

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND PARTNERSHIPS POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children, Families & Education - Vulnerable Children and Partnerships Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 31st March, 2010.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mr A H T Bowles, Mrs P T Cole, Mr H J Craske, Mrs T Dean (Substitute for Mr M J Vye), Mr D A Hirst, Mr S Manion, Mr M J Northey, Mr C T Wells and Mrs E Green

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES: Dr D Wadman

PARENT GOVERNORS: Mr P Myers

PRESENT: Mr L B Ridings, Deputy Lead Member, Vulnerable Children

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms H Davies (Director For Specialist Children's Services Group), Mrs J Wainwright (Director Commissioning (Specialist Services)), Mr P Gilroy (Chief Executive), Mr C Feltham (Head Of SEN & Resources), Mrs J Ackroyd (Trust Development Manager) and Mrs C A Singh (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

21. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2009

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2009 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

22. Director of Specialist Services, Director of Commissioning and Partnerships and Deputy Cabinet Member's Verbal Update

(Item B1)

(Verbal update by Mr R Ridings, Deputy Lead Member for Vulnerable Children and Ms H Davies, Director of Specialist Services and Mrs J Wainwright, Director of Commissioning and Partnerships)

(1) The Chairman asked Mr Ridings and Ms Davies and Mrs Wainwright to give their verbal updates.

(2) Ms Davies explained that the key issues that she would be speaking on were within the reports before the Members for the meeting and therefore she would wait to speak to each of the papers to avoid pre-empting Members discussions.

(3) Mrs Wainwright explained to the Committee that Mrs Turner, Managing Director was unable to attend the meeting and had asked her to give a update on the Restructure of the Children, Families and Education Directorate. The Consultation was still in the 3 month consultation period of the review. To ensure

that this was a full consultation process, meetings had been held with staff and managers seeking their comments and giving them the opportunity to ask questions, to ensure that they were properly engaged. Mrs Wainwright advised that the comments were being looked at as the process went along so that suitable issues raised through those comments could be introduced incrementally. The feedback on the meetings had been positive. There would be feedback into the exact arrangements in May 2010.

(4) Mrs Wainwright advised that the work programme was ongoing with a determination to produce a clearer Commissioning Framework by her Department with the cooperation of the Children's Trust Partnership. She advised that a draft was being produced on the final statutory guidance on the Children's Trust Partnership, which would be presented to a future meeting of the POSC.

(5) Mrs Wainwright concluded by informing Members of the new arrangements for dealing with complaints against schools and others. Complaints would now go through the schools and governing bodies. The first phase was due to commence on 1 April 2010 and Kent had agreed to be in the second phase, which was due to commence in September 2010. It was anticipated that any issues on the complaints procedure would be raised in the first phase and would therefore be better for those in the second phase and the second phase offered free training for staff and those not in the second phase would incur the cost of that training.

(6) Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments which included the following:

(7) In response to a question by Mr Manion, Mrs Wainwright advised that there was no information on the training at present as it was still a pilot, but she had produced a short report for her Senior Management Team that she would share with Members outside the meeting.

(8) In reply to a question by Mr Hirst, Mrs Wainwright explained that the governors had not been consulted yet as this was going through as an Act of Parliament.

(9) Dr Wadman was interested to note that the Local Authority was not going to be the final voice on a complaint.

(10) RESOLVED that the responses to the questions asked by the Members and the verbal updates be noted.

23. Champions Board Minutes 10 March 2010

(Item B2)

(1) The Chairman agreed to take the Minutes page by page to give Members the opportunity to discuss the issues raised in the Minutes of the Children's Champions Board that were within the remit of this Committee.

(2) In response to a question by Mrs Dean, Ms Davies advised that the problems with the ICS information system for Children's Social Services were a national

issue. Kent had been working to modify the system. As from 1 April there would be 10 new exemplars that had been tested and the feedback had been positive by being more user friendly. The system would be kept under review.

(3) In answer to a question by Mrs Dean, Ms Davies explained that the Social Worker vacancies did not include agency staff.

(4) In reply to a question by Mrs Dean, Mrs Davies advised that the visit to Hackney Council, London, was an extremely thought provoking experience. Hackney was looking to get a balance of social workers and other agencies to assist with the increasing work load. Hackney Council had a good record of using and working with other agencies and a different role for their administration staff. They also had a significant range of family services, which Ms Davies felt she would like to take time to consult with staff on how this could work in Kent.

(5) RESOLVED that the responses to questions made by Members and the Minutes of the Children's Champions Board be noted.

24. Kent Children's Trust and Local Partnership Arrangements

(Item B3)

(Report by Mrs J Wainwright, Director Commissioning & Partnerships)

(1) Members considered a progress report on the development of the Kent Children's Trust and local partnership arrangements and an overview of the process for preparing a new Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) by April 2011.

(2) The Chairman asked Mrs Wainwright to introduce the report. Mrs Wainwright gave a brief presentation on the key issues in the report and on appendix 1 and encouraged Members to visit the Trust Partnership in their local areas.

(3) Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments which included the following :

(4) Dr Wadman stated that when there was a major change taking place Members should be able to monitor and have the opportunity to discuss the review to ensure that it was streamline to eliminate duplication. Mr Ridings advised that he and Mrs Green attended the last Children's Trust meeting and were impressed with the cooperation between the various agencies at the meeting, which included the Police, Health, Social Services to safeguarding children, which he felt was the first signs that they could provide a good lead to the rest of the country. Mrs Green concurred adding that the review did seem to be genuinely moving.

(5) Mrs Dean expressed her concerns with the way Children's Centres related to the communities they were servicing. There was no 100% match with where they were to where they served. The services could be delivered outside the communities' area. She felt that it was important that there was more flexibility. Young parents had complained that their nearest Children's Centre was too far to push a pram to. Mrs Wainwright advised that the Children's Centres Review was still ongoing and that Mrs Dean's comments would be passed to Alex Gamby, Head of Early Years and Childcare (operations) for her feedback. The Chairman added

that she would ensure that this was part of the considerations of the Extended Schools Select Committee.

(6) RESOLVED that :

- (a) the comments and answers to Members questions be noted;
- (b) the findings from the review be noted;
- (c) agreement be given to the seven key proposals to strengthen our integrated commissioning and delivery arrangements at county and local levels for implementation during 2010; and
- (d) agreement be given to commit to a long term programme of consultation, development and change across all partner agencies of the Kent Children's Trust.

25. Review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) Units at Kent Mainstream Schools and Academies and Lead School Programme Pilots

(Item B4)

(Report by Mrs R Turner, Managing Director, Children, Families & Education Directorate and Mrs S Hohler, Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education)

(Ms H Davies, Director of Specialist Services and Mr C Feltham, Head of SEN & Resources was present for this item)

(1) Members considered a report that provided an update on the Review of SEN Units and the timescale for considering options informed by the evaluation of the Lead School Pilots.

(2) Members were given the opportunity to make comments and ask questions which included the following:

(3) In response to a comment by Mr Myers, Mr Ridings gave an assurance that there were no plans to close any of the special schools in Kent. He said that the results of the pilot were being carefully considered and would be reported back to the Committee in July 2010.

(4) In response to a question by Mr Hirst, Ms Davies advised that the objectives of the lead school pilots were to provide appropriate provision for the SEN children across Kent.

(5) In response to a request from Dr Wadman, Mrs Wainwright agreed to circulate a map of the Units to Members.

(6) RESOLVED that:

- (a) the comments and answers to Members questions be noted;
- (b) the needs of children and young people with SEN would continue to be met in appropriate schools and provisions, including schools with SEN

Units, providing parents and carers with confidence in Kent provision and services be noted;

- (c) the Local Authority would build on existing provision and expertise working with all schools in a locality to increase capacity to meet the SEN of children and young people informed by the lead school pilot be noted; and
- (d) the current lead school pilot would be evaluated as proposed and further reports made to the Children, Families and Education Senior Management Team and Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee culminating in a report to Cabinet in the Autumn be noted.

26. Safeguarding Children in Kent - Defending and Developing the Service

(Item B5)

(Item B6- Report by Mr P Gilroy, Chief Executive)

(1) The Committee considered a report that marked the final stage of the review commissioned by the County Council in December 2008, following the publication of the urgent Joint Area Review in Haringey carried out in response to the death in 2007 of Baby Peter, undertaken by the Chief Executive, on the arrangements in Kent for protecting vulnerable children. The report also gave an overview of the Review Team's assessment of arrangements in their local and national contexts and set out a number of recommendations for consideration by the County Council which would meet on 1 April 2010.

(2) The Chief Executive introduced the report explaining that protecting vulnerable children was a critical responsibility for the County Council with its 'corporate parent' responsibilities and said that he was pleased to be able to present the report to Cabinet and the Vulnerable Children Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee for discussion and comment, en route to full Council, who initially commissioned it.

(3) Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments which included the following:

(4) Mr Bowles proposed, seconded by Mr Craske that the recommendation be altered to read "the Vulnerable Children and Partnerships POSC recommends that the County Council adopt the report in its entirety and thanked Mr Gilroy and his team for the extensive work carried out in producing the valuable report".

Agreed without a vote

(3) Mr Gilroy suggested that one recommendation that he had not made and would consider making to the County Council was to reinstate a radio slot on Radio Kent for Social Workers on aspects of their work to rebalance the negative imagery reported in the press.

(4) In reply to a question by Mrs Dean, Mr Gilroy referred to page 87 of the report that indicated that the referral rates from neighbours was higher than from schools and questioned that there could not be so many of those children not at school. Complainants did not find it easy but he was concerned as to why schools did not relate easily to the Local Authority services.

(5) In response to a further question by Mrs Dean, Ms Davies said that Members would be advised of serious cases in future before they hit the media. Mr Gilroy added that there were times when cases went through the courts and there would be issues of subjudicy but he would plead that the whole report be made available to Members and the public for more trust in the system.

(6) Ms Davies outlined the actions already taken out on recommendations 75.2 to 75.8 and 75.8 to 11.

(7) Mr Bowles said that he was heartened by Members comments and thanked Ms Davies for her response on what was already happening with regard to the recommendations.

(8) The Chairman thanked Mr Gilroy for a very full and frank report and for leaving KCC with a wonderful legacy that should be taken forward nationally as part of the tool kit for local authorities.

(9) RESOLVED that the Vulnerable Children and Partnerships POSC recommends that the County Council at its meeting on 1 April 2010 adopt the report in its entirety and thanked Mr Gilroy and his team for the extensive work carried out in producing the valuable report.

27. Children Social Services Activity Figures

(Item B6)

(Report by Mrs S Hohler, Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education and Ms H Davies, Director for Specialist Children's Services Group)

(1) The Committee discussed a report that provided an overview of core activity for Children's Social Services in respect of; referrals, Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan, Looked After Children, Other Local Authority Children (OLA) and Social Work Vacancies.

(2) The Chairman asked Ms Davies to introduce the report. Mrs Davies highlighted key issues within the report which included the significant rise in referrals since the Baby P case and the work with being carried out with schools, parents who were misusing drugs and alcohol and substance misuse. Those parents were now receiving help which had meant a significant increase in the workload. There had also been an increase in Other Local Authority Looked After Children (OLA LAC) in 2009-2010. She added that the social worker vacancy position was 29% at the end on January 2010 but reminded Members that there had been an increase of 60 social worker posts in 2009. One of the key objectives was to reduce the vacancy rate to date there had been 27 social workers recruited from USA and 5 from East Kent, recruitment would continue both internationally and within Kent. There was also consideration being given to converting some social work posts to assistant social worker posts changing the skill mix of the teams. She concluded that even being under incredible pressure the social workers were still doing an incredible job.

(3) The reply to a question by the Chairman, Ms Davies advised that the responsibility for the follow up with those children placed by other local authorities in Kent was the responsibility of the host authorities. Kent's children social workers become involved if the children were at risk, other agencies that could be involved

such as the Youth Offending Service. She advised that the Mrs Turner, Managing Director, would be speaking to Director of Social Services in May regarding this issue.

(4) In reply to a request by Mrs Green, Mrs Davies agreed to supply the Social worker vacancies within each area across Kent.

(5) In response to a question by Mr Wells, Mrs Davies advised that there were 1196 Looked After Children and 253 that were Asylum Seekers.

(6) RESOLVED that the responses to the comments and questions made by Members be noted.

28. Select Committee Update

(Item C1)

(Report by Mr P Wickenden, Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager)

(1) Members received a report on the progress to establish the Select Committee on Extended Services (previously titled Extended Schools).

(2) The Committee were given the opportunity to suggest topics they wished to be considered for potential reviews in November 2010 and January 2011. Members agreed to contact the Democratic Services officer outside the meeting with their suggestions.

(3) Following the discussion on Item B3 "Kent Children's Trust and Local Partnership Arrangements" on the agenda. The Chairman agreed to ask the Select Committee for Extended Services to consider the location of Children's Centres within the review.

(4) RESOLVED that the terms of reference of the Select Committee on Extended Services be noted.