

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

---

### CHILDREN'S CHAMPIONS BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children's Champions Board held in Swale 3, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 26 September 2007.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mrs V J Dagger, Mrs M Newell, Dr T R Robinson and Mr M J Vye

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr K Arthur, Head of Children's Safeguards Service, CFE; Mrs K Lambourn, Policy and Performance Manager, Child Protection, CFE; and Miss T A Grayell, Democratic Services Officer

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

##### **12. Membership**

*(Item A1)*

The Chairman reported that Dr T R Robinson and Mr J D Simmonds had joined the Board in place of Mr M C Dance and Mr C T Wells.

##### **13. Election of Vice-Chairman**

*(Item A3)*

The Chairman proposed, and Mrs V J Dagger seconded, that Mr M J Vye be elected Vice-Chairman of the Board.

*Agreed without a vote*

##### **14. Minutes of Board Meetings held on (a) 14 March 2007 and (b) 23 May 2007**

*(Item A5)*

(1) RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2007 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2007 are already approved and signed, and are included for reference only.

(2) There were no matters arising.

##### **15. Kent Multi-Agency Public Protection (MAPPA) Update - Presentation by Kent Police**

*(Item B1)*

*(Presentation by Detective Inspector Derek Cuff, Operations Manager, Public Protection Unit, Kent Police).*

(1) DI Cuff presented a series of slides which set out the history, purpose and process of the MAPPA system, including the categories and levels of risk under which offenders are listed, and how each level is handled.

(2) Arising from DI Cuff's presentation, and in response to questions raised by Members, the following points were highlighted:-

- (a) Kent is particularly vigorous at mapping violent offenders.
- (b) The Violent and Sex Offenders Register (ViSOR) includes more than those who are convicted of offences. Potentially dangerous individuals are also included.
- (c) Internet offending is a huge area of current concern. Kent has the UK's most sophisticated digital computer system which helps trace and identify internet offenders, but police forces in the UK still need to keep up with the fast- changing technology and offenders' knowledge of it.
- (d) Members expressed grave concern at there being no Government-set performance indicator for child protection work. It was suggested that the Board write to the Minister for Children and Young People, Beverley Hughes MP, to lobby for a performance indicator to be introduced.
- (e) Young offenders were also a growing problem for the police and Children's Social Services, as young offenders may not qualify for help/treatment until and unless they are convicted. While on remand, they have Looked After Child (LAC) status, but do not keep this once sentenced, unless they were LAC at the time of the offence. They are then classified as Children in Need, and Children's Social Services, together with the Youth Offender Service, work with them and put together a plan for the time of discharge. While in custody they are placed where services are best able to meet their needs, or where a place is available, and this is sometimes far from their families.
- (f) Board Members offered to help, in whatever way possible, with publicity for DI Cuff's team's child protection campaigns.

(3) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the excellent presentation be noted, with thanks; and
- (b) the Board writes to the Minister for Children and Young People to express its grave concern that no Government-set performance indicator for child protection work exists, and lobby for one to be introduced.

## **16. Children's Safeguards Unit Annual Report**

*(Item B2)*

(1) Mr Arthur introduced the Annual Report and answered questions from Members. Points highlighted in the presentation and in discussion were as follows:-

- (a) Information from schools, regarding allegations against staff, and investigations, is gathered by the Unit and shared with Clusters via the Local Education Officer. Although anonymous, all information is still handled with great care and sensitivity and has a very limited circulation. It is necessary to gather such information to feed into the Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB), and a designated officer takes on this responsibility. Local authorities also have a duty to provide the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) with annual data.
- (b) All Kent schools, including special and residential schools, now undertake retrospective Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on all staff employed before 1991, as well as on all new appointments. Mr Arthur explained that he chairs the KSCB 'Safe Recruitment and Employment Sub Group' the membership of which also includes the previous speaker, DI Cuff, and Mrs Lambourn. This group is responsible for developing safe recruitment standards in all agencies that work with children on behalf of the KSCB.
- (c) Mr Arthur explained that an allegation of physical abuse can very easily arise from an incident in which a member of staff has had to physically restrain pupils involved in a fight. The intervention may well follow exactly the careful guidelines which are set down for staff, but an aggrieved pupil, whose perception of the incident was different, might tell their parents, who then complain directly to the police. The majority of cases, when investigated, are found to be unsubstantiated, as staff in most cases had acted appropriately to keep a situation safe. A way of reducing the number of parental complaints is for staff to contact parents and inform them of the incident when it happens and send home a copy of the incident report.

(2) Members shared officers' concerns about two issues:-

- (a) An increase in the number of recorded incidents of sexual behaviour by children against other children, whether these happen at home or in school. It is known from work in progress with other agencies that there are currently 52 children of school age on the Sex Offenders Register. The Kent Safeguarding Children Board will shortly be considering a report on the issue, which will set out the nature of the problem and what measures, including staff training on managing risk, are being put in place to address it. A difficulty around this issue is the need to distinguish between natural adolescent experimentation and inappropriate, threatening or coercive behaviour.
- (b) There is an ongoing problem in following up investigations on supply teachers against whom allegations may have been made in previous placements. Supply agencies do not have a disciplinary procedure and, as supply staff can move very easily from agency to agency, they are very difficult to trace. These concerns have been fed into the DCSF as a national response is required.

(3) RESOLVED that the report and the presentation be noted, with thanks, and the development of retrospective Criminal Records Bureau checking for all school staff, set out in paragraph (1)(b) above, be welcomed.

## **17. Kent Child Witness Service - Presentation by Denzil Peach, Kent Child Witness Service**

*(Item B3)*

(1) Mr Peach and Mrs Utting introduced the Kent Child Witness Service (KCWS) and outlined its origins and role, and the framework within which it operates. They also showed a video which followed a young woman attending Court to give evidence. Arising from their presentation, and in response to questions from Members, the following points were highlighted:-

- (a) KCWS was established in 1997 by a partnership of Victim Support, the Police, the Crown Prosecution Service and Social Services, in response to an identified need to support children who need to attend Court proceedings to give evidence. These partners still serve together on KCWS's committee.
- (b) The service originally supported 100 children when it was established, but has grown since to help many more. Many attend open court, but 'special measures' (for example, giving evidence using a video link or from behind a screen) is increasing now. 750 children used the video link service to give evidence in 2006/2007.
- (c) The service works with young people aged 17 years and under, attending both Magistrates and Crown Courts. The service is totally impartial and works with prosecution and defence witnesses. The process followed is exactly the same for each.
- (d) The role of the KCWS, once a child has been referred to them by the Police, is to prepare that child to attend Court by visiting them at home and talking to them about the procedure, using literature appropriate to their age group and offering a pre-trial familiarisation visit to the Court premises.
- (e) There are very definite guidelines within which the service has to work, to avoid compromising the case and its own role and integrity:-
  - (i) when visiting a child at home, a volunteer cannot discuss the case or the child's experience;
  - (ii) the volunteer cannot coach the child in the evidence they will be giving;
  - (iii) volunteers have to have an understanding of the rules of evidence and be aware of what behaviour might contaminate or compromise that evidence;

- (iv) a volunteer must not transport the child/family to court as this may leave the way open for suggestions that the case might have been discussed on the way;
- (v) volunteers report back to KCWS on their visit to a child and specify what was covered in it. They stick closely to the set literature and standard procedures and approaches.
- (f) In visiting a child at home, KCWS volunteers have the opportunity to build a relationship with the family. The family is often more anxious about the Court appearance than the child.
- (g) All KCWS staff and volunteers are CRB checked. Volunteers who wish to work with the service must already be experienced Victim Support volunteers. Volunteers are given 7 days' core training, as a Community Services Volunteer or Witness Service Volunteer and those wishing to become KCWS staff receive a further 2 days' training arranged and delivered by Kent Police.
- (h) Courts are able to offer some flexibility over how a young person presents their evidence. A request for 'special measures' should be made 28 days in advance of the hearing date, although this can be challenged if it is thought unreasonable, and may not ultimately be granted by the judge or magistrates. Unfortunately, at present, giving evidence using a video link would mean the defendant could see the child, but giving evidence from behind a screen in the court room means the defendant could not see the child. The two parties are kept separate throughout the proceedings. Special measures would mean an interpreter or British Sign Language signer can be arranged to assist a child if needed. A child with learning difficulties can have their caseworker present if both parties in the case agree.

(2) Members were most impressed with the care taken to support and accommodate a child through the Court process, the excellent work of the KCWS staff and volunteers, and the quality of the preparative literature. Members were also offered the opportunity to visit the Court to see the facilities available and arrangements made for child witnesses.

(3) RESOLVED that the excellent presentation, video and information given in response to questions be noted, with thanks, and Kent Child Witness Service staff and volunteers be commended on their excellent work.