

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 25 September 2013.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mr R E Brookbank, Miss S J Carey (Substitute for Mr G Lymer), Mrs T Carpenter, Mrs P T Cole, Mr S Griffiths, Mr B Neaves, Mr P J Oakford, Mr R Truelove, Mr M J Vye and Mrs Z Wiltshire

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs C Moody and Mrs J Whittle

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Brightwell (Head of Quality Assurance, Children's Safeguarding Team), Mr T Doran (Head Teacher of Looked After Children - VSK), Ms D Fitch (Democratic Services Manager (Council)), Ms Y Shah (Interim Head of Adoption Service and Improvement, Coram/KCC), Ms M Robinson, Mrs S Skinner (Service Business Manager, Virtual School Kent), Ms V West (Interim Team Manager, Action for Children) and Ms V White

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

49. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2013 *(Item A2)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2013 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

50. Cabinet Member's Oral Update *(Item A4)*

(1) Mrs Whittle and officers updated the Panel on the following issues and answered question from Panel members and noted points.

Virtual Schools Kent Award (VSK) Ceremony on 22 September 2013

(2) Mrs Whittle referred to the VSK Award day that had been held on 22 September 2013 to celebrate the achievements of Children in Care and Young People and thanked Mr Doran and his staff for their hard work.

Significant improvement in exam results for Children in Care

(3) Mrs Whittle commended the significant improvement in exam results for Children in Care.

Adolescents Crash Pad in Ashford

(4) Mrs Whittle referred to a visit that she had made to the Adolescent Crash Pad in Dartford. This was a facility for young people who were experienced problems at home and gave them somewhere to go to talk to professionals such as Social Workers who could help to return home. The aim was to reduce the number of young

people who ran away from home. It was hoped that this model could be rolled out across Kent

Kent County Council's first adoption activity day.

(5) Mrs Whittle and Ms White reported on the County Council's first adoption activity day. This day had involved 54 Looked After Children (LAC). The age range of these children was from 1 to 7 years old. There were 32 sibling groups and the children were from a range of ethnic backgrounds. As a result of this day 15 children had been matched and two tentative links made. This event had generated a lot of media interest and Ms White showed a You Tube clip from the day. Ms White explained that it had been a child-centred day focused around the children having fun. There had been education and health colleagues available to discuss with adopters any issues relating to the children to help them gain a better understanding of their needs and the support available.

(6) Ms White explained that there had been a lot of work with foster carers prior to the event to prepare the children for the day and that the feedback from the children had been that they had really enjoyed the day.

(7) Ms Shah set out the various reasons for the success of this day, which included the way that the foster carers had prepared the children for the day and the partnership working between Social Services, Education and Health colleagues. She expressed her thanks to Liz Hughes and the adoption staff for all their work behind the scenes which had contributed to the success of the day.

LAC inspection

(9) Mrs Whittle informed the Panel that the Ofsted inspection of LAC services in August 2013 had resulted in a 'good' for its capacity to improve. The action plan from this inspection set out the areas that the County Council needed to focus on which included support for care leavers. She undertook to bring the Action Plan from the inspection to the next meeting of the Panel.

Engagement with Children in Care

(10) There was a discussion with officers on the most effective way that the Panel could engage with Children in Care. There were a number of suggestions including holding a half day activity event in the school holidays. It was important to meet with these young people in an environment in which they felt comfortable. In the past Members of the Children's Champions Board had gone bowling or had a pizza with some of these young people which had worked very well.

(11) RESOLVED that the update be noted and that the LAC inspection action plan be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel.

51. Implementation of the Leaving Care Charter in Kent

(Item B1)

(1) Ms Skinner submitted a report which outlined the Government's commitment to ensuring young people in care were supported by local authorities into adulthood. It also provided an overview of the Government's leaving care charter and how this

was being progressed in Kent. Also provided was information on how the Care Leavers Charter would be communicated to young people in Kent.

(2) Officers noted comments and answered questions from the Panel which included the following:

- Ms Skinner stated that consideration would be given to looking at how to evaluate the effectiveness of the Charter in Kent.
- Mrs Whittle confirmed that the County Council were lobbying the Government regarding tax breaks for foster carers of young people over 18 years old and for financial support for the implementation of the Charter. She emphasised the importance of supporting these young people at that vital stage in their lives. Mrs Whittle referred to the need for a multi-agency approach to supporting young people leaving care in order to achieve the best outcomes for them.
- It was explained that the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) service focused exclusively on Children in Care. Exploratory work had been carried out into extending their remit to include care leavers. Discussions were being carried out with Catch 22 on how the IRO service could look at quality assurance and at good practice for working with care leavers.
- Mr Griffiths raise the issue of support for care leavers who went to university and the need for them to have somewhere to return to during the university holidays in the same way as other young people returned to their families. There was a need to have a network in place to support these young people.
- It was suggested that somewhere in the Charter there should be a formalisation of the financial backing for these young people. Ms Skinner stated that a challenge in the Charter was how to achieve the Government's requirement that corporate parents were life long champions for these young people. There was a need to involve foster carers in discussions on various foster carer forums.
- Ms Carpenter stated that when the young person reached 18 the support was not there for them. It was difficult to get anyone to help as the services said that they had no resources for these young people. She would like to see some form of IRO service for young people post-18.
- Ms Skinner explained that there was a review of the leaving care service taking place and there was a need to look at the Children in Care Charter in the context of the review.
- Mr Brightwell referred to Kent's pledge for children and young people in care which had been introduced in 2008, a year earlier than required. The care leavers' charter was something that young people had asked for, i.e. a contract of entitlement and clarity around the minimum service provision. The aim was to incorporate these into a document that set out clear commitments in a language that young people understood.

(3) RESOLVED That:

- (a) the Government's commitment to care leavers be noted
- (b) KCC developing a Care Leavers Charter and the comments made by the Panel Members regarding what support and service should be included within it be noted.
- (c) an update, and if possible the final Charter, be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee Panel

(d) it be noted that consideration of the Looked After Children inspection action plan at the next meeting would include information on the IRO service role.

52. Update on the Adoption Service

(Item B2)

(1) Ms Shah introduced an update report which provided information on post adoption support from Action for Children, Adopter's experiences and a service update from Coram.

(2) Ms Shah and Ms West responded to comments and questions which included the following:

- Ms Shah confirmed that 20 children had been placed outside of Kent and that 3 Kent adopters had adopted children from outside of Kent. In Kent there were 18 children a month requiring adopters. It was not possible to recruit enough adopters to satisfy this rate and therefore there would always be a mixed economy.
- It was noted that this report had been improved by taking into account the feedback from the previous meeting.
- Ms Shah updated the Panel on the situation regarding the recruitment of the Head of Adoption Service. The closing date for applications was 30 September 2013.
- Ms Shah explained that the timescale to adopt a second child if it was a sibling was reduced by 50% to 3 or 4 months instead of the current 8 months for a first child.

(3) RESOLVED that the update and comments made by Members be noted.

53. Update on the work of the Virtual School Kent (VSK)

(Item B3)

(1) Mr Doran introduced a paper which provided information regarding the profile of children and young people who had been subject to part-time timetables, an update on the Assisted Boarding Scheme, an outline on how the VSK was supporting the legislative changes regarding the Raising of the Participation Age, which had recently come into force, and an update on the participation and engagement of Kent's Children in Care.

(2) Mr Doran referred to the un-validated exam result data for LAC, which showed a significant improvement over previous years.

(3) Mr Doran thanked the members of the Panel who had attended the awards even on 22 September 2013. He had received fantastic feedback from young people and foster carers.

(4) Mr Doran responded to comments and questions which included the following:

- In response to a question about sporting activities as part of the VSK, Ms Skinner stated that a lot of activity days were held for these young people at

outdoor sports centres. In the summer there had been a 4 or 5 day event which including a cricket day. Also it had been recognised by Ofsted that these young people took advantage of the opportunities for activities outside school, such as local clubs. This was something that was monitored by the IRO service.

- Ms Moody confirmed that VSK did a fantastic job, the feedback from other foster carers was excellent and it was a brilliant service. She cared for children with special needs and there were plenty of opportunities for them to take part in sporting activities. Ms Carpenter stated that the young lady that she cared for had been able to participate in horse riding for the past two years and was winning events.
- It was suggested that Members should have the opportunity to meet with foster carers in their area in a formal setting.
- Mr Vye and Mrs Wiltshire were due to attend a Leaving Care conference in London and would report verbally to the December meeting of the Committee to give feedback on what other Councils were doing and on any good practice that could be adopted by the County Council. Feedback would also be sought from the participation workers and young people attending this event.
- Mr Doran undertook to email the members of the Panel with details of activity days so that they could have the opportunity to attend if they wished.

(5) RESOLVED that the report and the progress made be noted and that the Education Cabinet Committee be requested to receive a report on the improved exam results for Looked after Children.

54. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

(Item B4)

(1) Mr Brightwell introduced the report which contained the performance scorecard for Children in Care and identified the key performance data and targets that needed to be monitored in order to promote the best outcomes for children and young people looked after by Kent County Council. The performance scorecard for June 2013 was attached to the report.

(2) Mr Brightwell responded to comments and questions which included the following:

- In response to a question on persistent absence, Mr Doran confirmed that the Education Welfare Officers tracked and monitored absence and categorised the reasons.
- In relation to the increase by 1 of the agreed number of Children in Care in bed and breakfast accommodation, Mr Brightwell stated that would be looked at by the Children in Care team and Catch 22.
- In response to a question on whether lateness was monitored in addition to absence, Mr Doran explained that LAC's attended 677 different schools which would monitor this differently. There was a RAG (red, amber, green) rating for each child and the children who had amber or red ratings were monitored for issues such as lateness more closely.

(3) RESOLVED that the performance data and the comments made by Members both in relation to the areas of performance included and the targets be noted.

55. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service Quarterly Update

(Item B5)

(1) Mr Brightwell introduced the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Quarterly Update report which covered the period April 2013 to June 2013. The report included the workload of the service and the qualitative performance of both the IRO service and of social work practice.

(2) Mr Brightwell responded to comments and questions which included the following:

- It was suggested that there should be the opportunity for members of the Panel to meet with the IROs. Mr Brightwell explained that there were two IRO teams, one for East and South Kent, based at Gibson Drive, and one for West and North Kent, based in Brook House. There were monthly practice meetings and six-monthly County meetings. He undertook to look at the most effective way for members of the Panel to engage with IROs.
- In relation to the reduction in the number of care plans being issued, Mr Brightwell explained that there had not been a breakdown in the core components but there had been a weakness in how the Social Worker pulled together the core components to make a whole plan. Consideration was being given as to how this could be improved to help children realise their potential. He reassured the Panel that although the number of care plans was low, the components had been improved.

(3) RESOLVED that the update on the IRO service and the comments made by Members be noted.