

From Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education
 Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education

To Corporate Parenting Panel – 19 July 2018

Subject **Challenge Card Update - Lifelong links**

Classification Unrestricted

Summary	This report provides Members with an overview of progress made on the current challenge card which was presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 1 st June 2018.
Recommendation	Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to NOTE the progress of the Lifelong Links and that, following the Challenge Card, it is confirmed that this is open to all Kent children and young people in care who meet the criteria.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Following the Lifelong Links launch on 11th May 2018, our apprentices issued a new Challenge Card to the Corporate Parenting Panel, on behalf of our children and young people councils. The Challenge was: **‘Having heard about the need for children and young people in care to feel as “connected” to their support network as others do in their families, how will you as their corporate parents give this opportunity to all children in care going forward?’**

1.1 The criterion for Lifelong Links is to work with children and young people who have been in care less than 3 years, under the age of 16 with no plan to return to family or for adoption and identify a group of safe adults that can commit to offering permanent lifelong support.

1.2 The ‘family finding’ model in US or Lifelong Links approach in the UK is complemented by family group conferencing which gives a platform for the family to take the lead in decision making whilst recognising and responding to agency agendas.

1.3 During the local launch for the 3-year pilot of Life Long Links in Kent, Matt Dunkley agreed to the challenge card from our care leavers that all children in care should be offered this opportunity. The challenge was presented to members of the Corporate Parenting Panel on 1st June 2018.

2.0 Summary of the data

2.1 At any one time there are approximately 300 children and young people across the county that meet the referral criteria. To date we have had 85 children/young people identified by service managers and social workers

across East and South Kent as being suitable for Lifelong Links and 35 'confirmed' or active referrals. Lifelong Links in Kent is a 3-year pilot programme, which started in March 2017 and is funded by the Department of Education (DFE).

- 2.2 The 3-year pilot has now extended to North and West Kent and is open to all children and young people who meet the criteria, including disabled children, unaccompanied asylum young people and young people in custody.
- 2.3 It is too early in the 3-year trial to be able to identify with any accuracy how many children and young people will want to take up the offer, but preliminary data indicates that of the 85, 14% were later withdrawn by the Social Worker and 16% of children and young people declined the offer. The model and pace of the work is led by the child or young person and they must agree with the referral to Lifelong Links.
- 2.4 As of 21st June 2018, there are currently 1,608 children and young people in care in Kent. If the evaluation supports preliminary data, then those meeting the criteria for Lifelong Links would be approximately 1,120 over the 3 years. *(This number is an estimate, based on the first year and a more accurate estimate will be available at the end of year 2 of the pilot in March 2019.)*
- 2.5 Children and young people are currently identified and referred by their social worker, through Child in Care reviews and statutory visits. Children and young people are also able to self-refer. There is a triage system to identify which referrals need to be made more urgently and prioritised.

3.0 The Family Group Conference service

- 3.1 The family group conference service facilitates the work for Lifelong Links. The service currently has the capacity to achieve approximately 500 conferences per year. This is predominantly an edge of care provision with a small cohort of rehabilitation family group conferences, missing family group conferences and other pieces of restorative practice. In addition, there are a small number of family group conferences being convened as part of the schools' pilot in the East and adolescent pilot in the South. We are also trialling family group conferences for care leavers as part of the leaving care offer.
- 3.2 The Department for Education funding provides for 210 lifelong referrals over 3 years and ends in March 2020.
- 3.3 If lifelong link family group conferences are to continue post end of the trial, capacity would need to be redirected from edge of care (children social work teams) to CYPS. The infrastructure to receive Lifelong Links referrals is already established via Liberi and additional 'searching' capacity can be achieved within existing business support as this role will be changing once data reporting from Liberi is up and running. Additional capacity for coordinating planning meetings etc could be achieved through the apprenticeship scheme.

3.4 The benefit of utilising the family group conference service is to utilise the established skills of family group conferences coordinators in engaging children, young people and wider family and friends and the neutrality that the role offers in bringing together the partnership of professionals, family and friends.

4.0 The children and young people's service (CYPS)

4.1 It is anticipated that post the 3 year pilot, children and young people will be given the opportunity of Lifelong Links much earlier in their care journey.

4.2 The advantages of this will be that family and friends' connections are more likely to be intact than when the child/young person has been in care for a longer period. Where a positive relationship has been established, the children in care social worker may be able to undertake the discovery/searching for connections as part of life-story work.

4.3 Early indications from the pilot indicate that, for some children and young people, this is sufficient to inform their identity and they don't want to proceed any further. It would be envisaged that this work might remain in the CYPS. However, it is unrealistic that, for more complex referrals, the children in care teams will have the capacity to undertake the work involved if the Lifelong Links model is not to be diluted and therefore referral to family group conference service will be required.

4.4 Since the challenge card Lifelong Links will also include a small pilot with Care Leavers to test the model with young people over the age of 18, as there is likely to be significant benefits to building their local network of support.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Since the challenge card, the pilot for Lifelong Links is now in all areas of Kent and accessible to all children and young people who meet the criteria of having been in care less than 3 years, under the age of 16 and with no plan to return to family or for adoption. It is open to all our children in care and the pilot will now include a small number of Care Leavers. To achieve the challenge, there will need to be a commitment to continue the Lifelong Links model after the ending of the 3 years DFE funding in March 2020. This will be planned for in Year 3 of the pilot and is likely to be best achieved through extending the current life story work completed with children and using the model earlier with them, to enhance this work.

6.0 Recommendations:

Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **NOTE** the progress of the Lifelong Links and that, following the Challenge Card, it is confirmed that this is open to all Kent children and young people in care who meet the criteria.

7.0 Background documents

None

8.0 Contact details

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