

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 31 May 2023

MINUTES of the meeting held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.

PRESENT: Dirk Ross (Chair), Dan Bride, Becki Bruneau, Gary Cooke, Tony Doran, Alison Farmer, Kelly Grehan, Sarah Hamilton, Sarah Hammond, Dylan Jeffrey, Kayleigh Leonard, Rory Love, Nancy Sayer, Tracy Scott and Caroline Smith.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), James Clapson (Democratic Services Officer), Alice Gleave (Interim Assistant Director SEND Operations), Kevin Kasaven (Assistant Director), Leemya McKeown (Assistant Director, Safeguarding Professional Standards and Quality Assurance), Chis Nunn (Senior Management Information Officer) and Hayley Savage (Democratic Services Officer).

1. Membership

Members noted the following changes to the membership of the Panel:

- Rory Love OBE replaced Shellina Prendergast.
- Dylan Jeffrey replaced Margot McArthur.
- Kayleigh Leonard replaced Sophia Dunstan.
- Becki Bruneau joined the panel filling a vacant seat.

2. Apologies and substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Stephen Gray, Peter Harman, Lesley Game, David Beaney and Sharon Williams.

Dan Bride and Sarah Hamilton were present virtually.

3. Chairman's Announcements

The Chair advised that Trudy Dean had stepped down as Vice Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP).

It was proposed by Gary Cooke, seconded by Dylan Jeffrey, and AGREED that Becki Bruneau be elected Vice-Chair of the CPP.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 April 2023

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 April 2023 were correctly recorded.

5. Participation Team update

1. Jo Carpenter introduced the update and advised of the following:
 - The team had been busy supporting the newly qualified social worker recruitment programme.
 - There would be two new apprentices joining the team over the next couple of weeks.
 - A number of activities were scheduled to take place during the May half term holiday.
 - The Super Council, made up of the Children in Care Councils, came together on 31 May to consider the Government's response to the Social Care Review.
 - The Children in Care Council groups also met during the Easter school holiday. Their feedback on how children could be made to feel happy, safe and stable at home would be incorporated into staff training events.
 - The Young Adult Council had become well established, and an exclusive group for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people called YAC Extra had been set up to consider the specific issues these young people faced.

2. Kayleigh Leonard updated the panel on recent events that had taken place, they included:
 - Two activity sessions in Maidstone for children aged 5 and under.
 - A visit to Go-Ape for members of the Young Adult Council.
 - Two science days.
 - Two pizza making sessions at Pizza Express.
 - Rock climbing at Bowls Rock.
 - An event of Easter family fun and circus skills.
 - Cup cake decorating at a cake school in Maidstone.
 - A trip to Kent Cricket Club's ground in Canterbury.

3. Jo Carpenter advised of a new Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC) group called MAGIC (Making A Great and Important Change), that had met on 31 May. It provided an opportunity for children in care and adopted young people with special educational needs, to express how they felt about school, education, health, and wellbeing services.

4. Kevin Kasaven advised that following the recruitment process, KCC had offered 67 people Social Worker positions. There were also a number of Social Worker agency staff who were looking to return to permanent employment, however they sometimes required professional development and training to fill gaps in their experience.

5. Sarah Hammond said that KCC offered incentives for social workers to join and stay in the organisation. The Government was expected to restrict the number of agency staff that a local authority (LA) could employ. This would reduce the amount of work available to agency staff in future. Overall, there was a financial benefit for KCC to employ social workers directly.

6. It was agreed that the CPP chair would invite all KCC Members to attend the Corporate Parenting Team Day in July.
7. Gary Cooke, as Chairman of the Council, agreed that a corporate parenting stand could be set up outside the Council Chamber at the next Council meeting to help engage with Members, and raise the profile of the work being done.
8. The Chair of CPP welcomed any ideas that could raise the profile of the CPP. He would coordinate with Jo Carpenter about the quarterly newsletter and wished to send out a monthly CPP email to all Members, to highlight good news stories and upcoming events.
9. RESOLVED that the update was noted.

6. Challenge Card Update

1. Caroline Smith provided an updated on two challenge cards; the My Things Matter Pledge, and Accommodation for Care Leavers. She advised that KCC had signed up to the 'My Things Matter Pledge' which would help to ensure children had a better experience when moving home.
2. Caroline advised that the Accommodation for Care Leavers challenge card had a number of hurdles that were yet to be overcome. Local councils were hesitant to waive the requirement for care leavers to have lived in their area for three of the last five years in order to join the housing register. Care leavers often could not meet this criterion for reasons beyond their control and could find themselves unable to live close to where they worked, studied or had friends and relatives. Members of the CPP were asked to continue to champion the issue with their local council colleagues.
3. Members discussed the housing issues facing care leavers and acknowledged the social housing pressures local councils experienced. It was agreed that a report would come back to the next CPP meeting on 26 July. The report would look at the number of care experienced young adults, in which district they were living, the common reasons for them wanting to live in a different area and how this related to the current requirement for a local connection. The report would also consider how the project could be progressed and the ways in which Members of the CPP could offer support.
4. RESOLVED that the challenge card progress to date be noted.

7. Verbal Update by the Cabinet Member

1. Sue Chandler provided an update on the following:
 - From 1 May to 26 May, 99 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) arrived in the county. This brought the total number to 503 so

far for 2023. The largest cohort was from Afghanistan, although there had been an increase in arrivals from Sudan.

- On 1 June there would be a UASC connections day that would give children the opportunity to meet their peers. Previous events of this type had been very successful.
- The Christmas Appeal had raised nearly £27,000. This money was used to provide £10 vouchers to young people and starter packs for care leavers when moving into their first home. Thanks were offered to the Corporate Parent Team and the Young Lives Foundation for their work on the project. Items within the starter packs were bought in bulk through the Young Lives Foundation, to offer best value for money.

2. RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted.

8. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

1. Chris Nunn presented the score card for March 2023 and the proposed targets for 2023/24. He explained that:

- There were 27 key performance indicators (KPIs) that were measured monthly. National data was used to assess how Kent compared to others and this data was used to set appropriate targets.
- The proposed targets had not changed from previous years, however there were changes to the methodology/definitions of three targets as detailed at paragraph 3 of the report.
- There were 6 green, 13 amber and 8 red rated KPIs. The number of red KPIs had increased by one since the panel last met; that KPI was previously amber.

2. The Panel acknowledged that there was a shortage of foster carers due to a number of reasons including:

- Competition with independent fostering agencies.
- Affordability of housing; people bought smaller homes without spare rooms and dependents lived in the family home for longer, this led to less availability of spare rooms for foster children.
- Some people have a fear of giving up paid employment to become a foster carer.

3. Caroline Smith detailed some of the work done to highlight the need for foster carers in Kent, such as the use of social media, the creation of a Members' pack, the inclusion of fostering information on the back of council tax bills, and the Foster Care Fortnight Project that had just taken place.

4. Caroline Smith advised that both online and in person foster care information sessions were held for people who were interested in fostering. CPP would consider the Annual Fostering Report at the October meeting; Caroline would include information on how many of the online attendees became foster carers compared to the number of in person attendees, and how many of these people remained foster carers a year after being approved to foster.

5. Sarah Hammond noted that Kent had not had any children's homes for around 25 years, lots of LA's stopped providing secured home provision when a national system was implemented that took the decision of who got placed in the homes away from LA's.
6. Gary Cooke highlighted that paragraph 4.3.4 of the report showed a lower percentage of children in care were issued a care plan within 20 weeks than children not in care. There would also be a review into the cases to identify the causes that led to the 20 week deadline being missed, and new SEN teams were in place and responsible for the provision of this service.
7. Rory Love asked about the barriers to getting 90% of children in care an up-to-date dental check. It was noted that there was a shortage of NHS dental practitioners in Kent, however KCC worked with NHS England around capacity and these children had priority access. The percentage of children in care with an up-to-date dental check had steadily improved since Covid 19 restrictions were lifted. The KPI also included UASC who sometimes had significant dental care requirements.
8. RESOLVED that the performance data in the Corporate Parenting Scorecard be noted.

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

1. Tony Doran introduced the report which offered a six monthly update on the access to education of Kent children in care in statutory school years who had an EHCP. During Tony's introduction it was noted that:
 - There were 28 children on the Virtual School Kent (VSK) EHCP tracker, this also included children at risk of exiting mainstream education.
 - 18 children were not registered on a school role and received SEN tuition, however six of these children were placed outside of Kent which made negotiating bespoke tuition more challenging.
 - Five children operated on a reduced school timetable. A reduced timetable could be used to manage a trauma, the child would return to full time education after a specified spell.
 - Two children were receiving education from non-Department for Education registered providers.
 - So far in the 2022/23 academic year, 25 children's cases had been escalated to the VSK and SEND Leadership Team's Complex Case meetings. Resolutions had been found for 12 children and 13 children's cases were ongoing due to their complexity.
2. Alice Gleave added the following points:
 - KCC was currently undertaking a sufficiency assessment that looked to increase capacity and ensure adequate educational resources were in place within schools to support children with EHCPs.
 - There was a post-16 year old EHCP case team, that worked to create transition plans for children in years 10 and 11.

- There would be a deep dive investigation to establish the causes of the low percentage of EHCPs issued within 20 weeks for children in care. The investigation would present clear actions for implementation by the assessment teams, and the performance would be closely monitored.
 - The service was undergoing a number of changes that were designed to ensure the right children received the right support at the right time. The child should always be kept at the centre of the process.
 - Appendix C of the report detailed KCC's pledge to young children that consisted of three elements; A good education; Getting ready for being an adult; Championing your needs and interests. The format of EHCPs had been redesigned to ensure they captured the voice of the child and was geared towards their aspirations.
3. The Chair asked about the educational support provided to the 18 children not registered at a school and for those on a limited timetable. He was advised that each child had a bespoke provision that was tailored to their individual needs. It could be based in the home, a therapeutic setting, or an educational setting; some children also received therapeutic support to help them cope with full time education. The outcomes section of the EHCP determined the type of support provided to the child. The overarching aim was to provide appropriate support to enable the child to return to full time education when the time was right.
 4. In response to a question from Sarah Hamilton about pathways to independence and further education, Alice Gleave advised the board that there had been meetings with college representatives. They had discussed what skills and courses could be provided to support young people who had experienced a disrupted education. East Kent College had taken part in a small scale trial and offered a transition year with enhanced support for some of these young people.
 5. Tracy Scott highlighted that speech and language support was often identified in EHCPs, however it was not always accessible as the service was under great strain. Nancy Sayer advised that there had been a meeting about the issue on 30 May and she offered to email Tracy details of the outcomes.
 6. Rory Love asked why the key findings statistics at 2.1 of the report seemed to show a lower percentage of children in care with an EHCP than in the data provided by the Local Government Authority (LGA)? It was noted that the data shown at 2.1 of the report only considered the number KCC's children in care, whereas the LGA's data also included children placed in Kent by other LAs, this increased the percentage. 60-70% of the children placed in Kent from other LA's had an EHCP. It was agreed that a further breakdown of the figures would be provided when the report came to a future CPP meeting.
 7. Kevin Kasaven advised that KCC did not place children in placements rated inadequate or requires improvement however, the majority of other LA's did not have this restriction. KCC had strong commissioning arrangements that enabled access placements rated outstanding within Kent and these placements also cost the Council less than other LA's were charged for lower rated or unregulated placements.

8. Becki Bruneau noted that the drive for Ofsted ratings and league table results could offer an incentive for schools not to be inclusive. Tony Doran said that there was pressure on schools to solely focus on good exam results and Ofsted ratings. It was a challenge to make schools recognise the importance of inclusion. Alice Gleave added that KCC had teams that worked with schools to help mitigate their concerns and garner confidence that they could offer a good inclusive education. Last year KCC held a meeting with secondary school headteachers to look at the acceptance of seven SEND children, this allowed the headteachers to see what other schools were offering, and to offer peer to peer challenge.
9. Gary Cooke said that encouraging inclusion within secondary schools was made more difficult as they were not maintained by the LA. How closely a child lived to the school was the key determining factor for acceptance. This could lead to some SEN children going to their nearest school rather than the right school that would meet their needs.
10. Rory Love highlighted that the Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education Strategy was going through KCC's governance process. Once agreed it could be used in different forums to encourage key stakeholders to be more inclusive. Rory added that Ofsted also wished to encourage inclusive practices and would not award an outstanding rating to a school that did not have inclusive policies in place.
11. RESOLVED to note the work of the virtual school and Kent SEN in supporting its young people.