

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Council Chamber - Sessions House on Wednesday, 29 May 2019.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Ms J Bayford, Ms D Bride, Mr T Byrne, Mr I S Chittenden (Substitute for Ida Linfield), Mr G Cooke, Mr T Doran, Ms S Dunstan, Ms C Goodwin, Mr R Graves, Mr S Gray, Ms S Hamilton, Mrs S Hammond, Mr A Heather, Mr G Lymer, Mr M J Northey, Mrs S Prendergast, Ms N Sayer and Ms C Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough, Ms R Hills, Ms J Carpenter, Ms S Newman and Ms A Wood, Alex, Amy, Ashley, Bradley, Brooke, Charlotte, Charmaine, Chris, Fatima, George, Joseph, Josh, Kaziah, Keagan, Kezzie, Laine, Martin, Rebecca, Reza, Rob, Ronnie, Ruby, Shaniya, Sharand, Tabatha, Tia and Tibletse.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Dunkley CBE (Corporate Director for Children Young People and Education), Mrs S Skinner (Head of Adoption Service) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

149. Introduction

(Item 1)

1. Before the start of the meeting, young people had met the Panel members and officers with whom they had been matched for shadowing and had taken part together in an ice-breaker challenge.
2. The Panel Chairman, Ann Allen, welcomed everyone to the meeting and announced that Kent's Corporate Parenting Panel was the first in the country to have a Takeover Day. She introduced Brad from the Young Adult Council who took over as Chairman for the rest of the meeting.
3. Everyone introduced themselves around the Council Chamber.

150. Membership

(Item 2)

It was noted that Justin Dumigan had resigned from the Panel, making the total number of vacancies three.

151. Apologies and substitutes

(Item 3)

Apologies for absence had been received from Stuart Griffiths, Ida Linfield and Sarah Vaux.

Ian Chittenden was present as a substitute for Ida.

152. Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 27 March 2019

(Item 4)

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2019 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

153. Chairman's Announcements

(Item 5)

Chelsea Goodwin (Apprentice Participation Worker, Virtual School Kent) announced three dates for Panel members' diaries:

- 25 July – Corporate Parenting Team Challenge Day at Teston Country Park, which Panel members were invited to attend;
- Annual VSK Awards Ceremonies in the evenings of 15 September and 16 October, of which, more details would be sent out shortly.

154. Verbal Update from Super Council, Our Children and Young People's Council and Young Adult Council

(Item 6)

1. The Chairman introduced members of the three Children in Care Councils, who, with Sophia Dunstan (Participation Support Assistant, Virtual School Kent) gave verbal updates on their work:

Super Council:

2. The Council had spent some time at its meetings discussing what its members wanted to do as part of the Takeover Day. Ronnie, Ruby, Kezzie and Rebecca spoke about how much they enjoyed attending the Super Council meetings and how it helped them to meet other children and young people in care and share their experiences and problems.

Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC):

3. The OCYPC had discussed the 'Language that Cares' document which had been put together by young people for the Fostering and Adoption Charity, TACT, and which suggested alternative words to those usually used by social work professionals.

4. The Council had also worked on a school project about young people's emotional mental health and wellbeing and what support young people wanted to be able to access at school. Some very good ideas had come out of this and were being worked on by the VSK team to make sure that young people's ideas were put into practice.

5. Keagan and Tabatha spoke about why they were members of the OCYPC, including having the opportunity to spend some time in an environment which was not like school, to talk about their views and feelings in a safe environment and have fun with other young people, and to help them understand about being in care.

Young Adult Council (YAC):

6. The membership of this was continuing to grow and the meetings were being attended by the UASC Peer Champions. Tia talked about why she attended the meetings, how she believed the YAC benefitted children and young people in care and why she wished she had known about the various Children in Care Councils earlier.

Cambridge University Study Day with sons and daughters of foster carers

7. On 16 April, an activity day took place in Tonbridge to look into the experiences of birth children in foster families, how prepared they felt and how they formed relationships with the children fostered by their families, and how they felt the County Council could support them. Amy spoke about how she enjoyed meeting the children fostered by their families and having younger siblings to play with. She thought there should be more foster carers for teenagers as her family received lots of requests to do this. Participants at the activity day had agreed on the importance of everyone in a foster family discussing and agreeing each placement, felt that they could be included in training new foster carers and could get to know the family's social worker. It had also been suggested that social workers could take fostered children out on an outing to give the children of foster families time to prepare for important school tests.

8. Joseph spoke about how he enjoyed his family fostering as they had a chance to meet new people and give them an opportunity. The biggest shock in fostering was people's back stories. He and his brother were always included in discussions about fostering and each time a child moved out they had a family discussion about what had gone well and what could be done differently. He and his brother would help fostered children with school issues and act as role models to them. An upsetting aspect of fostering was how long it could take for fostered children to have their belongings sent on from their previous placement.

9. The VSK participation team was looking into working with fostering colleagues to address the issues raised.

10. New corporate parenting information flyers were tabled at the meeting. These had been prepared with input from young people to help other young people to understand the role of corporate parents.

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

155. 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:-

Foster Care Fortnight – this had taken place on 13 - 26 May. The fostering service was currently seeking to recruit 150 more foster carers and was using local media and social media to support this.

Council Tax Exemption for Care Leavers – this had been debated and supported by the County Council at its meeting on 23 May 2019. He had spoken about the Challenge Card on this subject which had previously been submitted by young people and the work they had done to promote this.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) Update – there were currently 267 UASC under 18 and 895 over-18 care leavers, making a total of 1,162. There had been 84 new arrivals so far in 2019, more than at the same point in 2018. The countries from which most young people had travelled were Iran, Iraq and Eritrea. The Panel had met the UASC Peer Champions team at its March meeting and had heard about their work. The County Council had lobbied the Government for years about the lack of financial support given to Kent to support its UASC population and had recently received a positive response, which was good.

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

156. Challenge Card update *(Item 8)*

1. Caroline Smith (Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting) and Jo Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager, VSK) updated the Panel on the progress of the most recent Challenge Card, a Council Tax Exemption for Care Leavers.

2. Caroline explained that she had researched figures from district and borough councils and passed them initially to Roger Gough and Matt Dunkley (Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education). These figures would be used to prepare reports to district councils and then the County Council to seek sign-up. Jo added that care leavers had been very pleased that the proposal had been taken so seriously.

3. Tia told the Panel about what it would mean to her as a young person at the start of her career to be exempt from paying Council Tax. It would leave her more money to run her car, have some leisure and take a holiday. Care Leavers sought a smooth transition into adulthood and to exempt them from paying Council Tax would make all the difference to them achieving this.

4. It was RESOLVED that the update on progress be welcomed.

157. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care *(Item 9)*

1. Chris Nunn (Senior Management Information Officer) and Rob (Apprentice Participation Worker, Virtual School Kent) introduced the report and Rob set out what he had learned from working with the Management Information Unit to draw up the scorecard document. He drew attention to parts of the scorecard which would be of particular interest to young people:

- 64.4% of the care leavers that the County Council was in touch with were in education, employment or training. This figure was steady but was just below the target figure of 65%;
- 91.9% of the care leavers that the County Council was in touch with were housed in suitable accommodation, above the target rate of 90%; and
- 56.5% of children who had been in care for at least 18 months had had the same worker for the last 12 months. This was improving and was not far from the target of 60%.

2. Matt Dunkley suggested that, once a year, a version of the score card could be prepared in a clear, modern format for young people to understand. It was further suggested that this could be put to the officers as a formal challenge card. Martin, acting as Corporate Director, accepted this challenge.
3. It was RESOLVED that the performance data in the Children in Care scorecard be noted.

158. The Kent Adoption Service's Participation and Engagement Strategy *(Item 10)*

1. Charmaine and George presented the report on behalf of the post-adoption service and outlined the participation events which already took place. They set out the many benefits to young people of them attending events.
2. They then shared with the Panel a film of a young woman in care, K, who was reading out a letter she had sent to Edward Timpson, setting out her experience of the adoption process. She set out the support she would like to have had from teachers at her school and what advice she would give to other young people going through the adoption process. Panel members praised the frank way in which she had set out her points and the courage she had shown in reading out the letter on film to share it with others.
3. Asked if it would be possible to produce a version of the film which could be shared publicly, covering all the same points but without identifying the young woman, Sarah Skinner (Head of Adoption Service) advised that K had agreed that the current version be shared with the VSK and used in teacher training but not shared publicly. Tony Doran (Head Teacher, Virtual School Kent) added that he was looking into whether or not it would be possible to produce a publishable version, and how this could be done, and also how the current version could be used in training adoptive parents and post-adoption staff. He undertook to report back on this to a future meeting of the Panel.
4. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report about the range of services provided be noted.

159. Review of Sufficiency, Placements and Commissioning Strategy, 2019 - 2022 *(Item 11)*

1. Christy Holden, Senior Commissioning Manager, and Reece Graves, Senior Apprentice Participation Worker, introduced the report and Reece highlighted the parts of the Strategy which had been identified by young people as being most important to them.
2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted and that the Kent County Council Sufficiency Strategy, 2019 – 2022, be endorsed.

160. Transition to the 18+ service and the role of the Personal Advisor *(Item 12)*

1. The Chairman introduced the first of the agenda items to be added by the Young Adult Council, which set out the number and range of issues with which young people leaving care had to contend. Caroline Smith was asked to stand at the front of the Chamber and have balloons batted across to her, each with a subject written on it – for example, study, travel, budgeting, cooking, etc – to represent the range of issues which needed to be juggled by care leavers. As more balloons were added, it became impossible to keep all of them aloft and help from other attendees had to be requested. This illustrated that care leavers needed help to manage all of these issues effectively.

2. Charlotte set out some of the challenges faced by care leavers, including finding out about tenancy agreements, living alone for the first time and the anxiety that could bring, managing bills, and signing up with doctors, dentists and opticians, etc. To have good support with these things was important, so the Personal Advisor role was vital, and Fatima, Alex and Charlotte set out the attributes a good Personal Advisor should have. Chris talked about his Personal Advisor and how she supported him, including listening to him and respecting his views, caring about his aims and wishes, being tough when she needed to be and helping him to understand things.

3. Charlotte set out three questions which the YAC wanted to ask the Corporate Parenting Panel:

a) We see the Personal Advisor as playing an important role in our futures – we would like to meet them and get to know them earlier which would help young people build stronger relationships with them. It would also help young people to understand pathway planning and be surer of their future steps. Could the age at which young people meet their future Personal Advisor be lowered?

4. Paul Startup (Service Manager, Quality Assurance and Safeguarding) responded by explaining that the 18+ team had been reviewing the transition process to make it better and had changed their practice to arrange for a care leaver to meet their Personal Advisor at 17 to allow joint planning sessions and to help a young person to understand how the service could help them. He said he hoped that all Personal Advisors were like the one described by Chris. The initial meeting between a care leaver and their Personal Advisor could be brought forward to 16 but it was important then to consider how the process would look and how the preparation for leaving care could best be achieved.

b) How is the 18+ Service making sure Personal Advisors have the specialist knowledge and training to ensure they can support young people as well as possible?

5. Paul explained that the service would seek to ensure that it recruited the best people and the right people. The training of Personal Advisors was very thorough and followed a programme which included close management supervision. New Personal Advisors would then serve a six-month trial period to see if they were able to meet the requirements of the role. It was important to consider how feedback from young people about the Personal Advisor service could best be gathered and applied. Sarah Skinner added that the Childcare Workforce Academy aimed to provide skills for staff who were not qualified social workers, including social work assistants and early help workers. It was important to recognise the importance of this part of the workforce.

c) *We believe that matching young people to the Personal Advisor is very important – how do you go about doing this matching?*

6. Paul advised that matching was sometimes difficult as the young person and their Personal Advisor could be working together for a number of years and the relationship was important. He undertook to look into how the matching process could be improved.

161. Youth Justice Apprentice - Role and Future Plans

(Item 13)

1. Josh, the Youth Justice Apprentice, talked about the role he had taken on in January 2019 and his aim to serve as the voice of young people in Kent who were caught up in the youth justice system. He would do this by attending meetings of Kent's Youth Justice Board. As youth clubs had been closed across the country, some young people had turned to anti-social behaviour, and many young people across the UK were feeling let down by the police and the courts. His aim was that all young people would be valued and feel valued.

2. Dan Bride (Assistant Director, Adolescent and Open Access) added that youth workers met with young people to ask them what support services they wanted to have in terms of dealing with issues around drugs and crime. The Police and Crime Commissioner, Matthew Scott, was seeking to roll out such services across the whole county with the aim of reaching young people who were usually hard to reach. The Youth Justice Apprentice role would be instrumental in achieving this.

3. Ann Allen suggested that it would be helpful to invite Matthew Scott to a future meeting of the Panel, and this was subsequently added to the work programme.

162. The County Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities - are they aspirational enough?

(Item 14)

1. Reece Graves introduced this item and explained that it had come about from various meetings and discussions at Children in Care Councils and focus groups. These had looked at how the County Council was supporting children in care to achieve their goals and aspirations. Martin then introduced the six key themes of the Kent Pledge to Children in Care:

- A sense of belonging,
- An adult who is always there for you,
- A good education,
- Good memories for the future,
- Getting ready for being an adult, and
- Championing your needs and interests,

which together made up the strong foundations and values which sought to ensure that all children in care could achieve their aspirations, however big or small.

2. Kaziah, Tabatha, Martin, Tibletse and Reza then spoke about their aspirations for the future. They set out how the County Council had helped them in the past, for example by paying for extra tutoring to help them pass SATS after missing out on

schooling, and how their foster carers were helping them to prepare and study for the future career routes they wished to follow. They also set out what more could be done to support and help young people:

- Increasing the number of UASC Champions across the county
- Increasing support and training for foster carers around different cultures
- Wherever possible, placing young people with foster carers who speak the same language
- Moving young people out of the Millbank centre faster
- Issuing young people with train passes to help them travel more easily around the county
- Offering free gym membership in more locations across the county
- Showing young people that the County Council is proud of their achievements

3. Tony Doran was asked to write on a whiteboard the dreams and goals he had when he was young; he wrote down a wish to play sports professionally. He was then asked who had helped him to try to achieve that goal; he wrote down his PE teachers. All the young people present were then asked to write down on their whiteboards their goals and aspirations. These included a wide range of careers and studies, including medicine and nursing, the arts, teaching, etc. Panel members were then asked to say how they, as corporate parents, were contributing to helping young people to achieve those goals.

4. In response to the final bullet point above, Tony pointed out that VSK held celebration events twice a year, for under-16s and over-16s, to present awards to young people who had achieved good academic, sporting or other performance.

5. The Cabinet Member, Roger Gough, added that the County Council needed to keep asking itself how it was performing against the six key themes of its Pledge to Children in Care and what more it could do. Meetings of the Panel were a useful way of measuring the progress made, to hear at first hand where improvement was needed and to hear young people's views about how improvement could be achieved.

163. Social Media - the Big Debate

(Item 15)

1. The Chairman introduced the final agenda item and explained that this had been selected as social media was constantly in the news and views on its good and bad points were often discussed. Reece Graves and Chelsea Goodwin then introduced the case for and against social media, highlighting its benefits and risks.

2. Reece set out its benefits, including the many different forms it took, its value in giving young people a voice and an opportunity to express their views, and that it could be used free of cost.

3. Chelsea set out the case against it, including the risk of addiction to it and its potentially damaging effect on the development of children's brains, its deceptive nature, where people can appear to be what they are not, and cyberbullying.

4. These views were then debated, with people arguing for and against social media as a good thing for young people;

FOR, ie that social media is a good thing for young people – 35

AGAINST, ie that social media is a negative thing for young people – 13

ABSTENTIONS – 4

5. Accordingly, it was RESOLVED that the use of social media is a good thing for young people.

164. Conclusion

(item 16)

1. At the end of the meeting the Chairman thanked everyone for attending and asked if people wished to repeat the event, which was met with an emphatic YES.

2. The Panel Chairman, Ann Allen, also thanked everyone for attending. She said that, while listening to the young people present, she had been reminded of a song by M People 'What have you done today to make you feel proud?' and said that the young people who had taken part and spoken up so well had indeed made her feel very proud.