

## **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 26 July 2023**

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

PRESENT: Dirk Ross (Chair), Alister Brady, Dan Bride, Becki Bruneau, Tom Byrne, Lesley Game, Stephen Gray, Sarah Hamilton, Dylan Jeffrey, Kayleigh Leonard, Rory Love, Nancy Sayer and Caroline Smith.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), James Clapson (Democratic Services Officer), Kevin Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Leemya McKeown (Assistant Director, Safeguarding Professional Standards and Quality Assurance), Maurine Robinson (Management Information Service Manager), Amy Coombs (Head of Adoption Partnership South East), Sarah Alizadeh (Quality Assurance Manager IRO Service SE), Christy Holden (Head of Strategic Commissioning – Childrens and Young People's Services).

#### **1. Apologies and Substitutes**

Apologies for absence were received from Sarah Hammond, Gary Cooke, Tracy Scott, Alison Farmer and Kelly Greham. Alister Brady was present as a substitute for Kelly Greham.

Sarah Hamilton was present virtually.

#### **2. Chairman's Announcements**

The Chair advised that work on the newsletter was underway. Circulation of the newsletter was planned to take place by the end of August.

Becki Bruneau asked about the support available, independent from the Local Authority (LA), for children who felt they were victims of abuse. She was advised that there were a number of external organisations in place that could provide support such as, Child Line, the trained volunteers from the Young Lives Foundation, and designated people in schools. Social Workers were also mandated to respond to reports of abuse.

#### **3. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 31 May 2023**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 31 May 2023 were correctly recorded.

#### **4. Participation Team Update**

1. Jo Carpenter, Tom Byrne and Kayleigh Leonard provided an update on the following:
  - During the May school holiday, the Children in Care (CiC) Councils met in Ashford to look at the Government's response to the Children's Social Care Review.
  - The Government had identified six ambitions to improve care. The Council members focused specifically on ambition four which was 'to make care better for children in care and care leavers.' The ambition was broken down into six mission statements, and the Council members were split into six groups to consider one each.
  - A Virtual Schools Kent (VSK) awards event was held on 25 July 2023 for young people in care aged over 16 and care leavers. The awards celebrated academic achievements and achievements within the community. 292 nominations were received across ten award categories. Thanks were offered to everyone involved in making the event a success.
  - There would be a 'make and bake' event on 27 July 2023. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) were invited to attend. A representative from the Children's Commissioner for England was also expected to be in attendance.
2. Alister Brady said that a list of actions could be drawn from the children's comments about the six mission statements. These actions could be monitored, and progress could be reported back to the children to demonstrate that their voice made an impact. Leemya McKeown added that their comments would be incorporated into the policies and practices as part of the social care review.
3. Jo Carpenter advised that young people had said it was important to consider their wishes when conducting business. As an example, some children may wish for reviews to take place outside of the school environment, and others may prefer reviews to take place at school. Social worker guidance had been updated to reflect the importance of listening, and responding, to the voice of the child.
4. RESOLVED that the update was noted.

#### **5. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care**

1. Maureen Robinson introduced the report that looked at 27 key performance indicators (KPIs) over 12 months, up to the end of May 2023. She added that there were eight KPIs with a red flag status, and said they were the same eight red KPIs that were reported at the meeting on 31 May 2023.
2. Rory Love enquired about the time scale used to assess the percentage Children in Care with an up-to-date dental check. In response, it was noted that the time scale was not specific to the needs of individual child, a period of

one year was specified by the Department for Education (DfE) for all children. In future, the wording in the report would clarify the time scale of this KPI.

3. Alister Brady asked about the percentage of initial health assessments taking place within 20 working days of coming into care. Nancy Sayer advised that there were challenges for those placed outside of the Kent; only 11% were completed on time for those placed out of the area, and some LA's refused to conduct assessments for children from other LA's. Every effort was made to complete the assessment before the young person was placed out of the area.
4. Stephen Gray noted how disruptive a change of social worker could be to a child. Kevin Kasaven advised that work was underway to help retain social workers and offer more stability. Agency social workers had begun to return to permanent LA employment and there was an apprenticeship scheme that could generate up to 20 new social workers once completed.
5. Caroline Smith advised that there had been two events held to encourage organisations to offer apprenticeships to care leavers. The Care Leavers Covenant would give the LA more authority to contact agencies and businesses about providing opportunities for care leavers. The Council had a number of arm's length organisations that could also be approached.
6. RESOLVED that the performance data in the Corporate Parenting Scorecard be noted.

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

1. Sue Chandler provided an update on the following:
  - Eight Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) had arrived in July, this brought the total to 703 for the year. There had been a rise in children from Turkey, who reported that they left their country because of an earthquake and recent political changes. Some children had also arrived from Albania.
  - The creation of a Regional Foster Care Initiative for the South East England region was underway, it had progressed through stage one of the DfE's process and was preparing for the next stage.
  - The young people from Afghanistan in Kent's Reception and Safe Care Service, had recently enjoyed taking part in a cricket match hosted by Tonbridge School.
  - The Virtual Schools Kent (VSK) Awards had been a fantastic event involving lots of people.
  - The closing date for nominations for the Kent Fostering Awards would be 29 September 2023, the ceremony would take place in November 2023.
2. In response to Alister Brady's question about predicting the number of UASC arrivals, Kevin Kasaven and Sue Chandler advised that the Home Office monitored the movement of young people through Europe; it normally took

between two and three months for young people to reach the UK, this allowed time to prepare for arrivals. It was important to understand why young people left their country; the LA shared this data with the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration and the Government.

3. Sue Chandler highlighted that it was important to place new arrivals with others from a similar background, faith and community. This helped new arrivals to develop strong friendships and support networks. There was a good understanding of where different communities were based within the UK.
4. RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted.

**7. Adoption Partnership South East, Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report, Business Plan and Legal Report on Outcomes for Children with a Decision for Adoption from March 2019-September 2022.**

1. Carolyn Smith advised that this was the second annual report of the Regional Adoption Agency that incorporated three LA areas; Bexley, Kent and Medway.
2. Amy Coombs summarised the reports. She advised that there were enough adopters for the number of children looking to be adopted, and that current practices met the required time scales. She said that high quality support was provided to families, and that Ofsted had inspected the Children's Services at Kent and Bexley and awarded both with an outstanding rating. An Ofsted inspection at Medway was currently in progress.
3. Amy Coombs noted that funding had been secured for three development projects, she offered to confirm and share the value of each funding stream after the meeting. The projects were;
  - Early permanence 'wrap around support',
  - Enhanced family finding,
  - Multi-disciplinary Centre of Excellence.
4. Amy Coombs flagged that one of the biggest challenges faced by the service were due to delays in the issue of adoption orders by the courts. Some judges were now permanently in position to help reduce delays in court hearings, and the service had seen some improvement.
5. There was a workshop in September that would look at what could be done to increase awareness of the needs of adopted children.
6. RESOLVED that the Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report, Business Plan and Legal report were noted.
7. At the request of the Chair, Rory Love gave a brief update on the response to the DfE's change of standards for reticulated aerated autoclaved concrete in schools. He advised that some schools had closed for a couple of days to ensure compliance with the new standards. Officers had worked hard to get children back into their classrooms as quickly as possible. Temporary

classrooms had been used in some cases. It was expected that normal classrooms would be ready for these children when they returned to school in September.

## **8. Kent Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2022/2023**

1. Sarah Alizadeh presented the Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) Annual Report that looked at the CiC population in Kent, the progress made against the 2021/22 Action Plan, and the next steps for the service in 2023/24. The presentation slides can be viewed using the following link for reference: [IRO Presentation Slides.pdf](#). During the presentation, the following points were noted:
  - There had been an increase in the number of CiC.
  - Just over half of the people entering care were aged 16 or over, and 91% of unaccompanied minors were male.
  - Good progress had been made against the 2021/22 Action Plan.
  - Action four showed an increase in safeguarding assurance. This indicated that there was a good knowledge of the procedures.
  - Action five showed an increase in the number of escalations received through the IRO escalation process. The new escalation policy enabled external partners to escalate cases.
  - Actions six and seven indicated that young people wanted to know more about the IRO and the childcare review.
  - The number of caseloads were at a five year high; however, a recent recruitment drive had been successful, and this would help to relieve this pressure once new staff members were settled into their posts.
  - The Placement Stability Checklist would be launched as part of the Action Plan for 2023/24.
2. Kevin Kasaven advised that before the Covid-19 pandemic there were around 1300 CiC. The pandemic restrictions led to a reduction in resilience within families, with less support from relatives and external agencies. This contributed to an increase in the number of children going into care once the restrictions were lifted.
3. It was clarified that the term 'missing' was used in the report when a child was not where they were expected to be; this was often because the child had missed a review appointment. Alister Brady highlighted that 44 of the children had missed two reviews. It was noted that there was a new mobile phone application that would help the service to stay in contact with these children, it could also enable reviews to be conducted virtually. Leemya McKeown added that some children attended the reviews but chose not to participate.
4. RESOLVED that the Independent Reviewing Officer's Annual Report and its findings were noted.

**9. Sufficiency Strategy 2022-2027 - Annual Progress Report - Accommodation for Care Experienced Young People and the Local Connection for Social Housing**

1. Christy Holden and Caroline Smith introduced the report that incorporated changes in legislation and regulation following the passing of the Illegal Migration Bill. They advised that the report also detailed the number of Kent care leavers living in each of Kent's district and borough council areas.
2. Alister Brady asked why such a high proportion of care leavers were in the Canterbury District. Christy Holden believed that some care leavers were drawn to the universities within the City of Canterbury.
3. Christy Holden advised that work to support the provision of independent accommodation for young people from the age of 16 until they turned 19 began in 2021. Discussions were ongoing with district and borough councils about the support that could be offered to young people when they left care. The topic would be considered at the next Kent Chief Executives meeting.
4. Christy Holden highlighted that it was important that district and borough council's recognised that they had a corporate parenting responsibility to young people leaving care. This responsibility was built around legislation. The Care Leavers Team had an information package that explained what it meant to be a corporate parent and Gravesham Borough Council had requested more information.
5. Alister Brady asked if the opportunities that an area offered to young people was one of the key reasons for a care leaver to wish to settle in an area. In response it was noted that this was sometimes the case, care leavers may also wish to stay close to those that had cared for them or move to be nearer to their birth parents. There were lots of reasons why a care leaver may wish to live in a particular area.
6. RESOLVED that the report be noted.