

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Darent Room - Sessions House on Wednesday, 27 March 2019.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Ida Linfield (Vice-Chairman), Ms J Bayford, Mr G Cooke, Mr J Dumigan, Ms S Dunstan, Mrs L Game, Mr R Graves, Mr S Gray, Ms S Hamilton, Mr S C Manion (Substitute for Mrs S Prendergast), 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), Ms J Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager, Virtual School Kent) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

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

It was 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)

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

(Item 1)

1. At the start of the meeting, the Panel was shown a film of children and young people in care at various participation and engagement activities which had been organised by the Virtual School Kent (VSK) participation team in the February half-term holiday. The film was introduced by Sophia Dunstan, Participation Support Assistant, and Reece Graves, Apprentice Participation Worker, Virtual School Kent (VSK), who had made the film with Rob Barton and Chelsea Goodwin, Apprentice Participation Workers, VSK.

2. The Panel welcomed this opportunity to see young people in care enjoying group activities which gave them the opportunity to meet other children in care and make new friends.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS (meeting open to public)

134. Membership

(Item 2)

1. The Panel noted the resignation from the County Council of Mrs Sue Gent and the vacancy this had left in the Panel's membership, making a total of two.

2. The Chairman placed on record her thanks to Mrs Gent for her work as a corporate parent and a Panel member.

135. Apologies and substitutes

(Item 3)

1. Apologies for absence had been received from Tony Doran, Louise Fisher, Stuart Griffiths, Sarah Hammond, Andrew Heather, Geoff Lymer and Shellina Prendergast.

2. Steve Manion was present as a substitute for Shellina Prendergast.

136. Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 29 January 2019

(Item 4)

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2019 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

137. Chairman's Announcements

(Item 5)

1. The Chairman praised the quality and presentation of the information and newsletters produced by Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC) and the Kent Youth County Council (KYCC) to keep corporate parents up to date with their work.

2. An invitation had recently been sent by the Kent Foster Care Association (KFCA) to all County Council Members to attend training being staged in early April for foster carers and staff on 'County Lines' gang activity and the exploitation of vulnerable young people. County Council Members had signed up to attend a session in their area. It would be good for them and foster carers to have the opportunity to meet each other.

3. Work would start shortly on a Select Committee on knife crime.

4. The Chairman added that, having taking advice from the Monitoring Officer, and with the support of the Leader, Paul Carter, and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, Roger Gough, she would continue as the Chairman of the Panel during her year as the Chairman of the County Council. Celebrating young people would be the focus of her Chairmanship year and the work of the Panel was an important part of that commitment.

5. This news was welcomed by Panel members and the view expressed that the young people of Kent were privileged to have such a dedicated Chairman working on their behalf. It was suggested that the list of engagements which a County Council Chairman would usually attend during the year could have added to it the list of events being organised by the Kent Foster Care Association, the OCYPC, the KYCC, etc, so the latter could form part of the Chairman's work for the year.

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

1. Ms Dunstan and Mr Graves gave a verbal update on the work of the OCYPC, the Super Council and the Young Adult Council and forthcoming participation events. *The text of this update will be appended to these minutes.*
2. Mr Graves read out a list of questions posed to corporate parents by the young people attending the recent activity days, as follows:-
 - 1) How do you make sure we are safe at school?
 - 2) What's your favourite part of job?
 - 3) Who started Virtual School Kent and why?
 - 4) If you did any activity what would it be and Why?
 - 5) How do you make sure the right foster carers are found for young people?
 - 6) Can you come to more of our meetings/activity days and are you excited or nervous about us taking over on the Corporate Parenting Panel Takeover Day?
3. Jo Carpenter advised Panel Members that they would be emailed a copy of these questions so they could email back their responses to her for collation.
4. Matt Dunkley advised the Panel that the Takeover Day would be the Panel's next scheduled meeting, 29 May 2019. It was envisaged that young people would take on the key roles in the meeting: Chairman, Cabinet Member, Directors, Clerk, etc. Panel members confirmed that they were happy with this arrangement.
5. There followed a discussion of the arrangements for the Takeover Day and how this could be organised. The following points were noted:
 - a) some young people who wished to could be given the opportunity to stay on for the afternoon and shadow the Chairman, Cabinet Member, Directors, etc.;
 - b) Panel members should prepare to stay for the whole day, if necessary;
 - c) older children might be happier to shadow; younger ones might find the morning meeting enough for them;
 - d) the day could link in to research work being undertaken by the University of Cambridge on the views of foster carers' children on the care process;
 - e) at other takeover events, young people had been paired up with the members of the group at the start and sat next to them throughout the proceedings;
 - f) refreshments would be needed and a sandwich lunch could be served at the end of the meeting part of the day; and
 - g) the meeting could be broken into short sessions (of perhaps one hour) to make the meeting easier for younger children;
6. It was RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted, with thanks, and plans be continued for the Takeover day on 29 May.

139. Challenge Card Update

(Item 6)

1. Ms Carpenter introduced the report and, with Caroline Smith, Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting, Integrated Children's Services, and Mr Dunkley,

responded to comments and questions from the Panel about the council tax exemption challenge, including the following:-

- a) it was suggested that all Panel members check with their local councils to find out the current practice around exemptions from, or reductions to, council tax payments for young people, and the eligibility criteria they applied in terms of age and educational/training/employment status. Once a full picture became available, it would hopefully be possible to identify a model of best practice and encourage other councils to adopt this. Ms Smith advised that initial discussions with district councils had identified the figures involved. Some councils had only a very small cohort of young people who were likely to be eligible. Once district councils were on board, a proposal would be brought to the Panel for its support. Ms Smith *undertook to provide Members with a summary of negotiations with each district council around the county;*
- b) it was pointed out that to exempt young people from paying council tax could be cost-effective in the long-run as young people getting into arrears would then need help to sort out their debts, and this could take up more cost and staff time later;
- c) it was important that district councils publicise any exemption scheme they ran so young people knew they might be eligible and could make an application. Leaving care and starting out on your own was difficult enough and any financial help available would make a valuable difference;
- d) hopefully, all district councils would be willing to join a county-wide exemption scheme, but if any were not able to, it might be possible for the County Council to fill in the gap. Mr Dunkley undertook to liaise with the Director of Finance to check what the County Council was able to do to support young people who may find themselves without a local exemption scheme;
- e) personal advisors for care leavers would have a role to play in letting young people know about such a scheme and could help them apply to it. However, the Care Leavers Survey had highlighted that some young people had little contact with their personal advisor and hence might miss the information and not be able to apply. The paperwork for such schemes could be complicated and young people would need help and support with the process. Personal advisors would also need to be trained in accessing any exemption scheme so they could support young people in the most effective way. Ms Smith advised that there was now a designated member of staff to advise care leavers on issues relating to benefits. Ms Carpenter added that feedback from young people had shown that the publication of the 18+ offer had made it easier for young people and foster carers to identify and understand young people's entitlements to benefits; and
- f) Mr Dunkley sought the Panel's support for the council tax exemption challenge before he was to approach district councils and finance colleagues. The Panel confirmed its support.

2. It was RESOLVED that:-

- a) the challenge card progress to date be noted; and
- b) the new challenge card - that all Kent Care Leavers living in Kent be exempt from paying Council Tax (until the age of 25, if they are still engaging with the 18+ Service) – be accepted, and all options be investigated to take this forward.

140. 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:-

Kent Adoption Conference 22 March – this had been an excellent event, which had focused on identity and belonging and hence linked into the Lifelong Links project.

Housing-Related Support update – this service worked with young people in care, care leavers and young homeless people. The updated housing-related support policy would provide better support, aiming to move away from regular support and increase floating support. Recent media coverage of the closure of the Trinity Foyer project in Maidstone had led to concern that the vulnerable young people living there would be made homeless, but Mr Gough assured the Panel that he would ensure that all eligible care leavers would have access to appropriate housing support before the project was allowed to close so that none was left at risk of being homeless.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) update – there were currently 252 UASC under 18s and 906 over-18 care leavers, making a total of 1,158. There had been 43 new arrivals so far in 2019, more than for the same period in 2018.

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

141. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

(Item 8)

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

1. Mrs Robinson introduced the report and scorecard and advised the Panel that there had been no significant change in performance since last reporting and that performance was generally good. She responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) it sometimes proved impossible to achieve an interview with a young person returning from a missing episode within 72 hours of their return, and the view was expressed that 72 hours was too soon for some young people to be able to sit down and talk objectively to a professional about their troubles; and
- b) the Virtual School had been set up with the specific aim of narrowing the gap in educational attainment between children in care and their peers, but educational attainment was not included in the scorecard, so progress could not easily be identified and measured. Mrs Robinson advised that, although this was covered in the VSK Head Teacher's annual report, some

information could be *included in future in the regular scorecard for the Panel.*

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

142. Statutory Health Assessment Data Overview - Work to Improve Outcomes (Item 9)

1. Nancy Sayer, Designated Consultant Nurse for Looked After Children (LAC), introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) asked how young people felt about having health assessments, Mr Graves and Ms Sayer explained that the LAC nurses had attended a meeting of the OCYPC to talk about the health assessment and review process for children and young people in care. This conversation had been very helpful and from this had been gained valuable feedback which was being addressed. Health reviews were less medical than the initial health assessment which was undertaken when a young person first came into care. The take up of appointments was generally good;
- b) although a child in care might move between several placements and may not be able to go to the same GP, LAC nurses sought to ensure that they could continue to see the same nurse each time, as far as possible, and have the opportunity to build up a trusting relationship. This would be difficult, however, if a child moved a long way across the county. The Clinical Commissioning Groups had recently provided further funding for the LAC nursing team which had provided for an additional three full-time nurses to be employed, thereby increasing the capacity of the service and enabling further support and 1:1 work to be built into the service to support improved outcomes;
- c) asked about the take-up of vaccinations among children in care, Ms Sayer advised that the County Council's public health team was looking at this as the take-up rate had dropped recently. Many UASC arrived in the county without any information about their vaccination history so had to start from scratch and could take a long time to catch up with all the vaccinations they should have had for their age. The way in which performance monitoring for vaccinations was recorded for the 903 return made it difficult to show the differences in population need. This issue had been raised at the national LAC Clinical Reference Group and with NHS England, who were asking for the question in the 903 return to be amended to reflect the differences in the population need and status of vaccination history, but the support of the County Council was also being sought;
- d) asked what issues around the health assessment had been raised by young people, Mr Graves and Ms Dunstan said that being called out of class to attend a health review appointment marked a child out as being in care (although this did not happen so much now) and that if a child did not know the LAC nurse, talking to them about personal issues could be

uncomfortable. These issues made health appointments more difficult than they needed to be; and

- e) asked how the LAC nursing service dealt with the issue of consent, Ms Sayer explained that a LAC nurse would always explain the purpose of the appointment at the start and ask if the young person was happy to participate. Ms Carpenter added that young people tended to have a more positive view of the process once they understood the reasons for it.
2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks, and that lobbying to change the standard monitoring questions to make them more appropriate be supported.

143. Youth Justice Service - Performance Scorecard Data

(Item 10)

1 Ms Smith introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) the improvements which had been made to the management and reporting of data were welcomed;
 - b) asked about joint working arrangements between services in the case of children in care, and if these differed from arrangements for other cases, Ms Smith *undertook to provide more detail and some case studies of this at a future meeting*. Case studies would help to illustrate how the process worked; and
 - c) asked about the reduction in the Youth Offending Team caseload since 2017/18, Mr Dunkley explained that restorative justice was been used in more cases to avoid relatively minor cases being escalated, and to seek to reduce repeat offending.
2. It was RESOLVED that the youth justice performance data for children in care be noted, with thanks, and a more detailed report with case studies be presented to a future meeting of the Panel.

144. Lifelong Links

(Item 11)

Clare Barton, Family Group Conferencing Team Manager and Lifelong Links Project Manager, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Barton introduced the report and tabled, as an anonymous case study, pages from a 10-year-old boy's workbook completed as part of the Lifelong Links project. She advised the Panel that Kent and Hertfordshire were ahead in the UK in the way and the extent to which they had introduced the Lifelong Links project, and Kent was particularly innovative in the way in which it evaluated the work undertaken. Work was currently going on to assess how best to sustain the project in the future, and Kent was seeking accreditation for its work from the Family Rights Group. The project was currently open to young people up to the age of 15 but the aim was to extend this to 16- and 17-year-olds. A presentation would be made to Parliament on

26 June 2019 to raise understanding of the project around the UK and Kent staff would play a key part in this. Ms Carpenter added that the project had received endorsement from the Children in Care Council as part of a previous challenge card.

2. It was RESOLVED that the progress of the Lifelong Links project be noted, with thanks, and a further report be submitted to the Panel later in the year.

145. Care Leavers Survey 2018

(Item 12)

Nimesh Patel, Team Manager, Care Leavers Service, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Smith introduced the report and advised that the feedback from the 2018 survey had been largely positive, particularly about young people's relationships with professionals. An action plan had been prepared, to address issues raised, and some work on these had already started. Young people were aware that the rent guarantor scheme was currently a pilot. Ms Smith and Mr Patel responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) asked how young people's awareness of the Young Adult Council could be improved, Ms Dunstan said that a video blog could be used to publicise it, and to seek more time to prepare and brief young people coming into care about the groups they could join. When the rent guarantor scheme pilot project came to an end, and assuming a permanent scheme was set up, this would be publicised so young people who were eligible and could benefit from it were made aware of it;
 - b) negative comments made about the personal advisor service were based on young people's view of them being difficult to contact or not meeting with them as often as they would like, and it might be that some expectations were unrealistic. Personal advisors would visit a young person every six weeks but would seek to increase this frequency and make more contact, particularly at key times in a young person's time in care. It was also hoped that a mentor scheme could be developed which could underpin the personal advisor service by providing an alternative contact for young people between personal advisor visits. Mr Patel added that the method of communication between personal advisors and young people was being reviewed, especially relating to the out-of-hours service. Mr Dunkley added that care leavers staff had asked for smart phones to make contact with young people easier. Ms Smith added that young people could facetime their personal advisor to seek their support if they were not able to meet in person; and
 - c) asked about scope to translate literature into different languages for UASC, Mr Patel advised that literature was available in the main languages spoken by the majority of the current UASC population.
2. It was RESOLVED that the results of the care leavers survey 2018 and the related action plan be noted, with thanks, and a further report be submitted to the Panel later in the year.

146. The role and work of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Champions

(Item 13)

Nick Crick, UASC Strategic Lead and Operational Manager, Karen Yusuf, Community Engagement Worker (North), and a party of young male UASC champions, Behnam, Eglis, Mohammed, Murad, Reza and Taman, were present for this item at the invitation of the Panel.

1. The Chairman welcomed the UASC Champions to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

2. Mr Crick advised the Panel that the UASC Champions programme had been set up using Government funding which had been made available as a result of a bid made in 2017. The aim of the programme was to provide better support for newly-arrived UASC as they settled into their new life in Kent. An engagement worker, Karen Yusuf, had been appointed. The aim was that every town in Kent would have a minimum of two champions, who would give feedback on behalf of UASC about their experiences. The programme included a number of projects, which were set out in the report.

3. The UASC Peer Champions, Behnam, Eglis, Mohammed, Murad, Reza and Taman introduced themselves and said where they had come from to Kent, how long they had been in Kent and why they had become Champions. All had arrived in Kent relatively recently, most being in their late teens. They told the Panel about the training they were undertaking, which included English, safeguarding, health and safety and household management, and that, with these skills, they would train other UASC to settle into the community, live safely and develop their English skills. They also enjoyed a number of sports and amateur drama, including football, basketball, swimming, table tennis, volleyball, running and chess and used these as a way of bonding with other UASC and forming friendships.

4. Mr Crick and the Champions responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) UASC had no choice of location when they were being allocated independent accommodation and had to move to wherever suitable accommodation was available. This meant they might find themselves in an unfamiliar town where they would have to find new connections and settle themselves in;
- b) it was suggested that sports could be used as a way of joining in to the local community, either by forming a new team or joining an existing one, and playing against other teams locally and across the county. Mr Crick said he aimed to establish under-16s and over-18s football teams, which would include other children in care;
- c) asked if there were any female UASC Champions, Mr Crick explained that there were indeed young women, two in East Kent and one in West Kent. He said he aimed to produce a map of the county featuring the Champions shown in the towns in which they worked, so UASC and professionals could get to know who they were. It was acknowledged that elected

County Councillors should know who the UASC Champions were in their local area. The Chairman advised that the Champions would also be helped to find out the name of their local elected County Councillor so they could seek help and support from them if they needed to. *The Democratic Services Officer subsequently sent Mr Crick a link to the webpage on which local Members could be identified using a postcode search facility;*

- d) Mr Crick said he hoped that the planned exhibition of artwork by UASC could be hosted by the Turner Contemporary gallery in Margate;
- e) asked how soon after arriving in Kent they had become Champions, some said they had taken on this role almost immediately, while they were at the Millbank Centre. They had been attracted to the role by the opportunity to take on leadership and develop a role for themselves in their new community;
- f) it was suggested that the police cadet scheme championed by the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner, Matthew Scott, might be an interesting project for some UASC, and Mr Crick undertook to look into this. Any help that the Panel could give in suggesting ways of supporting the UASC Champions or establishing new projects would be gratefully received. Ms Smith *undertook to contact all local authority-owned leisure facilities to ask about free or discounted membership for children in care and care leavers;* and
- g) the use of sports and drama groups as a way of integrating UASC with their communities was welcomed as both were good 'levellers' which transcended racial and cultural differences.

5. The Chairman thanked Mr Crick, Ms Yusuf, Behnam, Eglis, Mohammed, Murad, Reza and Taman for taking the time to attend the meeting to talk to the Panel about their work and asked that they visit the Panel again in the future.

6. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions about the new programme and its commitment to support migration and peer support positively, helping new arrivals to get established and settle in communities across Kent, be noted, with thanks.

147. Change for Kent Children programme (Item 14)

1. Mr Dunkley introduced the report and advised that Sarah Hammond and Caroline Smith were now in new permanent appointments, as Director of Integrated Children's Services, East, and Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting, respectively. Structure charts for the new Directorate would be drawn up shortly.

2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks.

148. Ofsted focused visit on the front door

(Item 15)

Penny Ademuyiwa, Assistant Director, Front Door, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Ademuyiwa introduced the report and explained that the recent visit by Ofsted had been brief as Kent was rated 'good'. The visit was the first to the new Integrated Children's Services team since its launch in October 2018. The Ofsted team had attended meetings and listened to calls, some of which included some difficult conversations, and their feedback had been good. The visit team had recognised the high number of calls dealt with on a daily basis and the way in which teams worked together to deal with these and avoid unnecessary escalation. Ms Ademuyiwa responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) asked about the reasons for the large number of calls received on the day, and the visit team's reaction to this, Mr Dunkley advised that it was unusual for an Ofsted visit to be made on a Monday as this was traditionally the busiest day of the week for referrals. 160 calls from the public were received on the inspection day, plus referrals by email, and this volume was an eye-opener for the visit team;
- b) Kent had not had any areas flagged for priority action, which was good, as the majority of authorities having front door visits had had some. There were also no areas for concern; and
- c) asked about the action plan which would address areas for service improvements, Ms Ademuyiwa explained that an action plan was in place and that practice development and training were ongoing due to the turnover of staff.

2. It was RESOLVED that:-

- a) the content of the narrative letter from Ofsted, following the focussed visit in January 2019, be noted; and
- b) the staff involved in the visit be thanked for their contribution to the success of the visit.