

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Sessions House on Thursday, 25 July 2019.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mr R H Bird (Substitute for Ida Linfield), Mr D L Brazier (Substitute for Mr M J Northey), Ms D Bride, Mr J Burden, Mr T Byrne, Ms S Dunstan, Mr R Graves, Ms S Hamilton, Mrs S Hammond, Mr A Heather, Mr G Lymer, Mr P Manning (Substitute for Mr T Doran), Mrs S Prendergast, Ms N Sayer and Ms C Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Dunkley CBE (Corporate Director for Children Young People and Education), Ms N Anthony (Head of Fostering, East), Ms R Calver (Service Manager for Transition, 18+ Leaving Care Service), Ms J Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager, Virtual School Kent), Mrs M Robinson (Management Information Unit Service Manager), Paul Startup (Head of Care Leavers 18 plus Service), Mr M Vening (Head of Fostering, West) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

165. Membership

It was noted that Mr J Burden had joined the Panel in place of Ms K Constantine.

166. Apologies and substitutes

(Item 1)

Apologies for absence had been received from Julianne Bayford, Tony Doran, Lesley Game, Stuart Griffiths, Ida Linfield, Michael Northey and Sarah Vaux.

Rob Bird was present as a substitute for Ida Linfield, David Brazier for Michael Northey and Paul Manning for Tony Doran.

167. Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 29 May 2019 (Takeover Day)

(Item 2)

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Takeover Day on 29 May 2019 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

The Chairman advised the Panel that its minutes, once approved, would be submitted to the next County Council meeting to be noted.

168. Chairman's Announcements

(Item 3)

The Chairman once again said how proud she was of the way in which the VSK Participation team had put together the Takeover Day and the way in which the young people taking part had conducted themselves.

169. Verbal Update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)
(Item 4)

1. Sophia Dunstan (Participation Support Assistant), Reece Graves (Senior Apprentice Participation Worker) and Tom Byrne (Apprentice Participation Worker) from the Virtual School Kent (VSK) Participation Team gave a verbal update on the work of the OCYPC, the Super Council and the Young Adult Council and forthcoming participation events. *The text of this update will be appended to these minutes.* They responded to comments and questions, including the following:-

- a) referring to work on 'the language of care', the Chairman said she found it sometimes difficult to understand the language used;
- b) the Chairman advised members of the Panel that they should always feel free to contact the VSK Participation team to find out about and link into work being done with children and young people in care;
- c) the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, Matt Dunkley, suggested that there be a team which would work with adolescents. This was welcomed as giving an opportunity for young people to have input into what they thought should be the qualities of people working with adolescents and what were the most important aspects of such work. The Chairman added that elected County Council Members could also benefit from some training in this area to raise their understanding of work with adolescents. Dan Bride (Assistant Director, Adolescent and Open Access, West) undertook to write to Members about a training day she was organising in September 2019; and
- d) Mr Dunkley suggested that a co-production seminar would also be helpful, to allow members and young people to discuss together how the corporate parenting role of all elected County Council Members could be developed and clarified.

2. It was RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted, with thanks.

170. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member
(Item 5)

1. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, Roger Gough, gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

Update on Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) – there were currently 315 UASC under 18, more than the same time one year ago, and 893 over-18 UASC care leavers. The National Transfer Scheme was based on the principle of no local authority having any more than its share of the UASC in the country, which was set at 0.07% of its population of children and young people. Kent's share on this basis would be 231 UASC. 137 UASC had arrived in the county so far in 2019, compared with 172 arrivals for the whole of 2018. Changes to the financial support

available had been reviewed, which would help the rates of support available for 16-17-year olds but leave a shortfall of funding for care leavers, so the County Council would continue to press for a review of this area of funding. Government funding of £407,000 had been allocated to Kent from the Controlling Migration Fund. This could be spent on housing, emotional health and welfare services and language support for UASC.

Housing-Related Support for young people – the Council’s policy on this had been reviewed early in 2019, to target key groups; children in care, care leavers and 16- and 17-year olds at risk of becoming homeless, who would previously have been housed in unregulated accommodation. New accommodation providers were being commissioned. Although there had been some problems, for example, Trinity Foyer closing, many issues were now resolved, and recent discussions with borough and district councils had been positive.

2. Mr Gough, Sarah Hammond (Director of Integrated Children’s Services, East) and Mr Dunkley then responded to comments and questions, including the following:-

- a) asked what proportion of UASC care leavers stayed in Kent after leaving care, and with how many the Council was still in contact, Ms Hammond advised that the Council was in touch with 85.2% of UASC care leavers who had ever been in the care of the county. This figure would be reported to the Department for Education in the regular return. Of the 893 UASC care leavers, 345 were living outside the County Council’s administrative area, but 254 of these were living in Medway. Because many UASC care leavers lived in Medway and the Canterbury area, money from the Controlling Migration Fund would be focussed on these areas. Mr Gough added that the services which the County Council was obliged to provide for care leavers up to the age of 25 had a take-up rate of 50% among citizen children but 100% among UASC care leavers;
- b) Nancy Sayer (Designated Consultant Nurse for Looked After Children) added that any increase in the number of UASC in the county also had an impact on NHS resources and its ability to meet its targets, for example, for initial health assessments. The East of Kent in particular had higher numbers of UASC. The NHS did not receive any additional Government funding to cope with increases in UASC numbers, and whenever the Council lobbied the Government for additional funding it would always be helpful to highlight this fact. Mr Gough undertook to address this issue with the new Immigration Minister, to seek to continue the progress which had previously been made in this area; and
- c) Mr Dunkley suggested that he write to the new Secretary of State for Education and the Children’s Minister and invite them to attend a future meeting to see how the Panel engaged and worked with young people.

3. Mr Dunkley reported on a recent event on Lifelong Links which he and Chelsea Goodwin (Apprentice Participation Worker) had attended and the work Chelsea had undertaken to ensure that the language used in the literature was as clear as possible for children and young people to understand. The Panel thanked and congratulated Chelsea on her commitment to this work and for her contribution to making the Lifelong Links project as easy as possible for young people to understand and relate to.

4. It was RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted, with thanks, and Chelsea Goodwin be thanked and congratulated on her commitment to this work and for her contribution to making the Lifelong Links project as easy as possible for young people to understand and relate to.

171. Challenge Card Update

(Item 6)

1. Jo Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager, Virtual School Kent) and Caroline Smith (Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting) introduced the report and explained that research on the feasibility of a Council Tax exemption for care leavers had been completed and that work was continuing with district and borough councils and other services which also took a share of council tax, for example, Kent Police and the Kent Fire and Rescue Service. When this was complete, meetings would take place with commissioners in each area. Mr Gough added that he would be meeting the Police and Crime Commissioner shortly and would discuss the issue.
2. The Panel was reminded that, subsequent to the challenge card being discussed at a Panel meeting, a motion was tabled at and supported unanimously by the full Council. The scheme once again received the full support of the Panel and the work being undertaken to move it forward was welcomed. Mr Dunkley advised that he hoped the exemption could be established in time for the issue of Council Tax bills for the 2020/21 financial year.
3. It was suggested that the Panel Chairman and Cabinet Member write to all elected County Councillors who also served as district and borough councillors to urge them to promote and support the exemption at their local councils.
4. It was RESOLVED that the progress achieved on the current challenge card be welcomed and the Panel Chairman and Cabinet Member write to all elected County Councillors who also served as district and borough councillors to urge them to promote and support the exemption at their local councils.
5. The Panel Chairman then suggested a new challenge: that young people ask to be invited to a meeting of the Cabinet, at which they could ask each Cabinet Member about their portfolio and what they could do within that portfolio to promote the corporate parenting role. This was welcomed.

172. Performance Scorecard for Children in Care

(Item 7)

1. Maureen Robinson (Management Information Unit Service Manager) introduced the report and explained that there had been very little change in performance since last reporting to the Panel, although there had been small reductions to some targets, including those relating to interviews with children and young people returning after episodes of being missing. Ms Hammond added that the Council did not take the decision to reduce performance targets lightly but had done so after feedback from young people that it was sometimes very difficult to talk about their reasons for going missing and that the 72-hour deadline in the performance target was too early. More would be willing to talk about their reasons if they had longer to prepare.

2. Mrs Robinson and Ms Hammond responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) the adoption process in Kent seemed to be quicker than in other areas but was held up by the court process. Ms Hammond explained that the Family Division, a group of 20 High Court Judges, had a new President, Sir Andrew McFarlane, who had stated his commitment to ensuring that decisions made in adoption proceedings had taken account of any and all family members who could offer the child a home. Identifying and assessing each of these could take a lot of time. She confirmed that Kent's adoption process had a good reputation nationally;
- b) asked about a very recent increase in the number of children in care being frequently absent from school, Paul Manning (Deputy Head for Key Stage 5, Virtual School Kent (VSK)) explained that VSK was aware of this issue and was working closely with schools to address it. Ms Bride added that this was probably due to the time of year. As the end of the school year approached, some young people, particularly those not intending to go on to the next academic year, stopped bothering to attend school; and
- c) asked if these absences were more prevalent in primary or secondary schools, Ms Hammond undertook to look into this and suggested that this detail be included in the next scorecard.

3. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the children in care scorecard be noted, with thanks, and future scorecards include detail of the percentage split of seasonal absences between primary and secondary schools.

173. Kent Fostering Service Annual Report 2018/2019 and Kent Fostering Service Business Plan 2019

(Item 8)

1. Caroline Smith introduced the report and introduced Mark Vening, Head of Fostering, West, who had been appointed as part of the service restructure in April 2019. With Nicola Anthony, Head of Fostering, East, Ms Smith responded to comments and questions from the Panel, including the following:-

- a) the Chairman referred to the range of community events around the county which the fostering team had attended to promote the work of the fostering service and further the recruitment campaign;
- b) concern was expressed that the number of foster carers had fallen and that recent promotional events had not generated the interest hoped for. What might be needed was a more innovative approach. Ms Smith explained that a national shortage of foster carers had prompted a different approach to promotion and recruitment. The recent recruitment event in Maidstone, which had been jointly arranged with the Kent Adoption Service, Catch 22 and Medway Council, had been an experimental approach, however this did not attract the expected level of attendance. More smaller-scale drop-in events were being arranged, for example, using local libraries and coffee

shops. Feedback from events had indicated that people would welcome smaller, local, informal opportunities to find out about fostering. Ms Anthony added that 28 new foster carers had been recruited so far this year, which was an increase on the same time last year;

- c) asked what proportion of foster carers had their own children, either younger or adult, and how the Council could reach those parents via promotions at schools, Ms Anthony advised that the majority of foster carers had older children but those with school-age children were being reached via initiatives with schools, for example, by including promotional material in the child's school book bag; and
- d) asked about the Sense of Belonging service, Ms Smith advised that, due to the popularity of this service, the Sense of Belonging team would be extended to include placement stability workers, which would increase the social workers' capacity to undertake follow-up work. Using a range of outdoor centres would help support placement stability.

- 2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the Kent Fostering Annual Report and Business Plan be noted, with thanks.

174. Review of Corporate Parenting Pilot Scheme: Kent County Council acting as a rent guarantor for Care Leavers, including accommodation types
(Item 9)

1. Paul Startup (Head of Care Leavers 18+ Service) introduced the report and summarised the outcomes of the pilot of the rent guarantor scheme, which had run successfully for six months. There had been no defaulters and no rent arrears and hence no cost to the County Council. All those who had been helped by the pilot scheme were happily accommodated and staying put, except one who had left a university place for reasons unrelated to any accommodation issues. To help develop and promote the scheme, the service was seeking a Member Champion and to change the strategy to seek young people earlier who could benefit from the scheme, allowing them time to establish themselves and build a reputation and a good relationship with a landlord. An example of this was a shared housing scheme in Canterbury which trained young people in preparation for independent living.

2. The success of the pilot scheme was welcomed and Ms Sarah Hamilton volunteered to be the Member Champion.

3. Concern was expressed that the scheme would target and benefit young people who presented no risk in terms of defaulting on rent payments at the expense of those who were less stable but who still needed accommodation. Mr Startup assured the Panel that the assessment process in the scheme sought to avoid causing any stress to young people who were not ready to take on a tenancy by encouraging them to do so prematurely. It was important also to consider that anyone who was not sufficiently mature to commit to and manage a tenancy successfully would present a higher risk to the County Council as a potential defaulter. He emphasised, however, that the County Council was not excluding young people on this basis but would provide training to prepare and support more young people towards being able to take on tenancies. He assured the Panel that anyone unable to secure a tenancy using the scheme was not at risk of becoming

homeless. The County Council's range of accommodation options offered care leavers options to suit different abilities and preferences and sought to build their confidence to take on and manage their own accommodation, of whatever type. Ms Hammond added that, although the County Council had a duty to ensure that its care leavers were appropriately accommodated, it did not have a duty to provide that accommodation. She advised the Panel that the 26 young people who were part of the pilot scheme would not have been able to manage a tenancy otherwise as they had access to no other form of guarantee.

4. It was suggested that a further update on the development of the rent guarantor scheme be made to the Panel in six months' time.

5. It was RESOLVED that:-

- a) the review of the rent guarantor pilot scheme, and the information set out in the report about other types of accommodation, be noted;
- b) the rent guarantor scheme continue to be developed, with Ms Sarah Hamilton acting as a Member Champion of the scheme; and
- c) a further update report on the development of the scheme be made to the Panel in six months' time.

175. Narrowing the attainment gap between Children in Care and their peers
(Item 10)

1. Paul Manning introduced the report in place of Tony Doran, Head Teacher, Virtual School Kent.

2. It was RESOLVED that the work of the Virtual School Kent in promoting the attainment and progress of its children and young people in care be noted and welcomed.