

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 8 DECEMBER 2021

NOTES of a briefing held using Microsoft Teams.

PRESENT: Rob Barton, Julianne Bayford, Dan Bride, Tom Byrne, Charmaine Chapman, Gary Cooke, Tony Doran, Sophia Dunstan, Lesley Game, Stephen Gray, Kelly Grehan, Sarah Hamilton, Sarah Hammond, Margot McArthur, Dirk Ross, Nancy Sayer, Tracy Scott and Caroline Smith.

ALSO PRESENT: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services.

IN ATTENDANCE: Matt Dunkley (Corporate Director of Children Young People and Education), Jo Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager, Virtual School Kent), Maureen Robinson (Management Information Unit Service Manager), Pritpal Sodhi (Quality Assurance Manager, IRO Service NW), Tina Onuchukwu, Steve Tanner (Assistant Director, SEND), Theresa Grayell (Democratic Services Officer, Clerk) and Hayley Savage (Democratic Services Officer, Support Clerk)

1. Membership update

The Panel noted that Sarah Vaux had moved to a new role in NHS Direct Commissioning and so had left the Panel.

2. Apologies and substitutes

Apologies for absence had been received from Trudy Dean, Alison Farmer and Shellina Prendergast. There were no substitutes.

3. Election of Chairman

Lesley Game proposed and Margot McArthur seconded that Dirk Ross be elected Chairman of the Panel. There were no other nominations and Mr Ross was duly elected Chairman.

4. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

1. Maureen Robinson introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-
 - a) staff resources had not been significantly adversely impacted by the covid pandemic so this was not a factor in the performance of services; and
 - b) Sarah Hammond advised that there had been significant delays in court hearings due to covid, however, and this continued to be a challenge. Matt Dunkley added that it would be helpful to include in future dashboards some commentary to give context to the figures listed, for example, a target missed may have been for only one child.

2. It was RESOLVED that the performance data set out in the Corporate Parenting Scorecard be noted, with many thanks to Children's Services teams for continued good work through very challenging times.

5. Participation Team Update

1. Jo Carpenter reported that the team had had a very busy few months and were now settled well back in an office environment. Rob Barton added that they had held a number of face-to-face meetings with young people and had enjoyed a Christmas meal together. Sophia Dunstan added that young people had given feedback on the health assessment process, including that they found the forms not very user-friendly. Some of the language and images use in the forms were outdated and young people could helpfully be consulted to help review and shape the forms' style and content. Charmaine Chapman told the Panel about the recent work of the Adoptables and, in response to a question, undertook to look into the idea of establishing a 'buddy' system or a quick-contact card to offer young people an easy way to access someone to talk to.

2. Tom Byrne showed a video of young people enjoying activity days in the October half term. Activities included African drumming and a study of Mary Seacole to celebrate Black History Month, bowling, baking for Halloween, LaserTag and litter picking. The Adoptables had held a useful session about returning to school after the pandemic, support networks and what potential adopters need to know. The video and the range of activities were both welcomed. Sophia said that she was very proud of the work of Kent's Children In Care Councils and the issues they had tackled, for example, their work on the language used when talking to and about young people in care. Julianne Bayford referred to the Kent Cares Town website, which had been set up by the Children In Care Councils, and said that she promoted it to the Kent Foster Care Association.

3. Tom advised the Panel that the Christmas gift campaign for care leavers was half-way to its target and asked that Panel members spread the news so that anyone who had not yet but wished to contribute could do so. Jo advised that a Christmas party for children in care, foster carers and their sons and daughters would be held on 11 December. Panel Members would also be very welcome to attend.

4. The updates were NOTED, with thanks.

6. Verbal Update by the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

1. Sue Chandler welcomed Dirk Ross in his role as the new Chairman of the Panel and thanked the participation team for their excellent work in supporting young people in care and leaving care. She then gave verbal updates on the following issues:

UASC – the Home Office had announced that the National Transfer Scheme, which sought to spread the burden of UASC more evenly across the country, would shortly become mandatory rather than voluntary, and she welcomed this move. There were currently 376 UASC under the aged of 18, of which, 143 were expected to be

transferred under the National Transfer Scheme. Since September 2021, 184 UASC had been transferred under the scheme.

In response to a question, Sue advised that the financial implications and details of the mandated National Transfer Scheme were expected in the new year. The Leader, Roger Gough, and officers were lobbying the Government for greater financial support for Kent to help it support its UASC, and she was confident that this lobbying would be successful. It was expected that, as was the usual pattern, the arrival rate of UASC would slow in the winter months, due to harsher weather conditions.

Campaigns – the progress of the Christmas gift campaign was very pleasing to see and a particularly large donation from the County Council’s Infrastructure team was warmly welcomed.

2. The verbal updates were NOTED, with thanks.

7. Youth Justice and Children in Care

1. Dan Bride introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:

a) it was suggested that a Police representative attend the Panel next time Youth Justice was reported, to help the Panel to understand the relationships between Youth Justice and the Police service. Dan undertook to liaise with the Police to arrange this. Matt Dunkley suggested that, rather than ask the Police to attend an additional meeting, another way of linking to them would be via the Youth Justice Board, on which the Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Member, Sue Chandler and Margot McArthur, both served. He undertook to look into this option; and

b) a virtual inspection of Oakhill Secure Training Centre had been carried out in June 2021, and no further inspection was expected for 18 months. The overall rating was ‘requires improvement’ but the report highlighted many positives, with safety and wellbeing and intervention and delivery all rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’. The service was clear about what it needed to do to improve Oakhill and had prepared an action plan to address the points raised by the inspection.

2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

8. Kent Children in Care in the statutory school years with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) – Access to Education

1. Tony Doran introduced the report and advised the Panel that Steve Tanner had taken on the role of Assistant Director of SEND in August 2021. Mr Tanner introduced himself and set out the 12-point action plan and the increased work going on to drive forward this issue. He emphasised that Virtual School Kent and SEND now had closer working links than ever before.

2. Asked how effective the service could be for any child not in school, Tony advised that every child had different needs and would respond to different mechanisms. A very small number of non-Department for Education provisions had been used successfully in exceptional cases, for example, with school refusers.

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

9. Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group Looked after Children Annual Report 2020-2021

1. Nancy Sayer introduced the report, for which additional Kent-only figures had been sent to the Panel on 7 December.

2. In response to a question about Kent's young people placed in other local authorities, Nancy advised that the Kent health team would request the receiving health team, in the area in which the young person was placed, carry out the health assessment as well as provide relevant health services to them. Sarah Hammond advised that very few Kent children in care were placed out of the county and that an out-of-county placement could be 50% more expensive than a placement within Kent.

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

10. Independent Reviewing (IRO) Service Annual Report 2020/2021

1. Tina Onuchukwu and Pritpal Sodhi introduced the report, on which there were no questions. Matt Dunkley congratulated Tina and Pritpal on the quality of the IRO service in Kent and emphasised its importance to children and young people in care.

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