

## **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL– 18 February 2025**

### **MINUTES of the meeting held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.**

PRESENT: Shellina Prendergast (Chair), Paul Bartlett (Vice-Chair), Gary Cooke, Dylan Jeffrey, Rory Love, David Beaney, Sarah Hamilton, Sarah Hammond, Kelly Grehan, Chris Passmore, Tracy Scott, Nancy Sayer and Brian Horton.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Sarah Hammond (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education), Caroline Smith (Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting), Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), Alice Gleave (Interim Assistant Director for SEND Operations), Christy Holden (Assistant Director for CYPE Commissioning), Kayleigh Leonard (Participation Support Assistant), Leemya McKeown (Assistant Director, Safeguarding Professional Standards and Quality Assurance), Sarah Newman (Participation Support Officer) and Georgia Humphreys (Democratic Services Officer).

#### **Apologies and substitutes**

Apologies were received from Ms Crisan and Mrs Game.

Ms Hamilton and Mr Beaney were in attendance virtually.

#### **Chair's Announcements**

1. The Chair invited Panel Members and the young people present to introduce themselves.
2. The Chair thanked the young people and Officers for attending the meeting.

#### **Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024**

1. It was highlighted that the title of Item 9 should have been 'Looked after Children's Integrated Care Board Annual Report'.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above correction being made, the minutes be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

#### **Children & Young People's Views about Corporate Parenting Responsibilities**

*Ms Carpenter, Ms Leonard, Ms Newman and a group of young people were present for this item.*

1. Ms Newman asked the young people 'What have your Corporate Parents done for you?'
  - a. In response it was said:
    - i. Young people had received both mental and physical support for their educational studies.
    - ii. It was felt that the voices of the young people were listened to and taken into consideration.
    - iii. Many young people noted feeling safe and cared for.
  
2. Ms Newman asked the young people 'What areas could be improved? What could your Corporate Parents prioritise?'
  - a. In response it was said:
    - i. Further access to education as well as physical and mental health services.
    - ii. Further clarity of housing and further education opportunities.
    - iii. A slower initial transition into care, more understanding of children's emotional wellbeing.
    - iv. Further training on identity and culture for staff.
    - v. Ensuring social workers make regular visits to the young people they look after.
    - vi. Further transparency for a young person as to why they had entered into the care system.
  
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. The Chair shared that she felt encouraged by the positivity expressed by the young people and expressed the pride she felt in being a Corporate Parent.
  - b. A Member recommended that the young people contact their local councillor for more information about housing opportunities.
  - c. A Member explained that schools needed to be trauma informed to be able to properly care for looked after children. Additionally, more information needed to be available for young adults.
  - d. Ms Hammond agreed that more needed to be done to ensure young people coming out of care had more information available to them, noting that it was a complicated situation due to the 1500 children placed in Kent from other local authorities.
  - e. It was suggested that incorporating the concept of inclusion and equality for all children into PSHE lessons in schools or teacher training could have a positive effect. Ms Nelson shared that the apprentice team met with 2<sup>nd</sup> year primary school students, there was a desire to

extend this into secondary schools. Ms Carpenter added that work was done in universities to train prospective teachers around this subject, the team was looking into delivering sessions.

- f. Mr Love, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, shared that the conversation with the young people would shape future conversations had with head teachers and principals.

4. The young people were invited to ask the Panel questions:

- a. Why do you do this job and what difference would you like to make?
  - i. Some Members of the Panel shared personal stories of what led them to want to be a Corporate Parent.
  - ii. The Chair shared that all Members cared about their duties as Corporate Parents and wanted to improve lives.
  
- b. How are we ensuring all members are keeping up their corporate parenting duties?
  - i. Mrs Chandler explained that all employees of KCC understood their responsibilities and participated in different ways, however there was always an effort to improve. The Kent Practice framework had a requirement for organisations to participate in this, ensuring there was an understanding of what being a Corporate Parent meant.
  - ii. A Member shared that there was an expectation for the legislation behind the Kent Practice Framework to be expanded to NHS staff. There was a desire to improve the health services for young people in care services and map out what was needed for their health, ensuring the transition process into adult services was smooth.
  - iii. Ms Carpenter explained that the inconsistency of social workers was a nationwide issue, there was a desire to change the narrative to ensure social workers took the time to communicate with young people.

5. The Chair expressed the Panels thanks to the young people and invited them to come back to meetings of the Panel at later dates.

### **VSK Participation Team Calendar of Events 2025**

*Ms Joanne Carpenter, Ms Kayleigh Leonard and a group of young people were present for this item.*

- 1. Ms Carpenter gave an overview of the report and highlighted key dates for Panel Members to attend. Focus groups had been conducted, a main takeaway from this was that most young people found turning 18 years old a

period of anxiety rather than a celebration. Ms Leonard added that virtual activities held since December had received positive feedback.

2. Young People came together to write a letter to the Minister for Children and Families to explain what they believed she should prioritise within her role.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. The Chair commended the amount of work done by the team and the young people.
  - b. A Member questioned the scope to explore connections to other individuals through care experience to speak at events. Ms Carpenter shared that broadcaster Ashley John Baptise was due to speak at the Visual School Kent Conference on 12th March 2025.
  - c. A Member expressed concern at the thought that young people in care dread turning 18. Ms Carpenter shared that there was a lot that could be done. Ms McKeown added that within the Children's Wellbeing Bill, councils were obliged to take more responsibility for young people. Ms McKeown's team aimed to evaluate outcomes to see what more can be done, there was an intention to do enquiries within children's homes and centres to ensure procedures were followed.
  - d. Ms Smith shared that there were advisors available to get young people a pathway plan, which would ensure they were aware of offers available to them. Additionally, a housing pathway was offered, there were local offers for school bursaries and driving lessons. Ms Smith assured the young people that she would investigate into the delay in them being aware of these offers, as there was a good support network and a range of offers in place for young people.
  - e. A Member shared the idea of making films to use for training purposes to ensure that all staff would be aware of what is expected of them.
  - f. A Member asked the response from the Chancellor to the young people be shared with the Panel.
  - g. Mrs Chandler shared that it was positive to hear what was working well and what was not. Additionally, explaining that she would use what was said to inform her work, adding that she wanted to support the young people's aspirations.

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

1. Mrs Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, gave a verbal update on the following:
  - a. The Kent Practice Framework had been given KSCMP executive approval. The multiagency agreement was a key development for the design phase of reforming children's services. The framework offered the opportunity for families to receive consistent practice from across the multiagency.

- b. The LADO and Education Safeguarding Advisory Service (LESAS) absorbed the Sector Led Improvement Programme (SLIP). This provided an opportunity for KCC to work closely alongside the Department of Education (DfE) and other Local Authorities to help design the future of children's services.
  - c. Kent Youth County Council took part in the launch of 'Don't Disrespect', which was a partnership campaign between Kent County Council, Kent Police and the Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit to combat street harassment and violence towards women and girls. Mrs Chandler shared that the 'Don't Disrespect' film and campaign including posters and social media copy information were available at: [www.dontdisrespect.uk](http://www.dontdisrespect.uk).
  - d. Virtual School Kent had received further accreditation for the Nurture Programme. Mr Doran, the Headteacher of Virtual School Kent had been asked to be part of an All Party Parliamentary Group on Inclusion and Relational Approaches in Education.
  - e. Mrs Chandler attended the CYPE Conference Day which focused on neurodiversity. The conference provided valuable insights on the latest research from the Children's Commissioner, the work of North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT), the neuroscience of learning and the biology of stress and the Dynamic Support Service.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
- a. The Chair shared that she had watched the 'Don't Disrespect' film and found the message behind it particularly powerful. When asked what work was going on within schools about this, Mrs Chandler shared that there was a programme within schools and a social media campaign on this topic. Additionally, explaining that she would like the LADO Education Safeguarding Advisory Service (LESAS) gave young people the opportunity to share any concerns or incidents, there was a desire for this service to reach out to more young people to ensure that they were aware of the work it does.

### **The Kent Practice Framework**

- 1. Ms McKeown, Assistant Director, Professional Standards & Quality Assurance, CYPE, presented on Kent's Practice Framework.
- 2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. The Chair asked that the Panel be kept informed on the progress of the Children and Wellbeing Bill. Ms McKeown shared that she would come back to the Panel to provide evaluations on the progress and explanations of how the bill would be implemented.
  - b. Ms Carpenter suggested that apprentices within the Children's Social Work Services attended the Kent Safeguarding Children's Multi Agency Partnership and any training on the Kent Practice Framework. Ms

McKeown explained that there was a working group in place see how the framework operates, which was a great opportunity to involve Ms Carpenter's team.

## **Kinship Service**

1. Ms Smith, Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting, explained that a full report was to come to the Panel in July to report on the first year of work. Since the launch of the service, in April 2024, the number of children in care was down by 4% (not including unaccompanied minors). The number of special guardians that were supported by the service had increased by 61%. Additionally, there were support groups running in eight areas within Kent. There was an increase in applications to the Adoptions and Special Guardianship Support Fund by 195%, which utilised funding of £56,000 to directly support children and their kinship family. 279 viability assessments had been undertaken, 89 special guardianship assessment and 52 kinship, foster carer assessments.
  2. In the future the plan was to formalise local offers of kinship. A number of informational leaflets had been developed for families, the team were using family conferences to inform families and children's local network of the options available for kinship care at the earliest stage, to avoid the need for formal foster care placements. There had been positive work done, the next stage was to align with government expectation, such as transparency of payments kinship parents could receive.
1. In response to comments and questions it was said:
    - a. A Member questioned what support was currently being offered within the kinship service. Ms Smith explained that the kinship service had two elements to it, the first being an early assessment stage within this there was a team that solely focused on support. Additionally, there were support groups, therapists, a governmental fund that the service could access for special guardians and adopters and training for special guardians available. Ms Smith explained that providing support from the beginning was important, there needed to be clear of offer of support. Ms McKeown added that there were a number of pilots available to provide financial support to kinship careers. Additionally, recognising there was a need to create a more consistent kinship offer across the country.

## **Work programme**

1. The Chair noted the following for future meetings:
  - a. An item on SEND children in care with EHCP's.
  - b. An update on the progress of the Children and Wellbeing Bill.