

The Chairman proposed and Mr M J Northey seconded that Mrs T Dean, MBE, be elected Vice-Chairman of the Panel.

Agreed without a vote

8. Minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on 20 March and 25 May 2017

(Item 5)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Panel's meeting held on 20 March 2017 and 25 May 2017 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman.

9. Chairman's Announcements

(Item 6)

1. The Chairman welcomed all of the new Panel Members and thanked all of the former Panel Members for their support and contribution around the issues that the Panel had tackled in recent years.

2. The Chairman provided a brief update on Ofsted and advised that the Council was awaiting the publication of the report. Mr Segurola followed on from the Chairman's comments and confirmed that the publication had been delayed to 13 June and the report will be sent to all of the Members.

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

(Item 7)

1. Mr Graves and Ms O'Grady gave a verbal update on the recent participation events and the work of the OCYPC, the Super Council and Young Adult Council (YAC). *The text of the update is appended to these minutes.*

2. A Panel Member commented on a recent event that he attended at an activity centre where he had the opportunity to meet the apprentices and have 1-to-1 discussions. He said it was a very pleasant experience and their achievements should be celebrated. The Chairman also commended the recent achievements within OCYPC.

11. Corporate Parenting Challenge Cards

(Item 8)

1. Ms O'Grady provided an update on the Corporate Parenting Challenge Cards, the current challenges and the progress that had been made. The railcards for young people, the Skills demo day to give young people the opportunity to learn life skills had been approved to go ahead, but the Cabinet Committee was not able to act as a guarantor for young people's rent payments. Ms O'Grady said that she had been working with the 18+ team and meeting with Apprentices and young people, in addition to these challenges.

2. Confirmed that the foster carers were currently working on policy and finding ways to help young people with basic life skills to create a clear pathway for young people when they leave home and become self-dependant.

3. Ms Khosla thanked Ms O'Grady for the update and the team for their use of expertise and experience to transition smoothly across services, support issues raised and continue to promote supporting young people into their futures.

4. Panel Members made the following comments:

a) District Councils and Housing Associations could have more involvement in Corporate Parenting.

b) The Cabinet Committee operated a number of initiatives and could do more to meet the needs itself and link together to promote better outcomes.

c) A foster carer shared an experience with the Panel regarding the housing arrangements for children in care and the lack of budget.

d) A Panel Member questioned whether help was available for young people with credit/debit cards to allow them to manage their finances appropriately. Ms Khosla confirmed that the workbooks cover managing finances including information on debts and current accounts.

e) Mr Segurola confirmed that the number of young people leaving care had increased with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and will continue to increase over the next 3 months.

2. RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

12. Advocacy and Independent Visitors Services, provided by the Young Lives Foundation - report on activity 2016/17
(Item 9)

1. Mr Gray provided an update on the Advocacy and Independent Visitors Services, provided by the Young Lives Foundation and announced the YLF's 10th anniversary and the strong and effective relationship that the Foundation had with the County Council and the VSK, Adoption Team. He advised that the Council's Advocacy service was statutory, to ensure that children and young people in care were able to have a voice, have control over their own future and have access to effective representation and rights. Mr Gray confirmed that the future was uncertain but confirmed that roughly 200 young people were being taken on each year and demand had been increasing since 2015 beyond expectations. The workload was now more consistent and manageable partly due to the reduction in the number of UASC in Kent. Outcomes: consistent adult in a child's life for at least 2 years. Challenges: seek to recruit volunteers and when an arrangement comes to an end (withdrawing support/extend past 18 years old). Cu recruitment and when arrangement comes to an end (seek to extend past 18 years old to ensure support is still available). Currently in a good position, sustain a high standard of work. The appendices summarised the issues which included Education and access, placements and Finance and access to bursaries. Appendix 2 is defined in 2 Acts; purpose to support young people relationships, 60 arrangements per year.

a) A foster carer on the Panel said she was very impressed with the Advocate Services provided and wanted to know whether there was anything that could be done to extend the 'ending mark' for arrangements for young offenders. Mr Gray confirmed that the service was available for young people up to age 24 if they were in education, although Independent Visitors services ended at 18. Mr Segurola also commented and confirmed that the service will continue in an informal way beyond 18 if there was a strong relationship, but that the service could only support young people in a way set out in contract.

b) Asked if the service could be built up more to support young offenders in secure accommodation, Mr Gray confirmed that the service could expand and work on this area to make the transition back into the community much smoother.

c) In response to a question about difficulties in providing travel warrants, Mr Segurola advised that many of the young people affected by these difficulties were UASC who needed to travel to London to access ESOL and other languages. Identifying local courses would reduce their need to do this.

3. RESOLVED – That the report be considered and noted.

13. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care (Item 11)

Maureen Robinson (MI Service Manager) was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Robinson introduced the Performance Indicators for Children in Care and provided a short update on the progress and the key areas to be improved.

a) Responding to a question regarding the 20 day deadline to complete Health Assessments, Mr Segurola confirmed that although a few of these did miss the deadline, they were done as soon as possible.

b) Asked about benchmarking against other authorities, Mr Segurola confirmed that most local authorities did not measure this. Ms Robinson added that this is not part of a regular benchmark.

c) RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

14. Statement of Purpose - Fostering Service (Item 12)

Caroline Smith (Head of Fostering) was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Smith introduced the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose, confirming that it sets out the Recruitment process, the Placement process and the Referral process. The 'Fostering Fortnight' was held for the first two weeks of May and still need to recruit 110 families for Kent, 90 families have been recruited so far with a target of 200. Work is being done to promote the service in preparation for Ofsted, next time the fostering business plan will be brought forward.

a) Asked about the locations in which the team had hoped to recruit, Ms Smith confirmed that the target was the North and West of the County. The London Boroughs were the main competitors, and the plan was to arrange more events in the areas that were struggling.

b) Asked if there was anything that the Members could do to support the Recruitment process, Ms Smith advised that spreading the word and advertising would make a difference.

2. RESOLVED – That the report be noted.