

## 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 Thursday, 9 November 2017.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mrs T Dean, MBE (Vice-Chairman), Mr G Cooke, Mr T Doran, Ms S Dunstan, Ms M Emptage (Substitute for Ms S Dunn), Mr D Farrell, Mrs S Gent, Mr S Griffiths, Ms S Hamilton, Mrs S Hammond, Mr A Heather, Ms N Khosla, Mrs C Moody, Ms C Mutton, Mr M J Northey and Mrs S Prendergast

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough and Ms N Sayer

IN ATTENDANCE: Miss K Mills (Commissioning Manager), Mrs M Robinson (Management Information Unit Service Manager), Ms C Smith (Interim Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

##### **37. Membership**

*(Item 1)*

It was noted that Sarah Hammond, Interim Director of Specialist Children's Services, had joined the Panel in place of Philip Segurola.

##### **38. Apologies and substitutes**

*(Item 2)*

Apologies for absence had been received from Alison Brett, Hazel Carpenter, Teresa Carpenter, Louise Fisher, Lesley Game, Reece Graves and Stephen Gray.

Marian Emptage was present as a substitute for Sue Dunn.

##### **39. Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 18 September 2017**

*(Item 3)*

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2017 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

##### **40. Chairman's Announcements**

*(Item 4)*

The Chairman expressed her appreciation of the contribution made to the Panel by the Virtual School Kent Apprentices (VSK) and said that the Panel's work would simply not be possible without them.

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

*(Item 5)*

1. Ms Mutton and Ms Dunstan gave a verbal update on the work of the OCYPC, the Super Council and the Young Adults Council. *The text of the update would be attached to these minutes.* They then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) participation events offering arts and crafts activities in the half-term holiday had been much appreciated by the young people who had attended them;
- b) the Virtual Triathlon to Calais and back again had so far raised £753 towards the £1,000 target. The distance covered was 142 miles in just under six hours, with which participants were very pleased; and
- c) the Christmas dinner being arranged in the Canterbury area for care leavers who would be alone on Christmas Day was part of a national scheme and was being trialled in Kent for the first time this year. It was hoped that a larger event could be arranged for Christmas 2018. *Details of the crowdfunding page which would be set up to support the event would be circulated to the Panel via the Democratic Services Officer.*

2. It was RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted, with thanks.

#### **42. Corporate Parenting Challenge Cards**

*(Item 6)*

1. Mr Doran introduced the report and said what a great initiative the challenge card process had proved to be and that it was an excellent example of a good process developed by young people to publicise and address issues raised by other young people in care. He added that the Young Lives Foundation was shortly to become involved in the development of the challenge card process, to help address the issues raised.

2. He emphasised that the County Council had a policy of black sacks not being used at all when young people moved between placements, and aimed to see that all foster carers provided proper and appropriate luggage to be used on these occasions. This principal was included in the Foster Carers' Handbook and in Foster Carer Skills training, at which the importance of it would always be stressed. He said the complaint which gave rise to the challenge card may have related to one or two isolated incidents. However, there would need to be a way of dealing with complaints in cases where the policy was not being properly applied. He responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) black sacks could have been used to pack belongings for a variety of reasons, for instance if there were too much to fit into conventional luggage or boxes and black sacks had been used to pack the surplus. Although black sacks might prove convenient for this purpose, their use was not appropriate as they gave the impression of homelessness and that a young person's possessions were not being valued or respected. He said he

would seek to ensure that common sense was applied when helping any young person to pack up to move;

- b) asked who was expected to provide luggage, and if it might prove prohibitively expensive for foster carers hosting temporary placements to keep buying or lending luggage, when young people moved in and out frequently, Mr Doran clarified that a child or young person should own their own luggage and should not have to borrow it each time they moved. Foster carers should ensure that children and young people in their care were provide with adequate and suitable luggage;
- c) a foster carer pointed out that luggage could be bought inexpensively. Most young people either arrived with their own luggage or had it bought for them by their foster carers. The use of black sacks was something not heard about for years and was hopefully very rare. However, it was an important point which needed to be addressed; and
- d) other speakers expressed surprise that black sacks were still used as foster carers would receive notice that a young person was to move and would have time to organise in advance for their packing to be done properly. It was important that all belongings were packed in suitable containers to avoid damage in transit.

3. Ms Hammond added that the reported use of black sacks may have been associated with care leavers moving into independent or semi-independent accommodation and that foster carers may not be to blame. However, the principal of taking care and showing respect for someone's belongings still applied.

4. It was RESOLVED that the progress made to date on challenge card issues and the information given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

#### **43. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education**

*(Item 7)*

1. Mr R W Gough gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

**2017 Examination results** – examination results for summer 2017 had now been verified. **KS2** results had been the best ever, with a substantial overall increase since last year. Kent's performance was above both the national and south east averages, and the national attainment gap at KS2 between children in care and their peers had narrowed. These results were a great credit to the children in care and the support given to them by Virtual School Kent.

More detail on **KS4** results would be available in March as these were more difficult to verify but it was known that one UASC had achieved five passes at A\* and one student with SEND had achieved four GCSE passes. KS4 results were also more difficult to compare with peers, due to the changes made to GCSE examinations nationally and the impact of these upon children in care in particular. To help them manage placement moves and the resultant disruption to their education, children in care had relied upon their final result being based partly on their course work rather than solely on examination results, but the course work element had now been

removed. More change was due to come next year, which would add to the difficulty of comparing the overall picture to that of previous years.

In terms of achievements at **16+**, twenty young people had taken up university places in autumn 2017 and one VSK apprentice had passed NVQ Level 4 in Maths. There had been much progress since 2014/15 in addressing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). The percentage of young people aged 16+ who were not in education, employment or training had fallen from 53% in 2014/15 to just over 38% in 2015/16 and 17% in 2016/17 and was expected to fall below 14% by the end of the 2017/18 academic year.

**UASC update** – as at 7 November, there were 344 UASC and 813 care leavers in Kent, but a substantial change was expected in January when many UASC would turn 18 and attain care leaver status. So far in 2017, there had been 180 new arrivals (compared to 388 in 2016 and 948 in 2015) and the rate was staying low and steady. So far in 2017, 253 UASC had been placed with other local authorities via the national transfer scheme (NTS), although some local authorities were finding it difficult now to accommodate the numbers of UASC being sent to them. Mr Gough explained that he chaired the South East Strategic Partnership on Migration, which was monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of the NTS. Mr Gough and Paul Carter had recently met the Immigration Minister to discuss the funding issues faced by the County Council as the frontline authority hosting UASC new arrivals.

**Celebration events – VSK/16+**; these were important in acknowledging and celebrating young people's achievements beyond their academic career, eg commitment and contributions to the Children In Care Council. This year's awards event had taken place on 16 October at Canterbury cricket ground and had been an excellent, well-attended event. The **Foster Carers awards** event had taken place on 4 October in Folkestone and had given an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the work of Kent's foster carers in caring for, supporting and championing children and young people in care.

2. Mr Gough responded to comments and questions about examination results, including the following:-

- a) the excellent KS2 examination results were welcomed but disappointment expressed about the KS4 results and the difficulties arising from the national change in assessment at KS4. However, as all pupils in the south east had experienced the same changes, it should still be possible to compare the attainment of children in care to that of their peers. The attainment gap between the two was still large and needed to be reduced. Mr Gough explained that it was not yet possible to make a comparison nationally of KS4 results, due to the changes to the assessment process made in the last year;
- b) Mr Doran added that KS4 achievements had been easier to support when VSK started, and Kent's results used to be above the national average. He agreed with Mr Gough that children in care relied on being able to use course work modules towards their final examination mark and would now feel the loss of this benefit. He added, however, that the performance of children in care had dipped when changes had been made previously, but had recovered once they settled into a new regime, and there was every reason to believe that performance would recover again. In response to a question about the extent to which the performance of children in care

could be compared to that of their peers, Mr Doran explained that it was difficult yet to see a clear picture and start to make a comparison; and

- c) Mr Gough emphasised how much of an achievement the KS2 results were as this area had previously been weak in Kent. Young people achieving good results at this stage were doing so against sharply-rising competition.
3. It was RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted, with thanks, and that a review of academic attainment be made after March 2018, when more information would be available.

#### **44. Safer care for children living away from home**

*(Item 8)*

1. Ms Smith introduced the report and highlighted the key developments, including the spread of safeguarding training to all staff, foster carers and independent panel members, as well as to groups of young people, with appropriate support from Virtual School Kent and designated nurses for Looked After Children. Foster care households would be required to have a safe care plan for the family as well as an individual plan for each foster child. In addition, Prevent training had been reviewed since the recent Parson's Green terrorist event and had been shared with foster carers and staff, as well as independent fostering agency staff and providers of semi-independent accommodation. Ms Smith responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) a foster carer on the Panel confirmed that she received both safeguarding and Prevent training and that her annual review meetings checked that this training had been given. She said she had found the training helpful. Ms Khosla added that foster carers had helped to develop both the safeguarding and Prevent training and thanked those present for their valuable participation. Canterbury College had also been instrumental in spreading the training, added to wellbeing and health issues, to groups of young women;
  - b) asked if similar training would be made available to young men, Ms Khosla explained that, while most training for young people was made readily available to both genders equally, take-up of certain kinds of training tended to be lower among young women, so their groups had been set up to address this. However, some of the issues covered by these groups had been requested by young men and would be extended to them; and
  - c) Ofsted had recognised Kent's good work on training, and foster carers' contribution to the good outcome of the most recent Ofsted inspection should be recognised and celebrated.
2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report, and given in response to comments and questions, be noted.

#### **45. Accommodation and housing options for 16/17 year old homeless young people, children in care and care leavers**

*(Item 9)*

1. Miss Mills introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) the accommodation options available for young people leaving care were welcomed as giving them an excellent opportunity to learn life skills such as budgeting and cooking; and
- b) asked about the potential de-commissioning of the Millbank reception centre for UASC, Mr Gough explained that a decision on the future use of this centre had yet to be taken but confirmed that there were no plans currently to close it. The County Council was currently looking into government funding for the establishment of a regional service centre. *The Panel would have regular updates on accommodation options for care leavers and further information on the use of this centre could be included then.*

2. It was RESOLVED that:-

- a) the plans to commission a new supported accommodation service, with a focus on a greater number of statutory service users;
- b) the new protocol for 16- and 17- year-old homeless young people and the update on Homelessness Reduction Act 2017; and
- c) the current procurement of a new shared accommodation service,  
be noted.

**46. Performance scorecard for Children in Care**  
(Item 10)

1. Mrs Robinson introduced the report and summarised key areas of performance, including placement stability, the number of care leavers in education, employment or training, and work with NHS partners to improve the completion of health assessments for children in care within the required timescale. Ms Sayer added that a similar challenge was being experienced within the NHS around the referrals process, which was being addressed with Ms Khosla. This joint work and the priority placed on this issue by KCC and NHS partners was welcomed.

2. It was RESOLVED that the performance data in the children in care scorecard be noted, with thanks.