

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 Tuesday, 9 December 2014.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mr R E Brookbank, Mrs T Carpenter, Mrs P T Cole, Mr G Lymer, Mrs C Moody, Mr B Neaves, Mr M J Vye and Mrs Z Wiltshire

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P J Oakford and Ms B Taylor

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Segurola (Interim Director of Specialist Children's Services), Mrs S Skinner (Service Business Manager, Virtual School Kent) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

49. Apologies and Substitutes

No apologies or notice of any substitutes had been received.

50. Minutes of the Panel meeting held on 24 October 2014 *(Item A2)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Panel's meeting held on 24 October 2014 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

51. Chairman's Announcements *(Item A3)*

1. The Chairman announced that Bella Taylor would replace Sophia Dunstan as the OCYPC representative on the Panel, while Sophia was on maternity leave. She welcomed Bella to the Panel.

2. She added that she had recently met the new VSK apprentices and said they would be a great asset to the VSK programme.

52. Verbal Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC) *(Item A4)*

1. Ms Taylor introduced herself to the Panel and gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

- a) she explained that the number of VSK apprentices had doubled, from four to eight, and introduced two of the new VSK apprentices, who had come to observe the Panel meeting. The increased number would allow there to be two apprentices in each locality and would increase the level of support and engagement possible;

- b) a taster day for the OCYPC had been successful, with new members joining. OCYPC would like to find a representative of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) in the coming year. There had been two residential courses during 2014, to help initiate team building. There had been a Christmas card design competition, with the intention that the winning design would be printed as the official OCYPC card. The Christmas edition of the newsletter would be issued shortly, and an ongoing aim was for this newsletter to reach younger children in care; and
- c) participation days had been successful this year, with some 300 children and young people attending, but the aim was always to try to engage with hard-to-reach children and young people and encourage them to take part.

2. She responded to comments and questions, follows:-

- a) concern was expressed that some asylum seeking young men may have trouble working with and relating to female staff, as attitudes to women in their home countries were quite different from attitudes prevalent in the UK. Ms Taylor said she had a keen interest in UASC issues and had taken account of the difference in attitudes but did not foresee it causing any problem. Mr Lymer offered the benefit of his experience of working with ethnic minorities to help with any support and advice with addressing any problems which may arise;
- b) in response to a question about how foster carers received the OCYPC newsletter, Ms Moody and Mrs Carpenter confirmed that they received the newsletter online and shared it with the children in their care;
- c) in response to a question, Mrs Skinner said that every effort would be made to help VSK apprentices to take up invitations to attend various events around the county, eg Youth Advisory Groups, but pointed out that apprentices had to rely on public transport. She asked that anyone seeking a visit by an apprentice contact her so arrangements could be made;
- d) Panel members offered help to distribute copies of OCYPC/VSK newsletters in their local areas, and it was agreed that each newsletter, when ready, would be emailed to the Democratic Services Officer for circulation to all Panel members;
- e) in response to a question, Panel members were advised that dates for participation days for the whole of 2015 were not yet set, but they would be posted on the website as soon as they were known. Events for the February half-term holiday had been set, and Easter events would be arranged shortly. The Panel was reminded that such events would always be scheduled to take place in the school holidays; and
- f) Panel members had heard often that young people did not welcome being asked to complete surveys, and that different ways needed to be found of gathering their views. Ms Taylor advised that the challenge had been given some thought and possible solutions would be discussed at the next

residential event and OCYPC meeting. Mr Segurola added that officers were looking into how best to gather feedback from children and young people in care, to achieve the most helpful method for them and to be able to evidence this relationship.

3. The Cabinet Member, Mr Oakford, said he had written to the Children's Commissioner about the challenge of finding an alternative to surveys and had received a favourable reply, asking for more detail. He said he would pursue the issue with the aim of achieving, by May 2015, a co-ordinated national annual survey which covered all the required information. He undertook to copy his email exchange with the Commissioner to Mrs Skinner and Ms Taylor.

4. The Chairman offered to write a Christmas message to all children in care, for inclusion in the Christmas edition of the OCYPC/VSK newsletter.

5. RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted, with thanks.

53. Cabinet Member's Verbal Update (Item A5)

1. Mr P J Oakford gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

Child Sexual Exploitation awareness session for Members of this Panel and the Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee on 18 December, by Tim Smith of Kent Police – all Members of both committees had been invited to attend and it was hoped that a good attendance would be achieved.

Visits with principal practitioner to Folkestone had been very enlightening. He would shortly start a series of visits to all children's centres in the county, in alternate weeks with visits with social workers.

Kent Safeguarding Children Board Annual Conference on 13 November – 'Voice of the Child' – this had been a very successful event.

E.safety – he had recently seen Becky Avery's excellent presentation on e.safety and the effects of cyber-bullying and recommended it to the Panel. He undertook to arrange for the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee to be shown Becky's presentation in January, at an awareness raising event similar to the one about Child Sexual Exploitation.

8 December meeting with Graham Archer at the Department of Education with Philip Segurola, Paul Carter and Andrew Ireland about how Kent managed issues relating to Child Sexual Exploitation.

CAMHS contract renewal – the clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) had extended its contract for CAMHS without discussion with the County Council. Specialist Children's Services and procurement officers would look into the impact of this upon the Council.

2. He responded to comments and questions, as follows:-

a) the CAMHS contract extension had been reported to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, so should not have come as a surprise, although, as the existing contract would expire in August 2015, there was surely time to have consulted more widely, so the lack of consultation was disappointing. Mr Segurola added that consultation with the County Council should have been routed through the Health and Wellbeing Board. He reminded the Panel that

the County Council had an interest in the contract in terms of its provision for children in care; and

- b) in response to a question about the possibility of young people attending the CSE briefing on 18 December, to broaden their awareness of the issue, Mr Segurola said the intended audience was elected Members and the content would address their need to be aware of the issues as corporate parents.

3. The verbal updates were noted, with thanks.

54. Meeting Dates 2015 - amended start times
(Item A6)

The Panel's 2015 meeting dates had been reported to the Panel on 24 October, but the start times of the afternoon sessions had since been brought forward. The dates reserved for the Panel's meetings in 2015, and their revised start times, were noted, as follows:-

Friday 13 February, 10.00 am
Thursday 9 April, *new start time 1.00 pm*
Thursday 18 June, *new start time 1.00 pm*
Thursday 3 September, *new start time 1.00 pm*
Friday 23 October, 10.00 am
Tuesday 8 December, *new start time 1.00 pm*

All meetings would take place at County Hall, Maidstone.

55. The Share Foundation and Junior ISAs for Children in Care
(Item B1)

1. Mrs Skinner introduced the report and explained that setting up a Junior ISA for every child in care, with an initial investment of £200 per child, had replaced the previous arrangements for each to have a Child Trust Fund. Children who were in care at the time of the Child Trust Fund would retain this fund, while children coming into care since then would have a new ISA. The Government introduced this support for children and young people who had been in care for a period of at least one year, so any child in care for twelve months or more should have some type of investment fund. When a child came into care, the County Council would inform the Share Foundation, which would establish a new ISA for them, and when a young person came to leave care, the Share Foundation would arrange for the funds accrued to be paid to the young person. The Kent Pledge payment, made by the County Council to every child in care, would be added to the Child Trust Fund or ISA fund. The purpose of telling the Panel about this scheme was to seek its help in raising extra funding for children in care. If agreement were forthcoming, a representative of the Share Foundation could attend a future Panel meeting to help take forward plans for fundraising. Mrs Skinner responded to comments and questions from Panel members, as follows:-

- b) the possibility of involving all elected Members was raised, perhaps by arranging a presentation and debate at a full Council meeting in the new year. This would reinforce Members' shared role as corporate parents and

allow all to input ideas about fundraising. If all elected Members were to be informed and involved, each could help by approaching business communities and fundraising organisations in their local area;

- c) foster carers were able to add their own contributions to the ISA funds for children in their care, as was the child's birth family, in the same way in which parents and grandparents would put away funds for their own children's and grandchildren's future;
- d) Panel members asked Ms Taylor if she was aware of the fund held in her name and her entitlement to access it upon leaving care. The Chairman added that young people in care were very astute about money issues and were sure to tell the County Council if the system did not work and if they were not able to access their funds!
- e) it was suggested that the knowledge available to the County Council via the officers who managed the Council's pension funds could be used to benefit the investment of ISA funds. Several elected Members had previously worked in banking and had excellent knowledge of investment;
- f) when a young person had their funds paid out to them upon leaving care, they could be given advice and encouragement to continue saving for their future;
- g) rather than approaching local businesses to help with fundraising, as many were still struggling after the economic downturn, it might be better to approach banks. This would give them a chance to 'give something back'. In addition, people with shares with a low value had an option to donate them to a good cause, which may be more cost-effective than cashing them in, and the County Council could establish a scheme to encourage people to donate these shares to benefit local children in care;
- h) another group of young people which could benefit from having an ISA was child carers;
- i) some of the cohort of 141 young people who were eligible to receive a payment of funds upon leaving care, but who had not yet done so, were those who had left care before the current scheme was established and were eligible for a retrospective payment. Some had changed addresses since leaving care and would need to be traced to a current address. Mrs Skinner reassured Panel members that she would obtain a list of names of the 141 and assist in tracing them; and
- j) young people should be involved in decisions, and asked for their suggestions, about how money was to be raised and invested for them, as it was, after all, money which was rightfully theirs.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information about sources of savings accounts held on behalf of Kent children in care be noted; and

- b) the County Council work with the Share Foundation to encourage additional fundraising through local businesses and other bodies, taking account of the Panel's comments and suggestions, set out above.

56. Therapy and Counselling services for Children and Young People with Emotional Wellbeing needs (including mental health)
(Item B2)

Mrs C Infanti, Strategic Commissioning Officer, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Infanti introduced the report and summarised its key points. A draft emotional wellbeing strategy had been debated by the Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee on 3 December and the delivery plan for this was expected to be ready in February 2015. Mrs Infanti and Mr Segurola responded to comments and questions from Panel members, as follows:-

- a) the figures for current cases in each area, listed in the report, were grouped by clinical commissioning group (CCG) district, and Mrs Infanti undertook to advise the speaker outside the meeting of the figures, separated instead into district council areas;
- b) it was noted that that the total number of cases listed – 464 – represented 25% of Kent's current children in care population.
- c) when a child came into care, they would have a health assessment to identify the type of support they needed. There was currently some fragmentation across the tiers of provision but the new emotional health and wellbeing strategy 'The Way Ahead' sought to improve the assessment process. A foster carer commented that access to emotional health and wellbeing services could be a lottery as some new social workers were unsure about the process, and by the time services could be found, the child had sometimes moved on to a new foster carer, who would have to start the process again from scratch. Mr Segurola explained that training on emotional health and wellbeing services would be built into the induction package for all new social workers;
- d) one speaker added that he had experienced delay in accessing the common assessment framework (CAF) process and said the Panel should monitor this issue closely, as well as access to lower tier services. It was important to identify also how such monitoring information would be acquired and how progress would be measured;
- e) the same speaker asked for a list of all commissioned services and who delivered them, and Mrs Infanti undertook to supply this;
- f) a care package put in place when a child entered care would not automatically include any emotional health and wellbeing service;
- g) concern was expressed that there were insufficient hospital beds available for young people in emotional crisis; some young people had to be kept in police cells as that was the only available alternative; and

- h) the Panel asked to receive a further report on emotional health and wellbeing services early in 2015, so it could see and monitor a co-ordinated approach to the related services.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information set out in the report be noted; and
- b) the further information requested about services and monitoring mechanisms, as noted above, be provided to Panel members, as requested.

57. Update on the Adoption Service

Ms Y Shah, Interim Head of Adoption Service and Improvement, Coram/KCC

1. Ms Shah introduced reports on the adopters' journey, children's adoption journey and by adoption panel chairs, and summarised the key points of them, as follows:-

- a) as the number of children awaiting adoption had decreased by some 60% nationwide, events aimed at recruiting new adopters had been scaled back and would be held less often, to slow down the rate of recruitment of mainstream adopters;
- b) a new service, recently launched, would allow adopters, once approved, to access a national database of children awaiting adoption;
- c) the British Association of Adoption and Fostering would shortly launch a scheme for adopters to make DVDs to promote themselves to children seeking adoption, in the same way in which children could currently make promotional DVDs to attract adopters;
- d) the timescale within which children were placed had improved, with 70% of children now being placed within the desired timetable;
- e) Kent's family finding service had received recognition at a national level; and
- f) Ofsted had highlighted the need to increase the number of elected Members serving on adoption panels.

2. She then responded to comments and questions from Panel Members, as follows:-

- a) asked about recruitment of adopters for harder-to-place children, eg sets of siblings and those with disabilities or behavioural problems, Ms Shah explained that a recent radio campaign had been unsuccessful, and that some adopters who had come forward for such children and had been approved then changed their minds about continuing. Some may have been put off by being given case examples of the medical problems experienced by some children. She emphasised that additional support

would be put in place for adopters of disabled children, and that a new recruitment campaign would be mounted early in 2015, aimed at recruiting adopters for siblings and disabled children. Mr Segurola added that additional support was vital to avoid a breakdown of a placement;

- b) a report setting out more detail of post-adoption support would be made to the Panel in the new year;
- c) adopters had previously been able to see profiles of children waiting adoption, but it was planned that children would shortly be able to see profiles of adopters; and
- d) the Chairman, who had served on adoption panels in the past, commented that finding Members to serve on such panels was a challenge, on top of other committee memberships and County Council duties, as the workload of preparation, reading and travel was onerous. Lay people determining adoption cases would need support to understand some of the issues involved, as the confidential nature of the material meant they could not discuss them with, or seek clarification from, any unauthorised third party.

3. The Chairman thanked Ms Shah and the Coram team for the tremendous amount of work they had done in improving the County's adoption service. Ms Shah replied that the biggest contribution to this improvement had been made by the foster carers who supported the placement and adoption process.

4. RESOLVED that the information set out in the reports be noted, and the Panel's thanks to the Coram team and the county's foster carers for their work in improving Kent's adoption service be placed on record.

Chairman.....

13 February 2015