

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 10th December 2024

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

PRESENT: Shellina Prendergast (Chair), Paul Bartlett (Vice-Chair), David Brazier, Lesley Game, Kelly Grehan, Sarah Hamilton, Sarah Hammond, Dan Bride, Tom Byrne, Tony Doran, Kayleigh Leonard, Caroline Smith and Tracy Scott

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Kevin Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Ingrid Crisan (Director of integrated Children's Services), Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), Roxanne Hills (Designated Nurse for Looked after Children), Hayley Bodiam (Service Manager Quality Assurance and Professional Standards), Georgia Humphreys (Democratic Services Officer) and Ashlie Gash (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Dylan Jeffrey, Rory Love, Stephen Gray and Nancy Sayer who was substituted by Roxanne Hills.

Sarah Hamilton, Lesley Game and Dan Bride were in attendance virtually.

Chairman's Announcements

(Item 2)

1. The Chair reminded the Panel of the Corporate Parenting Christmas campaign asking that those who could contribute and publicise.
2. The Chair shared that she would send message to group leaders to remind Members of the importance of their responsibilities as a Corporate Parent.

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2024

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2024 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

Participation Team Update

(Item 4)

1. Jo Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, Kayleigh Leonard, Participation Support Assistant, and Tom Byrne, Participation Support Officer, presented the report.
2. Following questions and comments from the members of the panel, it was noted that:
 - a. A Member requested suggestions from the team for activities to organize for the children before his visit to the Ashford Children's Home for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young Adults. The team had recommended considering cricket and football, as well as activities that would allow the young people to express themselves.
 - b. Leemya McKeown thanked the team for their support in presenting the QA Unit Practice Framework Roadshow. She mentioned her intention to report on the corporate parenting aspect of the practice framework to the panel at a later date.
 - c. Sarah Hammond praised the high quality of the social media accounts and requested the panel to share the content on their own accounts. Find the social accounts on X: @VirtSchl_Kent and Instagram: @participation_team.
 - d. The Chair highlighted the eagerness of young people to attend future panel meetings. This was agreed by the panel.
3. RESOLVED that the update be noted.

Challenge Cards Update

(Item 5)

1. Jo Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, introduced the update, providing an overview of the content.
2. KCC had the opportunity to review young people's opportunities to be involved in the recruitment and selection process of staff, to ensure that it is inclusive and accessible.
3. There was a desire to widen the training offer that Officers within the team deliver to young people. Additionally, there was work done with Practice Development to produce guidance to recruitment managers as to how to involve young people positively.
4. Hayley Bodiam, Service Manager Quality Assurance and Professional Standards, added that the service had used feedback from children and young people to inform future practices.
5. In response to comments and questions it was said:

- a. A Member questioned the scope for utilizing technology for the interviews to help to include young people. Jo Carpenter added that the children and young people had experience with and were comfortable with online processes. However, for some posts in person interviews were needed.
6. RESOLVED that the Panel notes the challenge card progress to date and to support the actions being taken to meet the challenges.

Verbal Update by the Cabinet Member

(Item 6)

1. Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, presented the update
2. The Chair requested that a copy of the Policy Statement regarding Provision for Independent Providers be shared with the minutes.
3. A Member inquired about the children's routines and support in the centre. Sarah Hammond invited Members to visit the centres, explaining there are two types: registered children's homes for under 16s and registered supported accommodation for 16 and 17-year-olds. These centres served as temporary homes, with most children staying only two to three days before moving to permanent placements. The transfer wait times had significantly decreased. Besides leisure activities, the children had opportunities to learn English, socialize, and familiarize themselves with UK customs. Citizenship work includes focusing on the role of women in UK culture and equal opportunities. It was also noted that the young people had their own rooms and bathrooms.
4. A Members highlighted a song recorded by 'Ashford Sings!' a group led by two foster carers. The song aimed to promote foster care and assist in recruiting more foster carers. A link to this song had been shared with these minutes.
5. RESOLVED that the update was noted.

Virtual School Kent Head Teacher 6 monthly update

(Item 7)

1. Tony Doran, Headteacher of Virtual School Kent, presented the report to the panel.
2. Caroline Smith questioned whether the low number of young people entering university was due to unaccompanied young people not obtaining legal status

in time to transition to care leavers at university age. Tony Doran explained that several factors contribute to this issue. Firstly, few young people took Level 3 courses at seventeen or eighteen, opting to take them later. Secondly, tuition fees deterred young people due to concerns about accumulating debt. Additionally, alternative opportunities, such as degree-level apprenticeships, also played a role.

3. Caroline Smith questioned whether the support offered was sufficient, highlighting available bursaries and the ability to connect with universities and apply for funding. Tony Doran agreed that awareness was crucial. He mentioned a specialist team within the Care Legal Service that works closely with the sixteen-plus team. Additionally, there was a dedicated website for sixteen and seventeen-year-olds and a Care Leaver app was in development.
4. A Member noted the absence of school exclusions but questioned the number of pupils placed in Managed Moves. Tony Doran clarified that children in care were not subject to the Managed Moves protocol, which was for hard-to-place pupils. He emphasized that there were coordinated exit opportunities to secure appropriate provisions for young people instead of permanent exclusion.
5. The Chair expressed concerns about the conflicting areas in the report regarding Key Stage Four and the low number of young people achieving five GCSEs. Tony Doran stated that his team works closely with the Education Doctorate to address this issue. Sarah Hammond added that, despite facing barriers to learning, these children do not have learning disabilities and should be able to achieve five GCSEs. She noted that if the special schools' offerings were effective, the children would spend less time in special schools and achieve according to their cognitive abilities.
6. RESOLVED that the work update was noted.

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2024

(Item 8)

1. Caroline Smith, Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting, introduced the report and gave an overview of the main points within it.
2. It was noted that a significant challenge for the services in 2024 was the increase in unaccompanied children, there was work being done to adapt the service as the reception centres opened to ensure there were enough provisions.

3. It was a priority to ensure that the health, housing and education departments had a local offer for Kent care leavers, following the publication of the Keeping Children Safe and Helping Families Thrive document.
4. Caroline Smith reiterated the desire for Members to help to get the Corporate Parent Christmas Campaign to the target of £25,000.
5. Panel Members and Officers had joined the Chair in congratulating to Nathan Moody, a care leaver who recently won Apprentice of the Year.
6. RESOLVED that the Panel to note and comment the report and to note Members responsibility as Corporate Parents.

Looked after Children's Integrated Care Board (IBC) Annual Report

(Item 9)

1. Roxanne Hills, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, introduced the report and gave an overview of the main points within it.
2. The commissioning group's goals for 2025 included free prescription offers for care leavers who were otherwise exempt and working on and supporting a primary care provision around the new accommodation sites for the UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) population.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. A Member questioned how far geographically out of Kent were those young people who could not be placed in Kent. Sarah Hammond shared that the young people could be placed at a significant distance if there were no available placements in Kent.
 - b. The challenge of Kent was that due to system in place, local authorities had the opportunity to bid for beds in Kent. Therefore, in some cases so don't have local beds for Kent, there can be specialists needs to place children in certain areas. Majority of looked after children are in Kent.
 - c. Panel Members discussed the opportunity to lobby local MPs to exemplify the struggle Kent faces in not being able to place their own young people within the county.
 - d. Tony Doran added that the Virtual School had a responsibility to Kent students regardless of where they were placed. Noting that 20% of Kent children and young people were placed outside of Kent, 50% of those not placed in Kent were placed in Medway.

Work programme

(Item 10)

RESOLVED that the work programme was noted.