

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL– 29 October 2024

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

PRESENT: Shellina Prendergast (Chair), Paul Bartlett (Vice-Chair), Gary Cooke, Dylan Jeffrey, David Brazier, Lesley Game, Sarah Hamilton, Sarah Hammond, Caroline Smith, Tom Byrne, Tony Doran, Tracy Scott, Nancy Sayer and Brian Horton

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

IN ATTENDANCE: James Clapson (Democratic Services Officer), Kevin Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), Alice Gleave (Interim Assistant Director for SEND Operations), Christy Holden (Assistant Director for CYPE Commissioning), Robin Cahill (Senior Commissioner), Jason Read (Youth Justice Service Manager), Gavin Swann (Service Manager Safeguarding, Quality Assurance & Professional Standards), Natalia Merritt (Co-Chair Kent Housing Options Subgroup), Amy Coombs (Head of Adoption Partnership South East) and Maureen Robinson (MI Service Manager)

Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr R Love OBE, Ms K Leonard, and Ms A Farmer.

Ms L Game, Ms S Chandler and Ms T Scott were in attendance virtually.

Chairman's Announcements

(Item 2)

1. RESOLVED that Mr P Bartlett be duly elected Vice Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
2. The Chair agreed to write to group leaders to remind Members of their duty as a Corporate Parent, and to extend an invitation to attend Panel meetings.

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2024

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2024 were a correct record of the meeting.

Participation Team update

(Item 4)

1. Joanne Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, introduced the report. She highlighted a few key areas:
 - a. Ms Carpenter shared that the recruitment of six apprentices had taken place over the summer. Additionally, two were shortlisted for Apprentice of the Year and one had won the award.
 - b. Furthermore, Ms Carpenter shared that positive feedback had been received from events that had taken place over the summer and from the CPP Takeover Day that took place earlier in the year. Panel members were invited to attend the Children in Care Council meetings.
 - c. There were 21 activity days run throughout the summer, with 408 places booked. The annual picnic was held in collaboration with Adoption Partnership South East, this was a family day held for children with SEND alongside an 18+ Care Leaver Event held in collaboration with 18+ Care Leaver Service. All events were met with positive feedback. Additionally, the Virtual School Kent award celebrations were held over the summer; one celebration for pre-16 and one for post-16, where many awards were given out.
2. The Chair and Members shared their congratulations for the nominees and winners of the awards, and the success of the events held over the summer.
3. In response to a question surrounding children who do not participate in the events, Ms Carpenter shared that:
 - a. Mental health had been a contributing factor as to why some children did not participate, there had been pilots tested for virtual meetings which would carry on into the winter months. She assured members that there had been consistent work to find diverse ways to encourage participation.
 - b. Children had the opportunity to have an independent visitor and a mentor through the Young Care System, which had been helpful for those who did not want to come to events held.
4. A Member questioned the timeline for outcomes of the Big Listen Consultation. Joanne Carpenter offered to follow up with Members when the results become available.
5. RESOLVED that the Panel note the Participation Team Update.

Verbal updates by the Cabinet Member

(Item 5)

1. Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, gave a verbal update on the following:
 - a. The Virtual School Kent held its annual awards event, where 479 nominations were received for children. 53 Children and Young People's Council Members were presented with awards in recognition of their contributions.
 - b. National Adoption Week had seen the publication of the 'Adopter Journey Standards,' which acted as guidance for adopters detailing what they could expect from their adoption journey. Furthermore, the results of the 'You Can Adopt' survey revealed the diversity of adoption journeys.
 - c. Ms Chandler shared that she had attended the National Agenda and Reforms Conference and Kent Academy Social Care Awards.
 - d. There had been support from train companies, such as Southeastern Railway, to encourage more people to start their own adoption journey. There has been an offer of free tickets to adoptive families and digital signage at train stations in support of existing or prospective adoptive families.
 - e. The Everything Project, a collaboration between a partnership of councils and children's trusts, worked to create a film for the Kent Fostering Service. Its purpose was to highlight the importance of fostering and to see how life changing and rewarding the experience was.
2. The Chair shared how powerful and moving she found the film and extended congratulations to the appointment to the Deputy Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services.
3. During a prospective Councillor event, it became clear that some potential candidates for the 2025 election had misconceptions about the council's duty to UASC. Recent High Court judgements had made the councils duty very clear, and this responsibility would be incorporated into the new members induction package following the 2025 elections. It was important to challenge misinformation and Mrs Chandler offered to circulate links to the Council's website that detailed the care offered to children arriving from overseas.
4. RESOLVED that the Panel note and make comment.

Adoption Partnership South East, Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report 2023/2024

(Item 6)

1. Amy Coombs, Head of Adoption Partnership South East, introduced and summarised the content of the report:
 - a. During National Adoption Week a conference was held, with over 200 people attending online. The author Sarah Nash spoke regarding

- therapeutic parenting and taking a trauma informed approach. There was a radio interview with Radio Kent and a story run on BBC South East, helping to highlight the importance of adoption.
- b. There had been work done to strengthen the adoption community through working collaboratively, which resulted in 11 community groups across the region.
 - c. To update the figures from the report: 31 children had been adopted, 26 children were matched with adopters, 18 children had a placement order and a continued plan for adoption but were not yet matched with adopters, 39 adopter households were approved and there were 24 approved and available adopters.
 - d. The participation team ran various events over the summer and would continue to do so for the remainder of the year, Ms Coombs extended an invite to Members to the Christmas event.
2. A film was shown which highlighted the importance of the strong adoption community across Kent, Medway, and Bexley. The Chair shared how important the message behind the video was.
 3. In response to comments and questions asked it was said:
 - a. Ms Coombs acknowledged that disruptions had taken place, children placed for adoption were the most vulnerable children who can have extremely complex needs. Sometimes there can be a need for children to return to the local authority for additional support. Since April 2024 there had been a sibling group of two that had been returned to foster care after 2 months of adoption. There was acknowledgement of how traumatic these disruptions can be for all parties and Disruption Meetings always took place to properly analyse and learn from the causes and outcomes.,
 - b. Most children place for adoption were between 0 to 2 years of age, Ms Coombs offered to provide Members with further details about the number of adoptions by age, outside of the meeting.
 - c. Elected Members were welcome to sit on adoption panels.
 4. RESOLVED that the Panel note the Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report 2023/2024.

Youth Justice Annual Report

(Item 7)

1. Jason Read, Kent Youth Justice Service Manager, introduced the work of the Youth Justice Service and highlighted the report:
 - a. HMYOI Cookham Wood was closed in April 2024, and the majority of the children housed there were moved to HMYOI Feltham.
 - b. There were significant pressures on the juvenile estate and adult secure estate due to the limited number of secure establishments for

young people. A pilot project at the Oasis Restore School would help elevate the pressure, as it was a dual registered secure school and children's home. The school had been taken over by a new trust, it had significant funding and oversight invested into it. The school was on stage one of taking in children and had plans to reach stage two in January 2026.

- c. The closure of HMYOI Cookham Wood led to issues in accessing children due to location, youth justice practitioners and social workers had been essential in managing these challenges.
- d. Community interventions had been successful, and reoffending rates were below the national average.
- e. It was important to try and diverted children away from the justice system were possible through support.

2. In response to comments and questions asked it was said:

- a. The Chair shared that she had been a member of the Youth Justice Board and therefore had seen the challenges present at HMYOI Cookham Wood. It was agreed that children should be placed as close to home as possible to limit issues with access and cost of travel for families. Two practitioners were placed in HMYOI Cookham Wood to offer support, but the closure of that unit increased pressure on families and professionals.
- b. A Member asked for confirmation as to within which stage of the Oasis Restore School were Kent youth offenders to be placed. Mr Read shared that the placement of youth offenders had been set to take place in stage two.
- c. A Member questioned to what extent the Youth Justice Service has engaged with district authorities. The focus of the work with local districts had been through Community Safety Partnerships which had helped to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- d. A Member questioned the impact of Outcome 22. Mr Read shared that it would take a full year of tracking before success levels could be determined and offered to come back to the panel with the data in the future.
- e. Mr Read advised that children in care were a priority group as they were disproportionately over represented within the justice system. He added that Outcome 22 was available to all children whose offences who met the criteria.
- f. A Member questioned the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to speed up the process within the judicial courts. Mr Read confirmed that he was not aware of the use of AI, and he believed that there were no plans in the immediate future to implement the use of it.

3. RESOLVED that the Panel note the Youth Justice Annual Report.

Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

(Item 8)

1. Gavin Swann, Service Manager in Safeguarding and Quality Assurance presented the Corporate Parenting Scorecard report which had been shared as a part of the agenda pack.
2. Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education added the following points:
 - a. The Deputy Prime Minister stated that care leavers were among the group of people that would be allocated priority housing. The cost of this priority housing would be substantial; therefore, it would be important to work with District Council colleagues to look at a new set of regulations for care leavers and social housing.
 - b. There have been a number of foster beds that are ring fenced for UASC arrivals, however, from June 2025 it was expected that less beds would be needed for UASC which would result in more being available for foster children.
 - c. There was a large cohort of UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) care leavers with no official status, meaning they could not access employment, education, or training. The Home Office had shown positive moves to prioritise these care leavers, however, they remained the responsibility of KCC until their status was confirmed.
3. In response to comments and questions asked it was said:
 - a. Members referred to the statistics and asked what KCC planned to do to improve the ones in the red.
 - b. Sarah Hammond noted that court delays, particularly those in Kent and Medway, were often caused lengthy timeframes for children to become looked after. Delays were also exacerbated by parents being allowed to repeatedly challenge assessments.
 - c. In response to a question on care plans, reviews took place twice a year. Gavin Swann added that every case that did not achieve Good or Outstanding would be looked at by a social worker to find improvements.
 - d. Amy Coombs stated that the adoption figures within the report were 12 months old, and the children referred to in this measure had been adopted.
 - e. In response to a suggestion of variable targets, Natalia Merritt agreed that there could be other mechanisms in place to manage cases affected by the court delays, but not necessarily variable targets.
4. RESOLVED that the Panel note the Performance Score Card.

The Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers

(Item 9)

Robin Cahill, Senior Commissioner (Children's), Natalia Merritt Co-Chair Kent Housing Options Subgroup (KHOG) and Brian Horton, Chair Kent Housing Group (KHG)

1. Brian Horton summarised the role of KHG by saying that it worked in partnership across Kent and Medway. In this case with KCC, the districts and boroughs to join up to add value, the Joint Housing Protocol for KCC Care Leavers.
2. Natalia Merritt highlighted that a disproportionate number of care leavers were likely to become homeless. This concern was raised by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in Kent specifically. With the change to KCC's policy for care leavers to be accommodated until the age of 19, now was a suitable time for the protocol to be reviewed.
3. The Care Leaver Panels, improving skills of staff and for foster carers, and preparing people to live independently, were the key processes changed.
4. A leaflet detailing housing options would be produced with the help of individuals with care experience.
5. The government announced that there was a need to sign off decisions for care leavers who were believed to have become homeless intentionally up to the age of 25.
6. In response to comments and questions asked it was said:
 - a. The formation of sub-groups being created from the CPP was discussed.
 - b. It was suggested that the local housing offers in each of the 12 districts were different and potentially confusing. This was an opportunity to achieve greater consistency and clarity for Care Leavers.
 - c. The distribution of Care Leavers was also questioned, it was suggested that if each area took on their even share of care leavers, it would work out that there was an average of three for each location.
 - d. Care Leavers continued to have access to support until they were 25 years old.
7. RESOLVED – to note the report, the proposed Joint Working Protocol for Care Leavers, and that the governance and monitoring arrangements would be considered and brought back to a future meeting of the Panel.

Sufficiency Strategy 2022-2027

(Item 10)

1. Christy Holden, Head of Children's Commissioning and Robin Cahill, Senior Commissioner (Children's) introduced the Sufficiency Strategy.
2. It was that the updated document would be published this year, and a new, more concise document would be presented in 2025.
3. In response to comments and questions asked it was said:
 - a. It was suggested that Kent should not have almost double the foster care needed, this over provision encouraged other authorities to place their children in Kent and this applied additional pressure on services such as the youth justice service. The new sufficiency strategy should ensure that there is the correct level of provision to meet the needs of the Authority.
4. RESOLVED to endorse the Sufficiency Strategy 2022-2027.

Kent CiC in the statutory school years with an EHCP - Access to Education

(Item 11)

1. Tony Doran, Headteacher - Virtual School Kent and Alice Gleave, Interim Assistant Director SEN Operations, introduced the report
2. In response to comments and questions asked it was said:
 - a. Members questioned the VSK tracker and the annual review process. Specifically, the figures in the review showed that the prioritisation of Children in Care (CiC), and that of the children not in care, were very similar. The effectiveness of prioritisation for CiC was therefore questioned. In response, Alice Gleave stated that she had recognised the narrowing of the gap between the two groups, and that phase two of SEN review, taking place this year, would focus on tribunals and annual reviews.
 - b. The number of children waiting for a change of provision was also questioned. In response, Ms Gleave confirmed that Claire Ledger was appointed as the designated social care worker and has been working with those children without placements.
 - c. The reason for reduced timetables was questioned. Robin Cahill, Senior Commissioner (Children's) reduced timetables were used for a number of reasons but should not be used indefinitely as a way to manage challenging behaviour. Reduced timetables should only be used for a fixed period of time to manage a child's time of crisis

- d. A member stated that there was an ongoing issue with SEN officers not communicating well with foster carers. Ms Gleave offered to raise the matter with the appropriate service.
3. RESOLVED that the Panel note the work of the Virtual School and Kent SEN in supporting its young people.

Work programme

(Item 12)

RESOLVED that the work programme was noted.