

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Swale 1, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 23 October 2015.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mrs Z Wiltshire (Vice-Chairman), Mr R E Brookbank, Mrs T Carpenter, Mrs P T Cole, Mr C Dowle, Mr G Lymer, Mr T A Maddison (Substitute for Ms C J Cribbon), Mrs C Moody, Mr B Neaves, Ms B Taylor and Mrs J Whittle

ALSO PRESENT: Mr G Williamson (Chair, Kent Foster Care Association)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Segurola (Interim Director of Specialist Children's Services), Mr T Doran (Head Teacher of Looked After Children - VSK), Mrs S Skinner (Service Business Manager, Virtual School Kent) and Mrs A Hunter (Principal Democratic Services Officer)

103. Exclusion of the Press and Public

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

104. The Views of Young People in care (discussion item)

(Item 1)

- (1) The Chairman introduced the purpose of the discussion session, which was an opportunity for young people to express their views directly to both senior staff and corporate parents.
- (2) The session was attended by a number of young people representing Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC), who were currently or had previously been in care, accompanied by Sarah Skinner (Service Business Manager, VSK) and Virtual School Kent (VSK) Apprentices Bella Taylor and Chris Dowle.
- (3) Those around the table introduced themselves.
- (4) Questions were raised about the transition of young people in care towards the independent management of their own budgets and personal finances, and the variations in advice and practice varied across the county as well as eligibility for supported lodgings allowances, savings and the operation of the "leaving care" grant
- (5) One young person said that his three most recent social workers had been newly qualified and needed to "refer to the book all the time" and that it had taken five months to get an answer about a bus pass.

- (6) The need for clear and consistent communication to foster carers and young people was identified to ensure that any allocated funding was either saved for or given to the young person. The need to support newly qualified social workers and ensure they had a clear framework of guidance was also recognised.
- (7) Mrs Skinner said that some of the issues raised at today's meeting could be reported to the next meetings of the Young Adults' Council and to Our Children and Young People's Council.
- (8) Mrs Whittle (Deputy Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services) asked about experiences in school and said a Select Committee had been established to review social mobility in grammar schools. The experiences of school among the young people present varied and there was a discussion about who decided whether children in care should take the Kent Test or not.
- (9) Mr Doran (Head Teacher - VSK) said that four years ago fewer than one in three children in care attained level 4 in reading, writing and maths and the figure was now one in every two.
- (10) The Chairman thanked the young people for attending and asked them to think about the issues they would like to raise the next time they attended a CPP meeting.

The meeting was opened to the press and public.

105. Apologies and Substitutes

- (1) Apologies for absence were received from Ms C J Cribbon, Mr S Griffiths, Mr P J Oakford (Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services) and Mr M Vye.
- (2) Mr T Maddison attended as substitute for Ms C J Cribbon.

106. Kent Foster Carers' issues: Discussion led by Glenn Williamson, Chair of Kent Foster Care Association (KFCA)

(Item B1)

- (1) Glenn Williamson (Chair, Kent Foster Care Association) said that Mr Gurney (Interim Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting) had asked him to work with foster carers to review services to them and to consider a model for engagement between services and foster carers. He said he had 12 detailed conversations with foster carers which gave a flavour of views but could not be considered to be representative of all views across the county. He said the conversations showed that there were differences in levels of satisfaction across the county and identified some potential "quick wins" including improvements in communication, consistency in the interpretation of policy and improvements to administration so minutes of meetings were written and circulated in a more timely way. The conversations had also shown that foster carers feel they are not always listened to when decisions are being made about children in care, morale was low in some areas and this was making engagement harder.

- (2) Ms Moody agreed that morale was very low in Thanet and that foster carers needed the support of the foster caring team especially during times of significant and frequent changes. Mrs Carpenter said that strong and experienced social workers were needed to deal with children in care who were 16 years old or more.
- (3) Mr Williamson said a conference on unaccompanied asylum seeking children held last week attended by 80 carers and a number of social workers and other professionals had worked well and had created an opportunity to discuss issues and challenges.
- (4) In response to questions and comments, Mr Segurola said carers were a critical part of the professional network, a more formal review of carers' views would be worth doing; foster carers received formal training, young people in care currently contributed to such training and that while there had not been any cuts to budgets for fostering services there were inconsistencies in caseloads which might need to be re-balanced.
- (5) Mrs Skinner said that recent training that included foster carers, social workers independent reviewing officers had been well received and demonstrated an appetite and need for it.
- (6) Mr Segurola said that a survey would be conducted early in 2016 to gather the views of foster carers and that the training programme would be reviewed.
- (7) The Chairman thanked Mr Williamson for his update and for leading the discussion.

107. Minutes of the meeting of this Panel held on 3 September 2015
(Item A2)

Resolved that the minutes of the Panel meeting held on 3 September 2015 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman.

108. Minutes of the meeting of the Kent Corporate Parenting Group held on 24 September 2015, and brief verbal update
(Item A3)

Resolved that the minutes of the Kent Corporate Parenting Group held on 24 September 2015 be NOTED.

109. Chairman's Announcements
(Item A4)

- (1) The Chairman said Chris Dowle was leaving to go travelling. She thanked him for his contribution and wished him well for the future.
- (2) The Chairman also said that she would attend a "Meet the Managers" Drop-In to be held at the Lighthouse, Gravesend on 29 October 2015.

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

(Item A5)

- (1) Mr Dowle and Mrs Skinner gave a verbal update as follows:
 - Sophia Dunstan was back to work full time and doing a Level 3 apprenticeship;
 - Amelia Kury had won the apprentice of the year award;
 - Jo Carpenter had received apprentice manager of the year; and Heidi Coombes and Kahleigh Jenner were now applying for jobs;
 - Recruitment for a new care leaver apprentice would be underway in the near future;
 - It was intended to recruit to all vacancies;
 - Efforts would be made to attract applications from children in care and all designated teachers and social workers had been emailed with information;
 - Meetings of the North and West Children in Care Councils and the Young Adult Council were scheduled for the week commencing 26 October 2015;
 - Efforts were being made to establish children in care councils in the south and east of the county, as well as a junior council;
 - A range of activities including skiing, tobogganing, ice skating and creative days had been arranged for half term;
 - Pledge cards to be given to every child coming into care had been printed and would be made available to all social workers and elected Members.
- (2) In response to a request for an update about a trip being organised by Bella Taylor, Mrs Skinner said the facilities available were being considered and that it was possible that the Youth Service may be able to assist.
- (3) The verbal updates were NOTED

111. Verbal Updates

(Item A6)

- (1) Mr Segurola (Interim Director of Specialist Children's Services) gave a verbal update.
- (2) In relation to unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) he said:
 - There had been a slight reduction in the number of children arriving during the first two weeks in September but the numbers had escalated since;
 - There were now 963 UASC being looked after (having increased from 386 in March 2015);
 - The impact had been considerable and foster care agencies had been used to find suitable placements, however all of the available places had now been filled;
 - Last week it had been impossible to place Kent children in foster care in Kent;
 - 26 locum social workers in four teams had been recruited to deal with the UASC and it was proving very difficult to recruit sufficient social workers to deal with the numbers arriving;

- Mr Carter (Leader of the Council) and Mr Ireland (Corporate Director of Social Care, Health and Wellbeing) had spoken with the Home Office and the Department for Education about the need for a dispersal scheme and a financial settlement to avoid an £8m shortfall in Kent. A ministerial announcement was expected shortly.

- (3) Mrs Whittle thanked all those staff involved in dealing with the UASC.
- (4) In response to questions and comments, it was confirmed that local MPs received regularly briefings on the situation and that all possibilities for the recruitment of additional social workers and translators were being investigated.
- (5) Mr Segurola said that feedback from the Leading Improvements for Looked After Children (LILAC) assessment had not yet been received and would be reported to Members and to the Corporate Parenting Panel at the earliest opportunity.
- (6) Mr Segurola concluded his verbal update by saying that App-based technology for consultation was been considered and that Family Drug and Alcohol Courts initiative that had been trialled in London would become operational in Kent in December. The purpose of the courts was to provide intensive support for families with drug or alcohol dependency that would result in either a step change for the families or a permanent placement for the children.
- (7) The verbal updates were NOTED.

112. Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report 2014/15

(Item B2)

- (1) Mrs Skinner introduced the report. She referred in particular to the key headlines set out on pages 27 and 28, the areas identified for improvement and the actions for 2015/16 set out on page 45. She also said that the “Your Voice Matters Survey” referred to on page 35 was a one-off survey and was not conducted annually.
- (2) In response to questions, she undertook to clarify the information set out in the summary of findings on page 41.
- (3) Resolved that the information set out in the report be noted and that clarification in relation to the summary of findings be provided.

113. Head Teacher of Virtual School Kent (VSK) Annual Report 2014- 2015

(Item B3)

- (1) Mr Doran (Head Teacher - VSK) introduced the report which provided an overview of his impact and priorities. He referred in particular to the Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 results which had been internally validated and were in line or better than the national average and had narrowed the gap in achievement between children in care and all Kent learners. He said the Key

Stage 4 results had not yet been validated but at this time showed a 4% improvement on last year.

- (2) Mr Doran drew the Panel's attention to performance in relation to health assessments, participation and engagement, celebration events, buddying support, training and to the events and forums the VSK Participation team had attended.
- (3) In response to questions, he said the total amount of pupil premium available was set out in the overall budget but individual allocations were tailored to need; conversations with the DfE indicated that it was likely to continue; activities in participation and activity days were tailored to maximise interest and attendance; and that the size of venues and budget meant that these events could accommodate only children in care.
- (4) Resolved that the progress made be NOTED.

114. Kent Specialist Children's Services Performance Management Scorecards, August 2015
(Item B4)

- (1) Mr Segurola (Interim Director of Specialist Children's Services) introduced the Performance Management Scorecards which set out performance data for Specialist Children's Services. He said that the number of unallocated cases numbered 130 for August, 126 of which related to UASC and all of them had been allocated by mid-September.
- (2) Mr Segurola drew the Panel's attention to the KPI - "% of cases adoption agreed as plan by 2nd review, for those with agency decision" which had been rated "red" for August. He said that for September the percentage was zero as cases that were being twin-tracked had been excluded and this provided a more accurate and realistic view of the position.
- (3) He concluded by saying that, although the average caseload for fostering social workers was 18.8, there were inconsistencies across the county.
- (4) RESOLVED that the information set out in the scorecards be NOTED.

Chairman

8 December 2015