

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Darent Room - Sessions House on Thursday, 19 July 2018.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mr M A C Balfour (Substitute for Mrs S Prendergast), Mr G Cooke, Mr T Doran, Ms S Dunstan, Mr D Farrell, Mrs L Game, Mr R Graves, Ms S Hamilton, Mrs S Hammond, Mr A Heather, Mr J P McInroy (Substitute for Mrs S Gent), Mr M J Northey, Ms N Sayer, Ms C Smith and Ms S Vaux

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Dunkley CBE (Corporate Director for Children Young People and Education) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

85. Motion to exclude the press and public for exempt business

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)

86. The views of Young People in Care

(Item 1)

As it had not proved possible to arrange a party of young people to attend the first part of the meeting, a film which had been made at participation and activity days earlier in 2018 was shown instead.

The film showed children in care enjoying singing, dancing and circus skills at activity days, with a voiceover by the participants and the VSK apprentices who had arranged the events and made the film.

Reece Graves told the Panel how the film had been made and thanked the County Council's IT team for their help with editing.

The Chairman said it was always good to hear about the activities and networking opportunities that young people enjoyed at meetings of the various Children in Care Councils, and to be able to see and share the events was most enjoyable. She thanked the VSK apprentices for their work in setting up events and in filming them to share with the Panel.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS (meeting open to the press and public)

87. Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies form absence had been received from Trudy Dean, Louise Fisher, Sue Gent, Stuart Griffiths, Geoff Lymer and Shellina Prendergast.

Matthew Balfour was present as a substitute for Shellina Prendergast and James McInroy as a substitute for Sue Gent.

88. Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 1 June 2018

(Item 3)

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2018 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

89. Chairman's Announcements

(Item 4)

The Chairman welcomed Sarah Vaux, Chief Nurse of Medway Clinical Commissioning Group, and Nicola Anthony, Interim Head of Fostering, to their first meeting of the Panel.

The Chairman advised the Panel that plans were in hand to invite a new foster carer rep to join the Panel in place of Carolyn Moody.

The Chairman told Reece Graves that she had heard very good feedback from a Youth Advisory Group about his contribution at a recent conference.

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

(Item 5)

1. Sophia Dunstan and Reece Graves showed a second film, made by the VSK apprentices, about work to counter the stigmas of being in care. This had been shown at the VSK Talent Showcase on 1 June 2018, with the aim of emphasising the skills, interests and hobbies of children in care and that their care status played no part in how they defined themselves.

2. They then gave a verbal update on the work of the OCYPC, the Super Council and Young Adult Council and forthcoming participation events. *The text of the update will be attached to these minutes.* They and Mr Doran then responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) a recent Young Adult Council meeting had raised the issue of the need for a new name for the care leavers service, and it was planned that a competition be held to find a new name;
- b) two new VSK apprentices were shortly to start work; Tia (16) would start at the end of July and Rob (19) would hopefully start shortly after;
- c) a list of participation events taking place between July and December was tabled, with an invitation to the annual Children in Care Council Summer Celebration on 1 August 2018, and *both were later circulated to all Panel members by the Democratic Services Officer.* Mr Doran explained that

VSK had a small nominal budget to cover events, which had been generously topped up over the years by elected Members, using their personal allowances;

- d) when tackling stigma, it was important to achieve a balance between being a good corporate parent and respecting a young person's privacy, between making reasonable allowances for someone's care status and not putting them down because of it. Sophia explained that one-to-one sessions between a teacher and child in care could lead to more stigma. What would help was group sessions of pupils and teachers;
- e) teachers needed to be aware of children in care, appreciate their circumstances and be realistic about their expectations of them. This awareness could be included in teacher training courses. A child in care would be visited at school by their social worker for their regular review meetings, so to keep their care status a secret from teaching staff or other pupils in the class was simply not possible;
- f) another speaker disagreed and asserted that teachers should not know which pupils in their school were in care, and, in that way, could not show any bias in the way in which they treated them, or the expectations they had of them. Teacher training in the 1980s would have taken this approach but the culture seemed since to have changed to one of teachers being made aware. This had led to children in care being treated differently. Another speaker, who had also trained as a teacher at about the same time, agreed that, once a teacher knew about a child's status, they were bound to treat them differently;
- g) Mr Doran added that behaviour management was not much taught as part of teacher training courses but was a fundamental part of a good teacher's skills. He suggested that raising awareness and understanding of issues faced by children in care, for example, trauma and attachment issues, would need a whole-school approach. Some pilot schemes were exploring this but there was need for more such schemes. In all of this, however, the privacy of children in care would need to be protected and they should not be seen to be treated differently from their peers;
- h) Sophia said that teachers should be aware of children in care and be trained in how to support them and how not to overcompensate for their care status, but should not reveal information about a child's care status to other pupils. Reece added that teachers' treatment of a child's care status was not the only problem; playground gossip and name-calling were also a big problem. The Chairman agreed that teachers needed to be sensitive around activities relating to Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day. Mr Doran added that teachers were now expected to know about the pupils they were teaching, to be fully aware of children with an e.PEP and to tailor their teaching to take account of this. It was important to remember that children in care were as different from each other as any other group of children; all were individuals and needed to be treated as such;
- i) a suggestion was made that, to raise awareness of stigma issues among all corporate parents, the film about stigma be shown at a full County

Council meeting. The Council, as corporate parent, should be seen to be tackling the issue of stigma by raising the awareness of all its elected Members as corporate parents, and could be smart about using the media to do this. The Chairman supported this suggestion and added that local sports personalities and TV celebrities who had been in care could be used as role models and examples of positive outcomes for children in care; and

- j) the issue of stigma and realistic expectations extended beyond children in care and applied also to children from areas of deprivation. It was important to set realistic and appropriate targets for expected progress and have a workable method of measuring progress. Mr Doran explained that the former national curriculum had previously provided this overall framework, but measuring progress now would be more difficult. VSK was working with the County Council's Management Information Unit to establish a new way to measure progress. He added that children's routes into care varied and that every cohort of children going through education was different and would be difficult to 'measure'. There was always the risk that having a specific, different set of targets applied to a child in care might add to the stigma they felt. A complex range of mapping and benchmarking might be required to measure progress in sufficient detail and in a meaningful way, and the National Association of Virtual Head Teachers was looking at this issue. It was suggested that either the Corporate Parenting Panel or the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee could look into this issue in greater detail. *An item was subsequently placed on the Panel's work programme.*

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

91. Challenge Card update - Lifelong Links

(Item 6)

Ms C Barton, Family Group Conferencing team, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Smith and Ms Barton introduced the report and gave some examples of the sort of links which had been established using the Lifelong Links project. They responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) one benefit of the project was that it could help children and young people to be clear of their identity and understand their route into the care system. They could be supported to own and manage their care status;
- b) many children in care were known to try to trace relatives using Facebook, but the Lifelong Links project offered them a safer way to trace and make contact; and
- c) the Lifelong Links project had been established very quickly after being the subject of a Challenge Card, and Mr Dunkley thanked the team for their swift work in setting it up. The project was an example of the sensible and achievable measures which could be put into place as a result of the Challenge Card process.

2. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, Roger Gough, expressed his support for the Lifelong Links project.

3. Referring to a previous Challenge Card, the rent guarantor scheme for private rents and university accommodation, Ms Hammond advised the Panel that the scheme had now launched its pilot with a cohort of 25 young people. She clarified that the scheme was not for paying deposits on property as this was already an established practice, but to support young people as they established themselves as tenants. Ms Smith added that Kent's guarantor scheme had been very well received by other local authorities, and some, including Medway Council, were looking into establishing something similar. More detail of the way in which the County Council supported young people leaving care would be covered in the report on accommodation options at item 10 on the agenda (*see minute 95 below*).

4. It was RESOLVED that:

- a) the progress of the Lifelong Links project be welcomed;
- b) the availability of the Lifelong Links project to all Kent children and young people in care who meet the criteria be noted;
- c) an update report on the project be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel.

92. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member (Item 7)

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

Private Fostering Week – this aimed to publicise and promote the arrangement wherein young people could be cared for by adults who were not part of their immediate family, rather than being placed with foster carers employed by the County Council. The County Council needed to be notified of such an arrangement being made so it could verify that the arrangement was suitable for the young person concerned and provide appropriate support. In the last twelve months, the County Council had received 94 such notifications.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) figures – these remained low (and were lower than in the same period in 2017) but with the small rise that was normally expected over the warmer summer months while travel was easier. There had been 20 referrals in June and 6 so far in July. Many of the most recent arrivals had been from Eritrea. There were currently 227 UASC in the care of the County Council and 886 UASC aged 18 and over.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Conference - 28 June 2018 – this had taken place at Oakwood House and had been a very useful opportunity for Kent to share its experiences of caring for UASC with other local authorities and for them to learn from Kent's approach. Two former asylum seeking young people had spoken well at the conference, including a young man who had previously presented to the Panel.

Care Leaver Progression Partnership Conference - late June – Mr Gough had opened this conference and taken the opportunity to promote the Lifelong Links project and Kent's rent guarantor scheme. The conference had also discussed

stigma and expectations, with the message that high expectations could be delivered. Two very successful former children in care, one from the USA and one from the UK, had spoken. The speaker from the USA was from Illinois, which, incidentally, had a very similar care population to the whole of England.

VSK Talent Showcase – 1 June 2018 – this had been excellent, and was much enjoyed by those who attended.

Awareness of corporate parenting role of elected Members – work was in hand to boost the understanding of the corporate parenting role beyond those Members who served on either the Corporate Parenting Panel or the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee and to help them to be the best corporate parents they could be.

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

93. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care (Item 8)

Mrs M Robinson, Management Information Service Manager, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Robinson introduce the report and explained that all of the services were performing above the floor standard and that none had a red rating.

2. It was RESOLVED that the performance data in the children in care scorecard be noted and welcomed.

94. The National Fostering Stocktake - Foster Care in England: a review for the Department for Education by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers - February 2018, and the County Council's Fostering Service Business Plan, 2018 - 2019 (Item 9)

Ms N Anthony, Interim Head of Fostering, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Smith introduced the report of the Stocktake undertaken by Martin Narey and Mark Owers. She and Ms Anthony responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) asked if it was still the aim to keep sibling groups together, as Mr Narey seemed to be suggesting that this practice not always be followed, Ms Smith explained that the hope was that siblings would always be kept together, if at all possible. However, for practical reasons, it was occasionally necessary to separate a larger family to find suitable placements. When a family came into care, an early assessment was made and a care plan drawn up for each child. Babies and very young children were more likely to be adopted, so would be placed with this ultimate aim in mind, while older siblings were harder to adopt and so would be more likely to stay together in foster care. Practically, larger groups of siblings were harder than smaller groups to place together;
- b) concern was expressed that older siblings would have developed the role of looking after their younger siblings and would wish to be able to continue this familiar arrangement. Ms Smith pointed out that some older siblings

may have taken on the parenting role of younger siblings as a necessity due to the shortcomings of their own parents, and such an arrangement, although familiar, may not be in the best interests of the older child as they would miss out on their own childhood. Ms Smith assured the Panel that siblings would always be able to maintain contact with each other, in a way which best suited them. Decisions about placement and contact would always be made on a case-by-case basis. Ms Anthony added that the Council was seeking to recruit foster carers who were able to take on sibling groups so more could be kept together, as long as that was judged to be in the children's best interests. Ms Hammond added that only Kent children were placed with Kent foster carers;

- c) regret was expressed that County Councillors no longer served on Adoption Panels, as this had given Members an opportunity to understand how adoption decisions were made. Those who had previously served on Adoption Panels spoke about the huge commitment required in preparing for and attending Adoption Panels and the difficult nature of the issues being discussed there, for which elected Members, as lay people, were not always prepared. Ms Smith advised that it was the court process, not the Adoption Panels, which decided which sibling groups were to be split when making placements, and such decisions were made only after a full assessment had been made. Ms Hammond added that judging which families would be better split and which would not was a difficult role, but useful research had recently been undertaken into permanency planning. *She suggested that a report presenting this research be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel;*
- d) *asked what control or regulatory role the County Council had in respect of private fostering arrangements, Ms Smith advised that private fostering did not involve Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) but private families, who were required to tell the County Council of a private fostering arrangement so the Council could monitor it. IFAs were part of separate fostering arrangements, over which the County Council had no regulatory authority. IFAs and the Council's own in-house fostering service were governed by the same fostering regulations, operated to a national minimum standard and were inspected by Ofsted; and*
- e) a recommendation of the Stocktake was that local authorities share information and best practice with each other, to provide a better fostering service.

2. It was RESOLVED that the recommendations of the National Fostering Stocktake be noted, with the delivery of the Kent Fostering Business Plan, and a report on research into permanency planning be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel.

95. Report on the types of accommodation for Children in Care and Care Leavers

(Item 10)

Mr P Startup, Head of Care Leavers 18 plus Service, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Smith and Mr Startup introduced the report and, with Ms Hammond, responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) accommodation for care leavers was monitored and inspected by the County Council, and personal advisors would visit young people regularly to see if they had any concerns about their tenancy or any problems with their accommodation. The County Council would always challenge a landlord where there were concerns about the maintenance or condition of a property;
- b) the reference to 'residence not known' on the list of accommodation types and the numbers of young people in them referred to young people who were missing. This number included those missing in the short- and long-term and consisted largely of UASC over 18 who had gone to find family elsewhere in the UK within 24 hours of arriving in Kent. Kent retained responsibility for them even if they had taken themselves to another local authority area. Other young people who were included in the number were those who had chosen not to stay connected to their foster carers once they reached an age when they felt able to go where they wanted and do what they wanted;
- c) the range of accommodation available was welcomed, and a *suggestion made that the Panel receive the information on a regular basis, perhaps annually;*
- d) using a combination of in-house and IFAs, Kent was not necessarily able to meet all young people's needs at all times, and the large number of UASC who had arrived at the peak of 2015 had meant that IFAs had to be used more than they previously had been, and many of these UASC were still in the foster placements made at that time. Some placements would have been made if Kent was unable to accommodate a child with special needs, for example, for which the only local provider might be someone available through an IFA. However, Kent accommodated the highest percentage of its care population with its own in-house foster carers than any other authority in the UK; and
- e) the Chairman suggested that the County Council could look at its own housing stock or estate to see if some premises might be suitable for use to accommodate care leavers. Some premises were used to provide training in household management, cooking, etc, for young people who were about to leave care.

2. Mr Startup advised the Panel that the County Council's new rent guarantor scheme had overcome some initial hurdles and was now starting to make progress. He had been liaising with letting agencies but some of these had been unused to working with a large local authority as guarantor and had initially been hesitant, being unfamiliar with the role of a corporate parent.

3. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks, and that a regular update report be made to the Panel.