

## **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 29 July 2025**

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

**PRESENT:** Martin Brice, Dan Bride, Paul Chamberlain, Stephen Gray, Sarah Hammond, Stuart Jeffery, Isabella Kemp, Adrian Kibble, Kayleigh Leonard, Connie Nolan, Peter Osborne, Amelia Randall, Tracy Scott, Colin Sefton, Caroline Smith and Pamela Williams

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), Connor Cruickshank (Apprentice Participation Worker), Alice Gleave (Interim Assistant Director for SEND Operations), Hayley Bodiam (Service Manager), Kevin Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Maria Cordrey (Head of Fostering Service), Mark Vening (Fostering Service Manager), Sarah Alizadeh (QA Team Manager), Sarah Howell (Deputy Headteacher for North and West Kent), Marian Smith (Deputy Headteacher for North and West Kent), Roxanne Hills (Designated Nurse for Looked after Children) and Georgia Humphreys (Democratic Services Officer)

#### **Election of Chair**

1. Mrs Williams was nominated by the Executive to be the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
2. The Panel agreed the nomination and Mrs Williams was declared as Chair of the Panel.
3. **RESOLVED** that Mrs Williams was elected as the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

#### **Election of Vice-Chair**

1. Ms Kemp proposed, and Mr Osborne seconded that Ms Randall be elected as Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
2. As there were no further nominations, the Chair declared Ms Randall as Vice-Chair of the Panel.
3. **RESOLVED** that Ms Randall be elected Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

#### **Apologies and Substitutes**

Apologies had been received from Mrs Russell, Mrs Palmer, Mr Heaver for whom Mr Jeffery was present as substitute and Ms Sayer for whom Ms Hills was present as substitute.

Mr Sefton and Mr Brice were in attendance virtually.

### **Chair's Announcements**

1. The Chair read out a verbal update from the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, which gave an overview of the work herself and her Deputy Cabinet Member had undertaken since their appointment.
2. The Chair advised the Panel that a minute silence would be taken at 3p.m. to mark the one year anniversary of the Southport tragedy.
3. The Chair invited members of the Panel and officers to introduce themselves.

### **Minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2025**

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

### **Participation Team update**

1. Ms Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, CYPE, and her team introduced the report and gave an overview of its content. The team highlighted the events held throughout the last period and collaboration between KCC Councillors and Officers and the Participation Team.
2. Ms Carpenter shared a video which gave an overview of the work of the Participation Team. Additionally, sharing a piece of artwork with the Panel which provided an insight into the thoughts and feeling of children in care.
3. Members complimented the work of the Participation Team and the piece of artwork that was shown.
4. Ms Hammond commended the number of Members present at the meeting, emphasising the importance of a 'one voice' focus on the wellbeing of young people and the duty for looked after children.
5. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. When asked if issues identified in the care system were consistent across the country. Ms Carpenter responded that there has been work done with other counties and it seemed that concerns and worries were similar.
  - b. A Member emphasised the importance of meeting the young people and understanding the importance that comes with being a Corporate Parent. Adding that the more learnt about the young people, the more pride and responsibility grew.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the Participation Team update.

### **Challenge Cards update**

1. Ms Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, CYPE, and her team introduced the report and gave an overview of its content.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the Challenge Cards progress to date.

### **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service Annual Report**

1. Ms Bodiam, Service Manager, introduced the report and gave an overview of its content. Ms Bodiam highlighted the changes that had taken place such as the introduction of additional IRO to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) due to the need to support the intake. Additionally, the Panel was given an overview of the activity from the previous year and a summary of goals for the following year.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. Ms Bodiam shared that a reason for instability in placements was hard to pin down, there was a staged review taking place into this. It was important to take into consideration the age of those young people concerned, during difficult developmental stages some factors leading to instability were out of the control of the service.
  - b. Ms Hammond added that the low levels of young children staying in foster placements for two years or more was a positive thing as they would have either been returned to family or moved to an adoptive placement.
  - c. Ms Bodiam was to come back to the Panel with data regarding the placements of young people aged over 16.
  - d. In reference to placement stability, Mr Kasaven explained that the system was built so babies had planned moves for stability. Additionally, sharing that UASC had multiple unit moves, this was something that the Local Authority had no control over.
  - e. A Member emphasised the importance of improving transitions for young people leaving care.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the IRO Annual Report and its findings.

### **Kent Fostering Service Annual Report**

1. Ms Smith, Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting, introduced the report and gave an overview of its content.
2. Ms Cordrey, Head of Fostering Service, gave an overview of the work undertaken by Kent's Fostering Service, highlighting that there were some movements within the fostering service transferring from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) to in-house fostering. Additionally, asking Members to help raise the profile of Kent fostering and fostering for the Local Authority.
3. The Panel was shown a video which highlighted the work of the Mockingbird Programme.

Mr Vening, Head of Kinship Fostering, provided an overview of the work carried out by Kent's Fostering Service. He explained that viability assessments were being undertaken to ensure that, wherever possible, children could be cared for within a kinship arrangement. Mr Vening also noted collaborative efforts with Legal Services and Children's Teams to address variations in practice and promote consistency across the service. He further reported that the service had received positive feedback regarding its performance and impact.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the information contained within the Kent Fostering Annual Report, Kinship Service Annual Report and Business Plan for 2025/2026.

### **Virtual School Kent Head Teacher Annual Report**

1. Ms Howell, Deputy Headteacher for North and West Kent, introduced the report and gave an overview of its content.

Ms Smith, Deputy Headteacher for North and West Kent, highlighted that not all children remain engaged with education and training. She noted a gap in the availability of appropriate courses tailored to individual needs. The service is committed to supporting young people in identifying and pursuing pathways aligned with their career aspirations. Ms Smith also reported that the service conducted approximately 1,800 Personal Education Plans (PEPs), three times per year. Last year, the scope of support was expanded to include children in early years settings from the age of two.

2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. When asked why the KPI's were going in the right direction but the academic results were not. Ms Hammond responded that the service was looking to track the same young people long term in order to spot when the expectations dip, adding that some factors that affect results were out of the control of the service.

- b. The service had prevented eleven permanent exclusions before December 2024. Pupil Premium funding was used to support students and facilitate alternative arrangements. There was effort put into relationships with school leaders, focusing on understanding behaviour rather than punishing students.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the impact of the Virtual School in relation to its performance and endorse its priorities for 2023-24.

### **Update on Children in Care in Oasis Reform School**

1. Mr Kasaven, Director for Children's Countywide Services, provided the Panel with a verbal update on children in care in the Oasis Reform School.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the verbal update.

### **Missing Episodes – Performance Report**

1. Ms Bride, Assistant Director, Head of Youth Justice, Adolescent Social Work, Early Help and Response Teams, & Family Hubs, introduced the report and gave an overview of its content. Ms Bride provided the Panel with an overview of the service's approach to data collection and explained how this information was utilised to gain insights into the reasons individuals go missing.
2. Ms Hammond explained that the service took every missing episode seriously, regardless of how short it was. Even brief absences carried the risk of a child being drawn into gang activity. There was a conscious effort to understand where the child had been and the circumstances that led to their disappearance. Whilst most common reasons for missing episodes were seeing friends and partners, it was important to remain alert to the underlying issues and use the appropriate tools to uncover the real reasons behind each episode.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
  - a. The data indicated a relatively balanced distribution between girls and boys reported missing, Early Help figures showed that 59% of those missing were girls. Age range was identified as a potentially significant factor influencing these trends, and it was suggested that this variable be incorporated into future reporting for deeper analysis.
  - b. When asked if the service was notified when schools marked young people as missing, Ms Bride explained that schools were responsible for following up if a child left their site, including following up with family. Schools and family were expected to report children to Police, not to the Local Authority, as missing, if necessary. KCC's missing

children processes started when the police informed them of the child being missing.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted Kent's current position for Children in Care who have missing episodes, and Kent's practice response.