

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 10 December 2019.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mr R Barton, Ms J Bayford, Mr D L Brazier (Substitute for Mrs S Prendergast), Mr T Byrne, Mrs T Dean, MBE (Substitute for Ida Linfield), Mr T Doran, Ms S Dunstan, Mr S Gray, Ms S Hamilton, Mrs S Hammond, Ms N Sayer, Mrs T C Scott and Ms C Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs S Chandler, Dr S Leather and Mr A M Ridgers

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Dunkley CBE (Corporate Director for Children Young People and Education), Ms J Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager, Virtual School Kent) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Membership

(Item 1)

1. The Panel noted that Michael Northey and Reece Graves had left the Panel and that Tracy Scott and Rob Barton had joined. Tracy had filled one of the foster carer places and Rob had taken Reece's place as an Apprentice Participation Worker with Virtual School Kent.

2. Apologies and substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies for absence had been received from Dan Bride, John Burden, Lesley Game, Andy Heather, Ida Linfield, Geoff Lymer, Shellina Prendergast and Sara Vaux.

David Brazier was present as a substitute for Shellina Prendergast and Trudy Dean as a substitute for Ida Linfield.

3. Chairman's Announcements

(Item 3)

1. The Chairman welcomed Rob and Tracy to their first meeting as Panel members and thanked Reece for his excellent work with the Children in Care Councils.

2. As part of her aim to promote the corporate parenting role during her year as Chairman of the Council, Mrs Allen had been very pleased to come across Fairshare, an organisation which collects surplus food and directs it to those who could use it. Stephen Gray, Chief Executive Officer, Young Lives Foundation, told the Panel that Fairshare provided hampers and welcome packs of cupboard essentials and basic groceries to care leavers setting up home independently for the first time. Ms Smith

added that Fairshare also offered apprenticeships for young people in care and leaving care, to help them get a start in the hospitality and catering industries.

3. As last year, a Christmas dinner would be arranged on 19 December for care leavers who might otherwise be on their own at Christmas. Surplus goods from the County Council's public relations team, including fleeces and other items featuring a 'Kent' logo, had been sold to raise money to put towards the costs of the dinner, raising over £600.

4. Mrs Allen had recently hosted at County Hall an 8-year-old girl in foster care who had designed the County Council's Christmas card for 2019. It had been good to see her enjoyment of the visit and her pride in her design winning the competition.

5. The Corporate Parenting Giving Tree at Sessions House had received a good initial donation of toiletries sets and chocolate selection boxes and it was hoped that enough parcels would be collected for every young man or woman leaving care to have a parcel to open at Christmas. It was hoped that all Members would feel able to contribute something suitable to boost the total, and it was agreed that *all Members be contacted by the Democratic Services Officer in advance of the next full Council meeting on 17 December so they would have time to organise and bring something.*

4. Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 17 September 2019

(Item 4)

It was RESOLVED that these are correctly recorded, and they be signed by the Chairman. There were two matters arising under Minute 188:

- a) Nancy Sayer, Designated Consultant Nurse for Looked After Children, advised the Panel that the **recruitment of deputy designated nurses** for Looked After Children was continuing, with two now having been appointed and another due to be appointed soon. The third round of recruitment had unfortunately not been successful so would be repeated. This problem arose from the very specific nature of the role and the importance of finding people who were completely right for it. In addition, it was hoped that designated doctors could be recruited to each of three posts, including doctors able to cover a range of specialisms. Dr Sue Leather had been recruited to the first of these three posts in July 2019; and
- b) further to the Panel's wish at its September meeting to meet a **designated doctor, Dr Sue Leather** was in attendance and told the Panel briefly about her role and experience of working as a community paediatrician for 28 years, then in an advocacy and advice role to clinical commissioning groups, particularly relating to neurodevelopmental services for children. She had also trained staff and service managers on the needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and children preparing for adoption and had a quality assurance role for these services.

Dr Leather was thanked for taking the time to attend and it was suggested that she also be invited to attend meetings of the Children in Care Councils to talk about her role.

5. Motion to exclude the press and public for exempt business

It was RESOLVED that, under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

EXEMPT ITEM

(open access to minutes)

6. Verbal Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)

(Item 5)

1. The Virtual School Kent (VSK) team started their update by showing a film, 'My Kent, My Identity', in which UASC and young people in care from black and minority ethnic backgrounds talked about their experiences of living in Kent and what it meant to them. They spoke about how different cultures were celebrated at their schools and youth clubs and how they thought young people of different races and cultures could spend more time together and understand better each other's cultures, for example, by playing sports together and via social activities. They also set out what they would tell a younger person experiencing the same things they had dealt with. The film had a positive message of mutual support, understanding and caring, and was much welcomed.

2. The Panel discussed how the film could be used to raise awareness of and start conversations about cultural diversity. Members were mindful, however, that the film featured young people whose identities and privacy would need be protected, and as such could not be shown to a public audience.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

(meeting re-opens to the press and public)

7. Verbal update by Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)

(Item 5)

1. Sophia Dunstan, Participation Support Assistant, and Tom Byrne and Rob Barton, Apprentice Participation Workers, Virtual School Kent, continued their update on the work of the OCYPC, the Super Council and Young Adult Council and set out forthcoming participation events. *The text of this update would be added to these minutes.*

2. Julianne Bayford, foster carer and Chairman of the Kent Foster Care Association, gave some feedback on the Teen Conference she had attended in October. This had been an excellent event which had generated a good buzz. Foster carers who had attended the conference were keen that social workers be made fully aware of the messages arising there, including the need to look at what could be done to improve the experiences of young people in care. In response to a question about what careers advice was made available to young people in care, Ms Dunstan said that nothing arose about that at the conference but explained that her social worker had given her an application form for an apprenticeship with the VSK. Young people in care applying for such posts would always be considered favourably but they would first need to know that it was possible to apply for such a thing. Tony Doran, Head Teacher, VSK, advised that every school had a duty to provide individual careers advice and guidance to every student, and every student had to be offered a suitable placement in the September after they had left school.

3. It was RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted, with thanks.

8. Challenge Card update

(Item 6)

1. Jo Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, VSK, and Caroline Smith, Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting, introduced the report and set out a new challenge, 'Mind Your Language', and updated the Panel on progress made on the Council Tax exemption for care leavers.

2. **Mind Your Language** sought to address the vocabulary, both spoken and written, used by professionals when talking to and about children and young people in care, to make sure that both were as child friendly as possible. OCYPC members had prepared an initial list of words and phrases for which they suggested more child-friendly alternatives.

3. Panel members commented that this list could be useful for elected County Council Members, foster carers and NHS staff and asked that it be sent round to all Panel members, who could then share it with their respective colleagues. It was suggested also that the fortnightly newsletter from the Corporate Director could include a 'dictionary corner', featuring one or two phrases each time, to remind officers and Members and reinforce the campaign as an ongoing project.

4. Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, added that Ofsted also used some of the jargon which was being targeted in the challenge, and suggested that the subject be raised at the next annual conversation with Ofsted in March 2020 with the tag line 'we are changing our language, you could change yours'.

5. **Council Tax exemption for care leavers** had been a challenge card in March 2019 and work had been ongoing since to look into the feasibility and costs to the County Council of establishing this as policy. The proposed exemption and all the supporting and financial information would be presented to and discussed by the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on 10 January 2020, prior to a key decision being taken by the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services under the County Council's decision-making process. Feedback on the discussion at the Cabinet Committee would be reported to the Panel on 18 February.

6. The current proposed scheme would cover care leavers up to the age of 21, as many of this age group would still be studying and seeking work. Older young people were more likely to be settled in work and hence more able to pay their own Council Tax. To extend the scheme to all care leavers up to the age of 25 would have an enormous financial impact on the County Council; to support each of the young people (approximately 200) between 21 and 25 with whom the Council was currently in touch would involve allocating each a personal advisor, and a higher age limit might attract more young people to delay leaving, or come back into, the service to benefit from the exemption.

7. It was RESOLVED that:-

- a) progress made to date on the exemption from Council Tax for care leavers up to 21 be welcomed; and

- b) the new 'Mind Your Language' challenge be accepted and the details of it be sent to all Panel members and elected County Council Members so it could be shared further among foster carer and NHS colleagues.

9. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member

(Item 7)

1. Mrs Chandler, **Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services**, paid tribute to the previous Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, Roger Gough, and the huge workload he had managed during his time in office, which had since been divided between two Cabinet portfolios, her own and that of Richard Long, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills. She then gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

Kent Association of Head Teachers Conference 21 November – this had been an excellent event at which she had felt very proud of the VSK Apprentices who had attended and addressed the conference. The conference had used the 'balloon challenge' (which had previously been used with the Panel at the Takeover Day in May 2019), in which a number of balloons, each featuring a subject with which vulnerable learners like children in care had to contend – for example, meeting a new social worker, coping with a new foster sibling, contact with their birth family – were thrown to a volunteer one at a time, with the aim of demonstrating how difficult it was for one person to juggle all the balloons and keep them all in the air at the same time, and the importance of having someone to help them to manage the large number of competing challenges.

Members for Children's Services in the South East – Political Leaders and Directors working in Children Services in the South East had recently met. They had touched on the same issue of language and the use of jargon addressed in the 'Mind Your Language' challenge and had raised the importance of corporate parents challenging what their authority did to help young people prepare for independent adult life. Participants had agreed on the need for elected Members to be kept in touch with language currently in use. She suggested that the initial list of words and phrases be sent to all elected County Council Members in advance of the County Council meeting on 17 December, as well as being tabled there, to raise awareness of the campaign.

2. The Chairman thanked Mrs Chandler for her first update as the new Cabinet Member and emphasised that the relationship between the serving Cabinet Member and the Children in Care Councils had always been one of open communication and mutual support, which Mrs Chandler welcomed.

3. It was RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted, with thanks.

10. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

(Item 8)

1. Ms Smith introduced the report. Asked about the apparent contradiction between two graphs in the scorecard, one showing children in care (CIC) numbers decreasing over the last five years and the other showing the number of CIC placed by other local authorities increasing over the same period, Sarah Hammond, Director, Integrated Children's Services (Social Work Lead), explained that the decreasing

figure was of Kent citizen CIC only. The total number of CIC in Kent at any one time would be a total of three cohorts - the number of citizen CIC, the number of UASC and the number of CIC placed by other local authorities. Asked why this total was not reported in the scorecard, Ms Hammond explained that CIC placed by other local authorities were not counted in Kent's performance figures, which were measured using the national key performance indicators. Kent had the highest rate of CIC placed by other local authorities in the UK, which was an ongoing challenge. Ms Sayer added that, although the County Council did not have corporate parenting responsibility for CIC placed by other local authorities, the NHS had a duty to provide health services to *all* CIC in Kent, including UASC and those placed by other local authorities, and this exerted much pressure on NHS budgets, which were already very stretched, particularly in East Kent. The costs of providing some services could be reclaimed later from the clinical commissioning group but the demand for those services needed first to be met.

2. It was RESOLVED that the information and performance data set out in the scorecard and given in response to questions be noted, with thanks.

11. The Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019

(Item 9)

1. Ms Smith introduced the report, which was the second to be produced and which would be considered also by the full County Council on 17 December, to raise the profile of the corporate parenting role shared by all elected Members. Ms Smith and Ms Hammond responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) asked about the progress of foster carer recruitment advertising, Ms Smith explained that an advert had been produced by young people and used by SkyTV and on social media in September and October 2019. This had been targeted at households which were most likely to have capacity to accommodate an extra child and had been well received. A TV advert had also been recorded, which had had a cost similar to that of the radio adverts recorded previously. It would be a little while before the success of these could be identified, hopefully in an increase in the number of foster carers being recruited;
- b) the report was welcomed as being clear and easy to read as an introduction and scene-setter to the corporate parenting role and the work of the directorate;
- c) asked how the number of 'Sense of Belonging' referrals in Kent compared to the national figure, and if it would be possible to report the figure yearly so an ongoing comparison could be made, Ms Hammond and Ms Smith explained that the Sense of Belonging service was unique to Kent so was difficult to compare with the service at any other local authority as none had a comparative model. Kent had recently established a placement stability team so had had an extra resource in 2019 to address placement stability. Kent had a target to keep the number of children in care (CIC) having more than three placements in a 12-month period to less than 10%, and was currently achieving 9.8%, compared to a national indicator of 12-14%;

- d) asked how the number of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Kent compared to the national figure, Ms Smith explained that Kent performed better than the national average and had maintained that position for some time;
- e) a view was expressed that the target for achievement levels for CIC should be inspirational but should not be different from those set for their peers, simply because of their care status, and a question asked about why children from economically disadvantaged homes did not also have a special target set for them. Mr Doran agreed that targets should be aspirational but explained that the two cohorts of students, in care and not in care, faced different challenges. National key performance indicators relating to narrowing the achievement gap measured the performance of CIC to that of all other learners. Other children who could be considered to be disadvantaged educationally, for example, children claiming free school meals, did not face the same challenges as CIC. For example, many CIC came into care shortly before their vital GCSE year and had their schooling disrupted by moves between placements. The figures for the number of children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) illustrated the difference; 30% of CIC had SEND, compared to only 1% of those not in care; and
- f) Ms Bayford reminded the Panel that the dragon boat race which had been so successful in 2019 would be repeated in 2020.
2. It was RESOLVED that the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019 be welcomed and commended, and the responsibilities of the County Council as corporate parents be noted.

12. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and the impact of leaving the European Union

(Item 10)

1. Penny Ademuyiwa, Assistant Director, Front Door, introduced the report and advised the Panel that, as of 3 December 2019, the number of UASC in Kent under the aged of 18 was 411. Of these, 26 had arrived during November, and 292 had arrived so far in 2019. There were many reasons why UASC would continue to come to Kent after Britain had left the European Union, and pressure for places needed to be compared to the capacity of the accommodation and services available. Taking the 0.7% of the population which was agreed under the National Transfer Scheme as any one local authority's 'fair share' of UASC under 18, Kent's share would be 231 young people, yet Kent currently had 411, 70 of whom were accommodated at the Millbank centre. Another local authority where UASC tended to arrive, Portsmouth, currently had only 118.
2. Asked about the age profile of Kent's UASC, Ms Hammond advised that:
- 75% of the cohort were boys and young men aged 16–17
 - 23% were aged under 16
 - only 3-5% of the total cohort were girls and young women
3. Mr Dunkley pointed out that the number of UASC arriving in Kent had peaked at each of the earlier proposed deadlines for leaving the European Union. He advised

the Panel that Kent would be approaching other local authorities in the South East to ask them to take on a larger share of the UASC currently in Kent.

4. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to questions, ie:-
 - a) the uncertainty that exists regarding the eventual impact of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union on all services and future rates of UASC arriving in Kent;
 - b) that an influx of arrivals, for any reason, will impact upon Kent County Council's ability to meet its corporate parenting responsibilities for both UASC and citizen children placed with them; and
 - c) that Kent County Council's Service for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (SUASC) is developing its staffing establishment and processes to ensure it is as prepared as possible for such an event,
be noted.