

## **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 10 October 2023**

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

PRESENT: Dirk Ross (Chair), David Beaney, Jason Read, Becki Bruneau, Gary Cooke, Tony Doran, Lesley Game, Stephen Gray, Sarah Hamilton, Dylan Jeffrey, Kayleigh Leonard, Rory Love, Nancy Sayer, Tracy Scott, and Caroline Smith.

IN ATTENDANCE: Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), James Clapson (Democratic Services Officer), Chris Nunn (Senior Management Information Officer), Mark Vening (Head of Fostering West), Leemya McKeown (Assistant Director, Safeguarding Professional Standards and Quality Assurance), Maria Cordrey (Head of Fostering East) and Carolann James (Interim Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services).

#### **1. Apologies and substitutes**

Apologies for absence were received from Tom Byrne, Sarah Hammond, Kelly Greham and Dan Bride who was substituted by Jason Read.

Lesley Game and David Beaney were present virtually.

#### **2. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair advised that he had become the Deputy Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services and would be supporting Sue Chandler, the Cabinet Member, in her duties.

The Chair and Becki Bruneau, the Vice Chair, wished to increase the presence of the Corporate Parenting Panel at events in the County. They planned to attend some events individually to make best use of their time.

#### **3. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2023**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2023 were correctly recorded.

#### **4. Participation Team update**

1. Jo Carpenter and Kayleigh Leonard provided an update on the following:
  - It had been a busy Summer. 20 events and activities had been put on for children in care (CIC), care leavers and adopted children. A total of 402 activity day spaces were attended by children and young people.
  - The Corporate Parenting event held in July had been a success. Representatives from the Children's Commissioner for England Office attended and provided positive feedback.

- Seven children undertook an accredited recruitment and selection training course in August. These children completed the course and could now be involved in the recruitment and selection of senior staff, social workers, and foster carers.
  - Members of the new Young Person's Council, for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), met for a social trip to get to know each other better.
  - The Virtual Schools Kent Awards Celebration would celebrate the contributions made by school age children. 400 nominations had been received and 42 awards would be presented.
  - The Young People's Councils would be meeting during the October school holidays, there would also be two Halloween arts and crafts workshops, and a trip to the zoo for asylum seeking young people.
2. Lesly Game asked about the gathering of information from young people about their health habits. Nancy Sayer advised that information about smoking, drugs, and alcohol consumption were gathered during health assessments.
3. There was concern about the use of vapes by young people. Young people needed to be aware of the health risks associated with vaping. The following points were noted during the discussion:
- Becki Bruneau said that foster carers should not be put under too much pressure to stop young people vaping because it was difficult to monitor what young people got up to when they were out of the house.
  - Kayleigh Leonard added that often when young people are told not to do something it can sometimes make them want to do it more. Some young people used vaping as a way to show off to their peers.
  - Nancy Sayer highlighted that young people needed to be given all the information in order to make their own decisions. Rory Love added that the narrative surrounding vaping needed to be addressed, it was often said that it was the healthy alternative to smoking.
  - The Chair suggested that vaping and young people's health could be topics for discussion at the Young People's Councils in October. He believed it would be good to explore the pressures faced by young people.
  - The shops who sold vapes to young people should be targeted. The Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee planned consider the matter at a future meeting, and Trading Standards representatives would be invited to attend.
  - Gary Cooke noted that Government was considering a ban on disposable vapes.
4. RESOLVED that the update was noted.
- 5. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care**
1. Chris Nunn introduced the report that detailed 27 key performance indicators (KPIs) up to the end of July 2023.

2. Gary Cooke noted that some of the KPI's appeared to suggest a history of underperformance for some time. He would like to get a better understanding of the action plans to address areas of poor performance. Chris Nunn advised that the KPI's often overlapped multiple services and could have several action plans allocated to each of them.
3. Chris Nunn advised that some KPIs spanned a 12 month period and others were a snap shot taken at the end of the month. He added that the report detailed some KPI trends over the last five years, however it could be misleading to draw direct comparisons between historic and present data. The data needed to be considered within the context of the time it was gathered.
4. Becki Bruneau suggested that it might be helpful to look back to 2017, before Covid 19. Chris Nunn suggested that another impact had been the rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) entering the County. It was also noted that some KPIs were affected by factors outside of the Council's control, such as the impact of court delays on adoption targets.
5. Chris Nunn advised national comparisons were used to benchmark the performance of services and the targets were ambitious. Caroline Smith added that some of the capacity challenges in Kent were not experienced in other parts of the Country.
6. RESOLVED that the performance data in the Corporate Parenting Scorecard be noted.

## **6. Verbal Update by the Cabinet Member**

1. The Chair read out the update on behalf of Sue Chandler as she was unable to attend the meeting. The update focused on the Sufficiency Strategy as follows:
  - Last year the Corporate Parenting Panel endorsed the Council's Sufficiency Strategy for 2022 to 2027. It set out the Council's approach to meet its statutory responsibility to provide secure, safe and appropriate accommodation to children in care, children in need and care leavers.
  - There were two unique factors that impacted the Council's ability to meet sufficiency in Kent; the unknown number of UASC coming through the Reception and Safe Care Service, and the number of children placed in Kent by other councils.
  - Both factors hindered the Council's ability to accurately forecast sufficiency in Kent. This had been further complicated by the recent

High Court judgment regarding UASC, and the Illegal Migration Act that would come into force in March 2024.

- The current Sufficiency Strategy was out of date and time was needed to understand the impact of the Illegal Migration Act. The Council awaited further direction from the High Court on the National Transfer Scheme, and on the management of the increased number of children coming into care.
- The Sufficiency Strategy should be paused, and a new document would be prepared for July 2024.

2. RESOLVED that the update be noted.

## **7. Virtual School Kent Head Teacher Six Monthly Update.**

1. Tony Doran introduced the report that focused predominantly on primary school examination results. The results were unvalidated at this stage but still provided a fairly accurate picture. The following points were noted during the introduction:
  - Key Stage (KS) 2 - Attainment was below the regional and national average. However, these children had shown more improvement on their KS1 SATS scores in Maths and Reading than the regional and national average for CiC.
  - KS4 - Unvalidated tracking evidenced a 2.2% improvement in young people achieving 5 GCSE's, including Maths and English at level 4+; however, there was a decline of 2.1% in the number achieving level 5. English Baccalaureate results had seen a 2.2% improvement.
  - KS5 - The number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) had increased by 3% to 13.8%. 18.9% of young people were NEET nationwide. There had been a rise in the number of apprenticeships. Apprenticeships gave young people the opportunity to enter employment with support and training in place.
  - Higher Education (HE) - So far there were five new entrants into HE, this number was expected to rise as the application period was still open. Overall, there were 109 young people currently in HE.
  - Personal Education Plans - The percentage of personal education plans completed had continued to improve year on year. The plans were done three times a year and had a positive impact for young people.
  - Attendance - The average attendance rate for CiC was 92.3%, this compared favourably against the national average for all learners that was 91.9%. Staff worked hard during the year to challenging exclusions and there were no permanently excluded children.
2. Becki Bruneau asked why the percentage of children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in Kent was higher than the national average? Tony Doran responded that there had been an increase in EHCPs nationally, however Kent was unique in that it had a selective school system. Some parents had a lack of faith in the education system and mistakenly saw EHCPs

as a golden ticket to get support for their child. EHCPs were relatively rigid in their offer and a more flexible approach could be better suited to some children. Rory Love added that Kent was an outlier and there were a number of reasons why Kent had a high proportion of children with EHCPs. The Leadership Team were working to implement new processes and practices that were more in-line with the code of best practice, to identify those who were most in need.

3. Sarah Hamilton asked about access to music and art for CiC? Tony Doran responded that Virtual Schools Kent (VSK) could not directly influence the delivery of school curriculums, but Pupil Premium Plus initiatives did allow children to access music and play therapy to help them engage with the curriculum.
4. Tracy Scott praised the work of VSK, noting that they had been very supportive of foster carers and children. However, foster carers had reported that the SEN service had been less supportive. Some foster children, with a strong need for EHCPs, had not received the support they needed. Tony Doran offered to flag how the SEN service interfaced with foster carers when he next met with them.
5. RESOLVED to NOTE the work of the Virtual School in supporting its young people.

## **8. Kent Fostering Service Annual Report 2023**

1. Caroline Smith introduced the report that included some additional information about recruitment and retention as requested by the CPP at the last meeting.
2. Maria Cordrey gave an overview of some of the recruitment activities that had taken place, noting that Kent Fostering had increased its reach by 184% across digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Google. Virtual events had been found to generate the most engagement with potential carers, however, the team had also attended some large community events in person.
3. Maria Cordrey advised that the Department for Education (DfE) had provided KCC with £2,400,000 for recruitment and retention. The funding would be used on a national marketing campaign, development of the Enquiry Hub, and to support the Mockingbird programme.
4. Maria Cordrey noted that it was particularly challenging to find carers for disabled children, and for older children who exhibited risk taking behaviours. This was despite the availability of an additional financial package to support the care of these children. Factors such as the cost of living and a shortage of spare rooms also led to less people willing to foster.
5. Mark Vening said that there were a number of reasons why foster carers stepped back from the role, such as a return to work or ill health. The following actions were underway to help retain foster carers:
  - The Mockingbird programme would offer respite support for carers.

- The Allocation Policy would be updated to ensure carers received the information and support they needed.
  - Workshops and disruption meetings would be relaunched.
  - Placement stability work would help to identify where things were not working at an early stage.
6. Gary Cooke asked about the possibility of retired foster carers returning to provide care. Maria Cordrey responded that they had recently ran the Welcome Back to Kent campaign. It had successfully bought some former carers back to provide care.
  7. Caroline Smith said that last year some district and borough councils had included a Kent Fostering leaflet with their annual council tax notification letters. Members could help by encouraging their local councils to allow the inclusion of these flyers, it was a good way to reach a large number of people.
  8. Gary Cooke suggested that Members could use their influence at parish and town councils, church magazines, and Facebook pages, to spread the word that Kent Fostering was looking for foster carers.
  9. Becki Bruneau suggested that Members could add the Kent Fostering banner to their email signatures. Maria Cordry would share the banner and link with James Clapson who would follow this up after the meeting.
  10. RESOLVED to NOTE the information contained within the Kent Fostering Annual Report and Business Plan 2023/2024.

## **9. Annual Youth Justice Report**

1. Jason Read introduced the report and the urgent notification letter, from the Chief Inspector of Prisons, about Cookham Wood Young Offenders Institution. The following points were noted during the introduction:
  - The launch of Outcome 22 provided the opportunity to divert children who had committed a minor offence away from the youth justice system, if they engaged with a package of support.
  - CiC were a priority group and were over represented within the youth justice system.
  - There were currently 176 children within the youth justice system and 32 of them were CiC.
  - The urgent notification letter was issued in April 2023 because the Inspector had significant concerns about how the children were being managed at the Institution. There was an action plan for improvement. The Council had some oversight of action plan because the Institution held CiC.
  - There was a Transition Officer on site for part of the week who could help facilitate visits.

2. The Chair said that he had visited recently and met with the Transition Officer, staff and some of the children. He added that staff shortages had exacerbated the problems, and he believed that the children did not appear to be getting suitable access to education.
4. Jason Read highlighted that Outcome 22 could help children avoid a criminal record that could impact upon their futures. It was possible that some children would go on to reoffend, but the scheme provided an opportunity for intervention that could help children take a different path in their lives.
5. Becki Bruneau said that she had been involved in a youth justice case where a young person became overwhelmed by the number of people telling her what to do. She suggested that support was often more effective when it involved a small number of people.
5. Carolann James said that she was the Chair of the Youth Justice Board. The Youth Justice Board was a multi-agency group that considered matters relating to children subject to the youth justice service, or at risk of entering the youth justice service. She asked those visiting the Institution to let her know of any concerns arising from the visit. In her position as Chair of the Youth Justice Board, she could raise these concerns with the Governor.
6. Dylan Jeffrey asked if the Outcome 22 interventions would appear on Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks later in life? Rory Love added that it was very important that children were made fully aware of any possible future ramifications before they agreed to accept any Outcome 22 interventions.
7. Becki Bruneau asked if there were psychotherapists or counsellors available at the Institution? Nancy Sayer responded that NHS England should have a service on site, she would confirm the arrangements when she visited later in the month.
8. RESOLVED that the report be noted.