

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S CHAMPIONS BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children's Champions Board held in the Swale 1, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 23 September 2009.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mrs P T Cole, Mr G Cooke, Mrs P A V Stockell and Mr M J Vye

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs S V Hohler

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs K Weiss (Head of Policy & Performance), Ms D Marriott (Acting Safeguarding Policy & Performance Manager), Mr M Ayre (Senior Policy Manager), Mrs J Doherty (Policy Manager) and Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

7. Membership

(Item A1)

Members noted that Mrs P A V Stockell had joined the Board to fill the vacancy previously listed.

8. Minutes of Board Meetings held on (a) 11 March and (b) 20 May 2009, and (c) 21 July 2009

(Item A4)

(1) RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 20 May and 21 July 2009 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman. The minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2009 are already signed and had been included for reference only.

(2) Arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 20 May, Members raised the following points:-

- (a) Before the June elections, the former Cabinet Member had been asked to meet the Board to talk about his role, and the Vice-Chairman asked that the new Cabinet Member for CFE do the same. Mrs Hohler agreed to this request and offered a twice-yearly 'Cabinet Member's update' item for the Board; and
- (b) The Vice-Chairman asked that discussion with the Director of CFE take place to ensure that the Board's key concerns of safeguarding and educational attainment of Looked After Children (LAC) are included on the agenda for the Head Teachers' Conference in 2010. This request was supported by officers as it would help keep these issues in the spotlight. In addition, Mrs Stockell asked if the invitation to the

conference could be widened to allow any Board Member to attend if they wish. Miss Grayell was asked to follow up both these points.

9. CPR3 Child Protection Statistical Return

(Item B1)

(1) Ms Marriott introduced the report and she and Mrs Weiss answered questions put by Members, explaining the following:-

- (a) Central Government kept nationwide data submitted by all local authorities, which all local authorities could consult to identify patterns and make comparisons;
- (b) All UK local authorities had shown an increase in the number of child protection referrals since the death of Baby Peter in 2007. In Kent the increase had been 30 – 35 %. If the whole increase could be attributed to heightened anxiety following the death of Baby Peter, professionals would expect to see a peak and then a gentle decrease, but instead the pattern had been a gradual, uniform increase;
- (c) Although many of the referrals received were from the public, most were from the Police, and Police referrals showed the biggest increase;
- (d) There was always some element of inappropriate referrals but even if these cases do not go as far as an initial assessment stage they take time and resources to process. It is important to find out why referrals had been made and what could be done to address the level of inappropriate referrals; and
- (e) Children who do not meet the official threshold for services may be missing out on support, so there was a need to see what could be done to help meet their needs. KCC's partners needed to be helped to understand thresholds.

(2) RESOLVED that the report be welcomed and information set out in it and in response to Members' questions be noted, with thanks.

10. Summary of Protecting Children in Kent review - oral

(Item B2)

(1) Mr Ayre gave an oral update of the review which had been set up as a result of the death of Baby Peter in Haringey in 2007. The overall aim of the review was to see whether or not Kent's child protection practice was fitter for purpose than it was before the death of Baby Peter, and whether or not Lord Laming's second report had left Kent better placed. He emphasised that the finding of the review was that child protection practice in Kent was fundamentally safe.

(2) Phases 1 and 2 of the review had been reported to special meetings of the Board, on 12 Feb and 21 July respectively, and the final phase would be reported to the full County Council on 10 December 2009. This final phase of the review would include the effectiveness of inter-agency working and this would include work

mentioned in the previous item about thresholds and how various partner organisations and agencies understood and applied them.

(3) The review had shown up that even agencies which had no child protection responsibility (eg District Councils) were now conscious of the need to check their staff's knowledge of child protection issues and procedures.

(4) RESOLVED that the information given in the oral update be noted, with thanks.

11. Children's Social Services Annual Activity Report for Kent Safeguarding Children Board, 1 April 2008 - 31 March 2009

(Item B3)

(1) Ms Marriott introduced the item and, with Mrs Weiss, answered questions from Members. The following points were highlighted:-

- (a) The difficult economic climate had not caused any appreciable difference in the number of domestic violence cases, as Children's Social Services' threshold for intervention looked at parenting skills and not family income level. A high number of referrals from the Police were related to domestic violence, so some joint work will be done to help CSS and the Police understand each other's processes. There were two key issues when looking at domestic violence – prevention and how to manage a case once arisen;
- (b) Kent had a higher level of child protection referrals than many other local authorities, although the way in which they are processed in each authority made the outcomes different. Other local authorities might show fewer child protection referrals but they take more of them to Section 47 Conference. Kent takes a lower proportion of its referrals to conference but a higher percentage of those end up having a Child Protection Plan. Comparing figs from authority to authority was difficult as the picture was very complex, with many variables;
- (c) Many initial referrals do not meet the threshold for CSS services but are redirected to other organisations and schemes that can help. CSS always look at available services as flexibly as possible to best meet the needs of each family. However, a family may not want the alternative service offered, or the other service may not be able to respond fast enough if the family had come seeking help at a time of crisis;
- (d) Referrals which do not proceed to service delivery are always recorded on a database, so any future referral for the same family or child can be cross-referenced to previous records;
- (e) What is most important is to choose the most suitable route for each child. A decision to take a case to conference would only be made if it was considered absolutely necessary. Conferences were avoided if possible as the process is stressful for the family. Some other local

authorities have more conferences as their processes are not so geared to avoiding them;

- (f) A small number of young people aged 17 shows up in the figures reported, and these are likely to be high-risk adolescents who have not been able to settle in the accommodation offered to them, and perhaps have mental health and/or substance misuse problems. When they reach 18 they are no longer subject to a Child Protection Plan, but those with mental health and/or substance misuse problems can be offered a good transition process into Adult Social Services;
 - (g) 45% of referrals are recoded as being due to 'family dysfunction' – an ISC category which includes a range of groups such as Children In Need. It is likely that this category includes many Police referrals;
 - (h) What would be useful for Members to see in the future is not only a breakdown of the initial referral figures but a similar breakdown of those cases which arrive at the initial assessment stage, to allow comparison and a chance to identify patterns; and
 - (i) Although the information gathered is believed to be accurate, the ICS system is still not working properly. Its documentation had to be re-designed and will need to be piloted by being tested in one district before going live. It is expected that ICS will be fully operational once again in April 2010. Members were reassured that electronic systems were always backed up by good paper records.
- (2) RESOLVED that the information given in the report and in response to Members' questions be noted, with thanks.

12. Private Fostering - Annual Report

(Item B4)

Mrs S Hammond, Policy and Performance Officer, was in attendance for this item

(1) Mrs Hammond introduced the report and defined private fostering as an arrangement made privately, between a child's parent and someone who is not a relative, for the care of a child. To be classified as private fostering, an arrangement would have to be intended to last for more than 28 days, and apply to a young person up to the age of 16 (18 if disabled). No local authority is involved in making the arrangement, and no local authority money is payable in support of the arrangement, yet the local authority is required to assess the arrangement to check that it is suitable and meets the child's needs. Someone who is taking on a private fostering arrangement has to notify the local authority of the arrangements, yet many people simply do not know about this requirement and do not define what they are doing as formal fostering, and the local authority has no way of checking that they had been notified of private fostering arrangements going on. Mrs Weiss added that Victoria Climbié had been in a private fostering arrangement when she died.

(2) In discussion, and in Mrs Hammond's and Mrs Weiss's responses to Members' questions, the following points were highlighted:-

- (a) A parent specifying in their will that they wish their child to be brought up by a godparent would be entering the child into a private fostering arrangement, and their solicitor would have to set up a transfer of parental responsibility for both parties to sign;
- (b) In the UK, it is estimated that approx 20,000 children are in private fostering arrangements. Referrals to the private fostering team are very low and come mainly from Children's Social Services (CSS), and many private fostering arrangements are discovered accidentally. In the 2008/09 financial year, the team had had 72 notifications of private fostering, and 43 children were in private fostering at the year end. As arrangements are temporary and transient, it is difficult to identify an exact number at any one time;
- (c) private fostering is not necessarily easier to identify when a child enters school. Admissions forms for schools are not standard and do not contain the same information. Adults signing a school form can specify that they are a 'parent or guardian', but are not required to give any further detail;
- (d) the private fostering team was working hard to increase the information it was able to get from schools, and a multi-agency partnership project in Ashford was looking into barriers to information being passed through;
- (e) Awareness of the issue and the need to identify private fostering in a school could be included in the training for School Governors;
- (f) Parents entering into private fostering arrangements could be encouraged to identify themselves as a way of accessing the extra support that their family might need, but it would need to be emphasised that this support could not be financial;
- (g) the private fostering team had been awarded the maximum possible score in a recent Ofsted inspection which had included visits to/interviews with young people and carers and social workers; and
- (h) The British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) had used its conference to raise awareness of private fostering and the key issues of safeguarding and the need to identify vulnerable children.

(3) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the information in the report and given in response to Members' questions be noted, with thanks; and
- (b) the private fostering team be congratulated on achieving an excellent Ofsted assessment.