

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, 10 March 2010.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mr M J Vye (Vice-Chairman), Mrs P T Cole, Mr G Cooke, Mrs V J Dagger and Mr L B Ridings

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Gilroy (Chief Executive), Ms R Turner (Managing Director Children, Families and Education), Ms H Davies (Director For Specialist Children's Services Group), Mrs K Weiss (Head of Policy & Performance), Mr K Arthur (Head of Children's Safeguards Service), Mrs J Doherty (Policy Manager), Ms D Marriott (Acting Safeguarding Policy & Performance Manager), Mr P Thomason (Independent Child Protection Consultant), Mr D Worlock (Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board) and Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

19. Minutes of Meeting held on 2 December 2009 *(Item A3)*

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2009 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

20. Matters Arising from Minutes

Housing for Care Leavers

1. Mrs Doherty reported that the Children's Trust Executive Board (CTEB) had received a report on housing issues and the Supporting People Draft Strategy at its last meeting. The KCT County Board also now includes representatives from housing in its membership.

2. Mr Ridings added that, although housing was not a KCC responsibility, the KCC needed to do all it could to help District Councils and ensure that they met their responsibility for housing young people, who always seemed to be given the lowest priority. For some District Councils, housing was a particular burden, so KCC would have to give these Councils extra support. Mr Gilroy added a doubt that the Government and District Councils could fully afford all their responsibilities to young care leavers up to the age of 24.

3. In answer to a question, Mr Gilroy clarified that KCC was able to act as a guarantor for rent payments, if it wished to, and Mrs Allen added that some District Councils, e.g., Dartford, guaranteed rent payments, while other District Councils did not. Mr Gilroy said that the Chief Executives' Group in Kent would shortly be considering a paper which would address the issue of rent guarantees by District Councils and the need to reinstate the former 'Crash pad' scheme of emergency accommodation.

Looked After Children placed in Kent by Other Local Authorities

1. Mr Ridings reported that the outcome of the meeting with the Government Office for the South East on 8 December had been disappointing. Mr Gilroy added that further dialogue with Government was necessary to address the issue of LAC being placed in Kent by other local authorities, and a mechanism was needed which would make it impossible, or would at least impose a financial penalty to make it very difficult financially, to place a child in Kent. Kent should be more aggressive in addressing this issue. All Kent Chief Executives and Leaders had recently signed a protocol to state that none of them would place any child in Margate.

2. The Board RESOLVED to place an item on the agenda for its May meeting to address this issue further.

21. Chairman's Announcements

(Item A4)

The Chairman reported that the Board's first informal meeting at County Hall with representatives of the Children In Care Council (CICC) had been enjoyable and useful, and she looked forward to welcoming representatives to the Board's meetings. She stated her intention to write to the CICC's Apprentice, Scott King, to invite him to attend a future meeting of the Board.

22. Oral update on the progress of the Protecting Children in Kent Review

(Item B1)

1. Mr Gilroy and Mr Thomason summarised the content and findings of the earlier two phases of the review and tabled documents, which included letters between Mr Gilroy and Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families. They explained that the final report of the review – titled 'Safeguarding Children in Kent: Defending and Developing the Service' - would be reported to the full County Council at its meeting on 1 April 2010.

2. Mr Gilroy set out some of the key findings and areas of recommendation which would appear in the final report, as follows:-

- a) Kent has the lowest child homicide rate in the UK, and the UK as a whole is a safe place in terms of child safeguarding, compared with many other European countries. The serious case review data prepared by Loughborough University, which will be included in the report, generally shows Kent in a good light;
- b) in terms of staffing and training, Kent has a good record of innovation, continuity and low turnover, and gives good quality supervision;
- c) the Integrated Children's System (ICS) is not fit for purpose, as 80% of practitioners' time is tied up in bureaucracy and administration. Given the increase in the number of referrals in the past year (previously reported as 46%, but now 22%, as the way in which they are recorded has changed), and the likelihood that this increase will continue, this is unsustainable. This view is supported by the Local Government Association and researchers at Loughborough University;

- d) Recommendation 19 of Lord Laming's report, that every referral should have a full assessment, is not sustainable or affordable, and money made available to fund these assessments will not directly benefit Kent's children. The level of support for Recommendation 19 among bodies dealing with Children's Social Work has not been clear;
- e) a few Children's Social Work (CSW) teams in Kent have a vacancy rate of 40%, and the recent and ongoing programme of international recruitment will not address this. The report will recommend that Kent rethink its position regarding university trainees. When such trainees have been recruited in the past, they have stayed in the job and been successful;
- f) the report will recommend multi-disciplinary training in Kent, delivered by the Universities in partnership with the Police, Children's Social Services and Health Visitors. Training could be delivered by actors in realistic home settings, and could be used to deliver Child Protection training to a range of final year students, including trainee teachers, GPs, Social Workers, nurses, etc;
- g) physical and sexual abuse is and always has been very difficult to deal with, and shared training will increase practitioners' confidence in dealing with it;
- h) thresholds should be clearly understood by all partners. Although only the Police, Social Services and the NSPCC have the statutory power to investigate Child Protection incidents, other organisations also have a responsibility, but it is difficult to agree among partners where thresholds are;
- i) the report will suggest collective responsibility for verification supervision, where CSW teams are particularly short-staffed; and
- j) the report will recommend a consultant post reporting directly to the Head of Paid Service and the Director of CFE. This post would have a strategic role and give an overview across the whole KCC, allowing an objective check.

3. Mr Gilroy concluded by saying that the future challenges that KCC will face in Child Protection work are unprecedented, but that Kent would approach these from a strong position with a background of good practice.

4. In discussion, and in response to questions, the following points were highlighted:-

- a) issues cited by Social Workers leaving the job were too much bureaucracy and admin work as well as the weight of the workload. Kent at best had had a 4 – 8% vacancy rate, but was now using agency staff to cover, which was not a desirable situation;

- b) Mr Gilroy said he would have reinstated the USA exchange programme, but had not included this as one of his recommendations;
- c) Ms Davies pointed out that, although 10 teams had been identified as having a 40% vacancy rate, the average vacancy rate across CSW teams was 29%, and had reduced since to 26%. Mr Gilroy agreed that the general picture in Kent was good, but that an interim arrangement was needed when the rate was particularly high;
- d) Kent could try other models for its CSW teams, such as the model trialled by Hackney Council. KCC Members and the Director of Specialist Children's Services were to visit Hackney shortly to see if Kent could learn from their experiences;
- e) all the high profile Child Protection cases which Kent had seen had involved families which were already known to Social Services, and the issues involved in these cases were familiar. New Social Workers needed to be familiar with and proficient in the 'sharp end of the job' as well as the preventative agenda; and
- g) Mr Worlock asked that the Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) receive a copy of Mr Gilroy's final report when it went to the County Council. He added that the KSCB had a very strong quality assurance mechanism in place and would further strengthen this in the next year.

5. RESOLVED that:-

- a) Mr Gilroy and his team be thanked for their work on the review and the preparation of the final report; and
- b) the Children's Champions Board recommends that the final report of the review be considered by the Cabinet on 29 March and the Vulnerable Children and Partnerships CFEPOSC on 31 March, before going to full County Council at its meeting on 1 April.

23. The Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA)

(Item B2)

The Chairman secured the Board's agreement to consider this and the following items as urgent business, as the papers had not been placed in the public domain with the required notice.

1. Mrs Weiss introduced the new ISA, which had been established in October 2009 to fulfil the recommendation of the Bichard report that one overall registration authority should cover all people who work with children and vulnerable people of all ages. Mr Arthur expanded on this by confirming that people need only register once to cover different types of involvement. Registration would be phased in over three years, first targeting staff who are new to the profession, then established staff who change jobs and finally existing staff within the children's workforce.

2. Mr Arthur highlighted a major area of concern; that the new regulations do not include any requirement for a self-employed person (e.g., a music teacher or language tutor) or anyone who might be employed using a direct payment, (e.g., commissioned directly by a parent to work with a disabled child), to register. These concerns had been expressed in writing to the ISA and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) on behalf of the Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB), via the Safe Recruitment and Employment Sub-Group.

3. In discussion, and in Mrs Weiss's and Mr Arthur's responses to questions from Members, the following points were highlighted:-

- a) the implementation and monitoring of registration would be the responsibility of the personnel team within each KCC Directorate;
- b) a frequency test would be applied to identify who would and would not need to register, and the Secretary of State recently wrote to all local authorities clarifying this issue. For instance, a visiting author who goes into a school occasionally to help with a reading scheme would not be required to register, but someone attending more than once a week would be;
- c) the cost of the single, transferable, registration for paid staff is £64, including the CRB check, but volunteers registering would not have to pay this;
- d) the new arrangements applied only within the UK, but the existing CRB checking system, or an equivalent of it, applied in most countries, particularly within the commonwealth. Staff coming to work from abroad would bring with them whatever equivalent criminal record check existed in their home country, and this should be verified;
- e) having a fully-vetted person in charge of a group – e.g., a scout group - would not obviate the need for any other adult involved in that group to be properly CRB checked and registered; and
- f) a public education campaign might be needed, via KSCB, to introduce and clarify the new requirements, so that all sorts of groups and clubs would be clear and confident of their status and what was required of them and their participants.

4. RESOLVED that the report and the information given in response to Members' questions be noted, with thanks.

24. Discussion of how ongoing Child Protection training should be delivered to Members (Item B3)

The Board considered that Child Protection training for Members had been adequately covered in the extensive induction process following the 2009 Elections, and that the training work undertaken by Mr Arthur's team was covered by the content of the Annual Report at item B4 on this agenda.

25. Children's Safeguard Unit Annual Report, for 2008/09 Academic Year
(Item B4)

1. Mr Arthur introduced the report and he and Mrs Weiss answered questions from Members, as follows:-

- a) the report highlighted training provided for Designated Child Protection Teachers but did not mention supervision of staff as advocated by Laming, and these were big issues for schools. Head Teachers and Governing bodies were expected to provide supervision but in reality this was very difficult to do;
- b) training was delivered to all schools and early years settings by the Children's Safeguards Team, but only Academies, Further Education Colleges and Independent Schools were currently charged for this service; Mr Arthur has been asked to present a paper to the Senior Management Team of CFE that considers a charging structure for all training in the future;
- c) Ofsted had recently become more rigorous in assessing the safeguarding policy and practice in a school, and the level required to secure a 'satisfactory' score was now higher. It was also recognised that safeguarding applies a 'limiting judgement' which can impact on the overall inspection outcome for the school;
- d) Over one third of allegations involve a referral to the Police and Children's Social Services but very few proceed to court. Allegations of physical abuse have to have clear evidence before they will be taken forward, but all allegations of sexual abuse will automatically be taken forward. However, very few sexual abuse allegations result in a successful court case, either because the evidence is insufficient or the child does not prove to be a reliable witness, due to communication difficulties. National statistics provided by the DCSF suggest that only 5% of all allegations lead to a conviction;
- e) the Children's Safeguards Team works with schools to improve the quality of information made available to support an allegation, to make cases easier to investigate and to establish a clear record of the outcome of an allegation for the protection of the employer and the individual; and
- f) Mr Warlock commented that in his opinion this was an excellent report that demonstrated a high level of safeguarding activity that any local authority in the country would be proud of.

2. RESOLVED that the report and the information given in response to Members' questions be noted, with thanks.