

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 29 January 2018.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mrs T Dean, MBE (Vice-Chairman), Mrs T Carpenter, Mr G Cooke, Mr T Doran, Ms S Dunstan, Mr D Farrell, Ms L Fisher, Mrs L Game, Mrs S Gent, Mr S Gray, Mr S Griffiths, Ms S Hamilton, Mrs S Hammond, Mr G Lymer, Mrs C Moody, Ms C Mutton, Mr M J Northey, Mrs S Prendergast, Ms N Sayer and Ms C Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Dunkley (Corporate Director for Children Young People and Education), Mr S Fitzgerald (Assistant Director, South Kent, and Lead Officer for Missing Children), Ms M L Hall (Commissioning Manager - Children Living Away From Home), Mrs M Robinson (Management Information Unit Service Manager) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

Item 1 was taken later in the meeting and appears as minute 56

47. Membership - to note recent changes to the Panel's membership (Item 2)

The Panel noted that Nancy Sayer had joined the Panel as an additional NHS representative and that Caroline Smith had joined in place of Naintara Khosla.

48. Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies for absence had been received from Andy Heather.

There were no substitutes.

49. Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 9 November 2017 (Item 4)

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2017 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

50. Chairman's Announcements (Item 5)

1. The Chairman announced that the Kent Adoption Conference would take place on 23 March and invited all Panel Members to attend. *The Democratic Services Officer undertook to send the conference flyer to all Panel Members after the meeting.*

2. The Chairman also referred to a copy of the 'Get Involved' newsletter, which all County Council Members had received, and the work of the Dartford Youth Council, and said that these were excellent examples of young people in care getting involved and expressing their views.

3. The Chairman introduced Matt Dunkley, the new Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, and welcomed him to his first meeting of the Panel.

51. Meeting dates 2018/19

(Item 6)

It was RESOLVED that the meeting dates reserved for the Panel's meetings in 2018/19 be noted, as follows:-

Thursday 22 March 2018

Friday 1 June 2018

Thurs 19 July 2018

Weds 19 September 2018

Thurs 1 November 2018

Tues 29 January 2019

Weds 27 March 2019

All meetings will start at 10.00 am at County Hall, Maidstone.

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

(Item 7)

1. Ms Dunstan and Ms Mutton gave a verbal update on the work of the OCYPC, the Super Council and the Young Adults Council. *The text of the update will be attached to the final version of these minutes.*

2. Ms Smith added that funding would be made available to support the work groups for young women in care, and that Teresa Carpenter and Carolyn Moody hoped to help with these groups. Similar groups for young men were being piloted in East Kent as demand for them had arisen there, and it was hoped that this initiative would later be able to spread across the county.

3. It was suggested that a further report on the use of the MOMO App be made to a future meeting of the Panel and that this include the views of social workers on the usefulness of the App and perhaps some case studies of how it has been used. *The Democratic Services Officer undertook to add this to the work programme.*

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

53. Corporate Parenting Challenge Cards

(Item 8)

1. Mr Doran introduced the report and thanked Members and officers for their sponsorship and support for the Virtual Triathlon event in October. He then referred back to the discussion at a previous Panel meeting about corporate parents taking on the role of guarantor for care leavers' rent payments, which was now being reviewed in the light of similar arrangements being made by other local authorities. Mr Dunkley added that, in his

view, unless there was a very good reason for the County Council as corporate parent not to be a guarantor, then the arrangement should be open as a possibility, as it would be for any natural parent supporting their child into adulthood. He undertook to take further legal advice about the issue and assured the Panel that appropriate safeguards would be put in place before any arrangement was entered into.

2. Foster carers on the Panel welcomed this review of the guarantor proposal as it supported young people towards independence, and was something that most foster carers would not be able to afford to offer on their own. Another speaker agreed that such an arrangement would be an onerous undertaking for a family. Her family had recently looked into making such an arrangement for a relative and had found the associated financial enquiries intrusive.

3. Mr Doran was asked to relay the Panel's thanks and appreciation to staff for the work undertaken to progress the challenges.

4. It was RESOLVED that the progress made to date on Challenge Cards be noted, the review of the guarantor issue be welcomed and the Panel's thanks and appreciation for the work undertaken to progress these challenges be relayed to the staff concerned.

54. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member

(Item 9)

1. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, Mr R W Gough, gave a brief verbal update on the following issues:-

Ofsted 'annual conversation' – this was a new model of Ofsted engagement. The first conversation would take place on 7 February and would cover a range of service areas in some depth. A number of documents had been submitted which set out the County Council's self-assessment of its children's social care and education services, and this self-assessment covered the same ground as an Ofsted inspection.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) update – there were currently 274 UASC under 18 and 874 over 18, the latter having care leaver status. As had been expected, 1 January had seen a large number of UASC turn 18 and become care leavers, as UASC who arrived without paperwork were given 1 January as their date of birth. There had been only 214 new arrivals during 2017, compared to 388 in 2016 and 948 in 2015. The County Council was continuing to lobby ministers for increased funds to help cover its responsibilities towards UASC. Funding issues were particularly significant in relation to UASC care leavers.

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

55. 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)

56. The views of Young People in Care

(Item 1)

A party of social workers from the North Kent Children in Care service, Rodica Cobarzan (Service Manager), Jade Sanghera (Social Worker) and Phil Khumalo (Social Work Assistant), and two young unaccompanied asylum seekers, M (aged 18) and R (aged 11), were present at the invitation of the Panel.

1. The Chairman welcomed M and R to the meeting and hoped they had enjoyed visiting County Hall and learning about its history and that of the neighbouring prison.

2. M and R were asked if they were well looked after in care and both said they were. M said he had been in the UK for four years, having come from Eritrea, and had been very well looked after during that time. He had lived in shared housing briefly, and foster care, and was now living at a YMCA. He said he had 'found his family', referring to the team who supported him. R was asked if he enjoyed school and he said that he did. He had been in the UK for just over one year, having arrived in November 2016 from India.

3. Phil and Rodica showed the Panel the Silver 'Social Worker of the Year' award which the team had won for their work with UASC, having submitted evidence of their work and been shortlisted in the 'Creative Social Work' category. This win was a great achievement for them and they were very proud of the award. It had raised the profile of the work that UASC social workers were doing, and they were proud to showcase their work to help UASC settle into new lives in the UK and gain an education and independence. The Panel congratulated the team on their success in winning the award.

4. Rodica said the trauma that some of the young people had experienced was hard to put into words and working with them to help them learn new skills and grow in confidence was immensely rewarding and satisfying. They were running work groups to teach young people skills such as cooking, food hygiene and personal and home safety. Seeing young people learn to cook a meal together and then share that meal with the group was immensely rewarding. Working with UASC brought to light the small issues which simply did not arise with civilian children but which needed careful thought when working with UASC. UASC also needed different support and more support than civilian children. A social worker was more likely to get a call from a UASC at the weekend, seeking support for something which had happened, perhaps something quite small, as they had no-one else to turn to for support.

5. M said he felt close to the social worker, Michael, who had supported him over the years and called him 'Dad' as he felt he was a father to him. Michael was the only family M had and he would always call him whenever he needed support or advice. He spoke about everything to Michael and valued him highly. Since he had reached 18, the leaving care service had treated him as an adult, and he now had a small flat with his own kitchen. He was attending college, had a job and enjoyed playing football. These achievements had been as a result of the work of the UASC team.

6. R said he had worked with Jade on his life story, and Jade had cooked Indian food with him, which he had enjoyed. He had come to the UK in very difficult circumstances and had lost track of his father during the journey. With Jade's help he had found his old school online, had been able to trace his mother and was hoping to find his father as well. After

having an emergency placement with foster carers when he had first arrived in the UK, he had lived with the same foster carers since and with them he was learning good English and was working well at school.

7. M added that, before living independently, he had lived in supported lodgings with foster carers and had received very good care there.

8. Rodica and Phil told the Panel that the team had undertaken its group work since 2015/16 and had worked with many UASC in that time. Work had focussed on teaching young people how to live in the UK, including how to manage money, personal and online safety and living in a community. Work group sessions were held once a week in the evenings, and each group worked in its own way by its individual rules, which young people set themselves. Phil showed the Panel the schedule of sessions and the subjects which would be followed, for example, one week a visit from a community liaison officer or a visit to a fire station and the next week a talk on substance misuse. Sessions also included liaison with local youth services and sporting activities, at which M in particular had excelled. After each session the group would prepare a meal together. Ten young people were able to work together in the kitchen at one time and would learn budgeting skills and food hygiene while cooking. *He undertook to leave a copy of the schedule and photos of the group sessions with the DSO for circulation to the Panel.*

9. M thanked the social work team for the support they had given him and said that, as a result of their support and encouragement, he had been able to achieve his dream of playing football in a local team. His social worker Michael had helped him to find a coach who had taught him how to train and build up his physique. At 16, he had been playing football locally and had been approached by a scout to play football for the local league team. Michael encouraged him to take up this opportunity and develop his football skills and he had been placed in the first team. Michael had taught him to protect himself and stand up for himself when dealing with people, and had signed for him when he wanted to join the team as an under-18. The social workers he had met as an UASC had all been good people and had helped him with getting into college and learning to use a computer for study, which had been difficult at first and was not something he enjoyed. When he had come to the UK he knew 'nothing' and spoke no English, and had to learn the names of everything. Michael had helped him build his confidence, particularly to take up the place on the football team, and he was touched by the support and commitment he had given him. By being promoted into the first team he had achieved his dream. Michael had told him he would still look after him once he reached 18.

10. Rodica said that work with UASC brought the team much satisfaction and that the UASC they had worked with had given them back just as much in return. They had helped young people to achieve and to build confidence and it was so rewarding to hear M and R talk to the Panel about their lives.

11. The Panel thanked M and R very much for attending and congratulated them on their achievements. The Chairman added that she was very proud of M and R and of the social work team which had supported them so well.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS (meeting open to the press and public)

57. Virtual School Kent (VSK) Overview Report 2015-16 (validated results) and 2016-17 (un-validated results)
(Item 10)

1. Mr Doran introduced the report and highlighted key achievements in the year, including:

- The overall examination performance in Kent had exceeded the south east average
- The attainment gap between children in care and all learners had been narrowed
- Kent's KS4 results had exceeded the national average
- The cohort of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) had continued to fall
- Jo Carpenter and the VSK participation apprentices had organise 19 activity days which had engaged over 400 young people
- The annual 16+ achievement awards event had grown so much that it now needed a larger venue
- Ofsted had praised VSK's use of pupil premium

2. Mr Doran then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) VSK supported foster carers in providing a flexible timetable as an alternative to a pupil attending a pupil referral unit (PRU). Without this option and support, some foster carers would have to cope with a disaffected young person being at home all day, and young people would not have the opportunity to address and overcome their difficulties in a supporting environment; and
- b) there was sometimes a lag in schools receiving the pupil premium allocation for a pupil and this could be due to the allocation for a child placed in Kent from another local authority taking a while to be sent on to the new host authority. In an area in which many out-of-county children in care were placed, this lag could have a sizeable impact on some schools' funding. Local authorities around the UK had different processes for claiming and allocating pupil premium. This issue could be picked up by the Select Committee on Pupil Premium.

3. It was RESOLVED that the performance of the Virtual School Kent in 2015 – 2017 be noted, its impact upon positive outcomes for children in care be welcomed and its priorities for 2018 – 2019, set out in the report, be agreed.

58. Young People Missing from Placement

(Item 11)

1. Mr Fitzgerald introduced the report and highlighted the ways in which, until very recently, Kent differed from other local authorities in how missing episodes have been recorded, i.e., its pioneering work with sharing its reporting and data with the police and the way in which it conducted interviews with young people returning from being missing. Mr Fitzgerald responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) national guidance gave no exact definition of the word 'missing' and historically local authorities and police forces have applied the term in different ways. 'Missing' could be taken to mean that a young person was not at home at a time when they should be or could apply to anyone whose whereabouts could not be established, where the circumstances were out of character, or the context suggests that the child may be at risk of harm. The age range of young people most likely to go missing was 14 – 15. Mr Dunkley added that this issue was to be covered in the

Ofsted conversation on 7 February as local authorities had a responsibility to follow up all missing episodes relating to their children in care, including UASC for which they were the corporate parent;

- b) one foster carer added that she had previously had a foster child who had rarely returned home on time throughout his whole placement. She had been obliged to report him as missing and he had then been included amongst the figures, although his lateness was never a big issue;
- c) some young people went missing in order to try to find relatives elsewhere in the UK. Contact with friends and family remained the single biggest pull factor for children who go missing;
- d) asked how many young people went missing and could not be found, Mr Fitzgerald explained that the majority of children who went missing (75%) did so for less than 24 hours. However, the length of time missing was not in its own right an indicator of risk. Kent had had no citizen children who had gone missing and had not been found but there were a small number who went missing for extended periods. Some UASC went missing within a short period of arriving in the UK and for these there was a joint agency response as there was a high probability that these young people will have been trafficked. There was also a number of UASC who went missing close to their 18th birthday and who did not return. For these young people a pending change in legal status was believed to be the principle trigger. Ms Hammond added that approximately thirty UASC under the aged of 18 were still missing. Members asked for more detailed figures of the number of young people missing who had not returned and officers undertook to supply this information outside the meeting. *This was subsequently done.* Ms Hammond then suggested that a regular update report on the cohort of young people missing be submitted to the Panel;
- e) Mr Dunkley undertook to follow up with the Young Lives Foundation, which was delivering the service as an independent provider. It was recognised that some young people will prefer to speak to someone other than the local authority when they had come back from being missing as they could talk more frankly about a problem they might have with the local authority's care service or staff;
- f) asked why some young people refused a return interview, Mr Fitzgerald explained that some saw it as a repetitive discussion covering the same ground each time, while others felt they were at risk in a situation they did not feel able to discuss easily. These young people would need to be made aware of the option available to them to speak to someone independent of the local authority and they could be encouraged to see a return interview as being in their own best interests in helping them start to tackle the issues which had caused them to go missing;
- g) asked if it were possible to extend the 72-hour period within which return interviews should be conducted, Mr Fitzgerald explained that 72 hours had been set in statutory national guidance but it was still possible to conduct and record an interview after this time;
- h) asked what could be done to stop young people from going missing, Mr Fitzgerald explained that a focus group of young people in 2017 had been asked what they would want to see done differently in terms of handling missing episodes and return

interviews. This group had said that repeated return interviews which asked the same questions were not effective; and the County Council needed to ensure that the return interview did not become process driven. Practitioners need to be tenacious, creative and persistent and ensure that agencies are working together to identify and mitigate risks. The recent changes to the placement planning procedures was one example where the County Council had placed an emphasis on developing an effective response to missing episodes whilst at the same time attempting to ensure that judgements about what constitutes a missing episode are not risk adverse; and

i) following a return interview, the record of interview would be signed off by the team manager and discussed with the social workers working with the young person concerned to address any areas of practice which might have contributed to the missing episode.

2. It was RESOLVED that the current practice challenges faced when children in care go missing, the work being undertaken to better understand the circumstances that lead to missing episodes and the steps being taken to mitigate risks as much as possible, be noted; and

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

(Item 12)

1. Ms Smith and Ms Hall introduced the report and explained that the Panel was being given the opportunity to comment on and influence the review of the strategy. They then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

a) a review of the supply of supported housing places had been carried out as part of the preparation for a key decision about the service, and a further review of provision would be undertaken later in the summer of 2018; and

b) the strategy was primarily concerned with accommodation for children in care, but, related to it, more work was required on preventative and early help services. These services would become part of the strategy in the future. It was suggested that the Panel have a further opportunity to consider and comment on the strategy later in the summer of 2018, before it was finalised, *and this was subsequently added to the work programme.*

2. The Panel then discussed the recruitment, training and retention of foster carers, with the foster carers on the Panel contributing their experiences and views. Points arising included the following:-

a) information evenings sought to help attract more foster carers but this was a challenge and word of mouth was still the most used method of attracting new people;

b) Mr Griffiths said the role of foster carer was unlike any other and was a vocation rather than a job;

c) foster carers recruited more recently could be asked for their input of their experiences of recruitment and how this could be improved in future;

- d) Mrs Carpenter and Ms Moody were looking into the pay structure for foster carers and how this could compete more effectively with IFAs. This work was much appreciated;
- e) support for foster carers was an important part of the package and Mr Dunkley asked foster carers to say what more the County Council could do to support local foster carers' associations. Ms Moody said the structure of support groups was important and they performed a valuable role but could have a closer link with social work support. Mrs Carpenter added that, due to budget restrictions, foster carer support groups had a very low priority, which did not reflect the value the county placed upon its foster carers. Foster carers needed to have a supportive group in which they felt able to voice worries and discuss problems and find common ground with others who were having, or had dealt with, the same worries and problems. Use of IT for sharing forums was an option but older foster carers tended to resist the use of such media;
- f) these views surprised some Panel members and it was suggested that the Panel take a detailed look at the pay and rewards for foster carers. *An item would be added to the work programme for a future meeting;*
- g) a former foster carer on the Panel said she would not take up the role again now as she was put off by the recruitment process and fear of not receiving sufficient support;
- h) some aspects of fostering, for example, the respite care available, may not be well known by all foster carers so would need to be publicised; and
- i) information evenings had been made more informal as part of the recent 'rebranding' of the fostering role and good feedback had been received about the new format. Most people considering fostering would think about it over a long period (perhaps up to one year) before finally deciding. Young people who had been fostered sometimes attended information evenings, but these were vulnerable young people and care needed to be taken about exposing them to an audience which, in the early stages, was unknown. The Virtual School Kent apprentices supported and facilitated young people's participation in foster carers' training.

3. Ms Smith undertook to look into and address the issues raised during the discussion.

4. It was RESOLVED that the proposal to review and update the Sufficiency, Placements and Commissioning Strategy 2015-2018 be welcomed and supported, and a further report be made to a future meeting of the Panel to allow for more discussion of the final strategy, once the issues raised during discussion had been taken into account.

60. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

(Item 13)

1. Mrs Robinson introduced the report and summarised key areas of performance since last reporting to the Panel. She then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) concern was expressed that performance targets should be realistic and achievable, but not too easy. A combination of shorter and longer-term targets would help the County Council to get to where it needed to be. Mrs Robinson explained that some targets, for example, the number of initial health assessments undertaken within 20 days of a child coming into care, were not set by the County Council. Ms Sayer added that NHS commissioners in Kent had a key performance indicator of 85% for initial health assessments completed within the 20 working days set out in the statutory guidance. The County Council target was 90%. NHS colleagues worked with social care colleagues to build an improved picture of a child's case, and consent issues for children within the NHS were different from those in social care. *Ms Sayer offered to supply a breakdown of health assessment data for the last quarter to show what was set and monitored by the Kent NHS clinical commissioning groups, and Mrs Robinson offered to set out the process for target setting in the next performance scorecard report; and*
- b) Mr Dunkley explained that the reasons for patterns of performance would be investigated as part of the overall picture, for example, for the 13.3% of young people who refused health assessments, reasons for and rates of refusal would be examined and compared to those in other local authorities. He added that a good performance target should balance predicted performance with an element of stretch and aspiration. *Ms Smith offered to supply in the next performance scorecard report detail of the reasons given for refusal and how refusal would be dealt with.*

2. It was RESOLVED that the performance data in the children in care scorecard and the information given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks, and the next performance scorecard report include the process for target setting, a breakdown of health assessment data for the last quarter to show what was set and monitored by the NHS, and detail of the reasons given for refusal of a health assessment and how such refusal would be dealt with.