

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 27 February 2024

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

PRESENT: Dirk Ross (Chair), Dan Bride, Becki Bruneau (Vice Chair), Tom Byrne, Gary Cooke, Tony Doran, Alison Farmer, Stephen Gray, Kelly Grehan, Sarah Hamilton, Kayleigh Leonard, Rory Love, Nancy Sayer, Tracy Scott, and Caroline Smith.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: James Clapson (Democratic Services Officer), Ingrid Crisan (Director – Operational Integrated Children's Services), Kevin Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Maurine Robinson (Management Information Service Manager), Deborah Royle (QA Manager – IRO Service North West) and Georgie Topsfield (Participation and Support Assistant).

1. Apologies and Substitutes

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Sharon Williams and Dylan Jeffrey.
- 1.2 Sarah Hamilton, Lesley Game, Stephen Gray, and Kelly Grehan were present virtually.

2. Chairman's announcements

- 2.1 The Chairman noted that the work programme would be reviewed following the meeting and advised that planning had begun for the CPP Children in Care Take Over meeting scheduled for 30 July 2024.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2023

- 3.1 RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2023 were a correct record of the meeting.

4. Verbal Update by the Cabinet Member

- 4.1 Kent Intake Unit Visit
 - 4.1.1 Mrs Chandler, the Leader and Ms Hammond met with Michael Tomlinson, the Minister for Countering Illegal Migration, at the Kent Intake Unit in Dover on 22 February 2024. They discussed the challenges that Kent faced from the arrival of large numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

4.1.2 KCC and the Home Office would continue their close co-operation to ensure robust safeguarding of children coming into the country.

4.1.3 The need for fair distribution of UASC through the National Transfer Scheme was reiterated to the Minister. Fair distribution would ensure that there was not an unfair burden placed upon the county.

4.2 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Update

4.2.1 The total number of arrivals during 2024 so far was 210.

4.2.2 Preparations were underway to open new reception centres at nine locations around the county. Over the last few weeks there have been meetings with local MPs and Councillors to provide reassurance regarding the nature of the new centres.

4.3 Ofsted Inspection

4.3.1 Ofsted used the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services framework to carry out a focused visit inspection of services at the end of January 2024. The inspection covered the Canterbury and Folkestone and Hythe districts, focusing on child in need, child protection, children's entry into care, and 16 and 17 year old's who presented as homeless. The key findings were published on 27 February and thanks were offered to everyone involved in the inspection.

4.3.2 Ms Crisan added that overall, the Ofsted report was positive. Work would continue on plans for improvement. The inspection identified a lot of strengths that staff should be proud of.

5. Participation Team update

5.1 Mr Byrne, Ms Leonard and Ms Topsfield provided an update on the following:

- There had been some positive staff changes within the team. Ms Wood and Ms Topsfield had secured Participation and Support Assistant positions and Ms Willimas had secured a position as a 999 call handler. Two new care experienced apprentices joined the team in January, and two members of staff had begun level two apprenticeships.
- The Council groups had expanded their reach through virtual meetings and home visits to provide inclusivity for children and young people who could not attend Council meetings in person.
- The main Council groups met in February and considered how children in care (CiC) and foster children could have input into the changes taking place

within fostering. They were now planning for the next set of meetings in Easter.

- The Adoptables members discussed their aspirations and hopes for the future. Their feedback would be used to create a short film to highlight what young people would like for their futures.
- OCYPC MAGIC members were working on a project called This Is Me. The project would show what it was like to live with SEND.
- The Young Adult Council (YAC) and YAC Extra held their first meetings of the year. They attended an activity day to learn cooking skills, and plan to volunteer with the charity Porchlight.
- YAC Extra members produced a film about their experiences in care, it was shown at the UASC Conference held in January at Dover Castle.
- A range of engagement work had taken place, including visits to Canterbury Christchurch University and the University of Kent, to share care experiences with student social workers.
- Speak Up sessions were designed to support and encourage children to express themselves. The sessions were 1-1 and were very popular with young people.
- Over the Christmas period there had been lots of events, and the VSK Christmas Show in a Day had been a great success. Thanks were offered to everyone involved.

5.2 The following points were noted during consideration of the item:

- The breadth of work undertaken was very impressive.
- The This Is Me project was planned for completion in the Summer and would be circulated once complete.
- The Speak Up sessions were one way to support and encourage young people who lacked confidence in social situations. Recent media reports suggested that young people lacked resilience and confidence; these young people needed support to overcome social anxiety and develop their social skills. School also had an important part to play in building this resilience.

6. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

6.1 Ms Robinson provided a summary of the scorecard for November 2023. She noted that the number of red rated performance measures had reduced from nine in September to six.

6.2 The following points were noted during consideration of the item:

- The percentage of children leaving care who were adopted rose from 9% in September to 10.4%. The national average was 10%
- The adoption targets would be looked at in more detail when the target setting report was considered by the Panel later in the year.

6.3 The performance scorecard for children in care was noted.

7. Missing Episodes of Kent's Children in Care

7.1 The following points were noted during Ms Bride's introduction of the item:

- 2022 had seen an increase in the number of UASC who did not wish to claim asylum.
- Overall, the data was similar to previous years however, there had been a reduction in the number of 15 year olds going missing.
- When non-UASC CiC went missing, it was generally for a short period of time. When UASC went missing it was generally for a longer period of time.
- The main reason children gave for missing episodes was to spend time with friends.
- KCC had a close relationship with the Transport Police, and constantly looked to further understand and tackle the causes of missing episodes.
- The vast majority of CiC did not go missing, and occurrences were normally for a short period of time.

7.3 The following points were noted during consideration of the item:

- It would be good to know the number of children who had a missing episode in addition to the number of instances. This would help to provide a clearer picture.
- There was a statutory responsibility to respond to every missing episode, even it was for a matter of minutes.
- There was a responsibility to care for UASC arrivals even if asylum was not claimed upon arrival.
- Some traffickers encouraged UASC not to claim asylum so that they would not be eligible for the National Transfer Scheme. These children remained in Kent which made them easier to track down by traffickers.
- When a child went missing, a multi-agency meeting to took place to coordinate intelligence and attempt to locate the child.

7.4 The report was noted.

8. Kent CiC in the statutory school years with an EHCP – Access to Education

8.1 The following points were noted during Mr Doran's introduction of the report:

- The report was produced every six months.
- There number of children on the Virtual Schools Kent (VSK) EHCP Tracker had reduced by two, to 26 students. The tracker monitored Kent CiC with and EHPC who were not considered to have suitable education.

- There had been an increase in UASC in Kent who were under 16 years of age. This lowered the percentage of CiC in statutory school with an EHPC because it was very unusual for an UASC to have an EHPC.
- The percentage of Kent CiC with an EHPC had reduced to 27.5%. This figure rose to 31% if UASC were removed from the calculation, which was higher than ever previously recorded.
- The percentage of key stage 4 CiC with an EHPC had reduced. However, the figure rose to 39.1% if UASC children were excluded from the calculation, which was significantly above the national average.
- The number of young people with no recorded school had reduced from 18 to 10 since the last report.
- The number of young people with a non-Department for Education provision was zero.
- The number of young people who were on the tracker due to a change in care placement had reduced from 18 to seven since the last report.
- The number of young people placed outside of Kent with no recorded school had reduced from six to three since the last report. This was encouraging as there had been 18 young people in this position two years ago.
- The County Partnership Panel, chaired by Mr Doran, was having a positive impact. They had five cases carried over from the last academic year, this had reduced from 13 cases the year before.

8.2 The following points were noted during consideration of the item:

- Improvements were largely bought about through the re-organisation of the service. There was now a dedicated Assessment Team and Placement Team, and oversight had improved to help ensure that no CiC fell between the gaps. The number of CiC not in school placements was expected to continue to reduce over time.
- There was good collaboration between the VSK and SEND teams.
- UASC were entitled to the same care as other CiC. However, they were unlikely to have an EHPC unless they had been in the country for a few years.
- Foster carers found communication with SEND teams very difficult. Ms Farmer offered to look into the matter.

8.3 The work of the Virtual School and Kent SEN in supporting its young people was noted.