

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, 30th March, 2011.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mrs P T Cole, Mr H J Craske, Mrs E Green, Mr D A Hirst, Mr P J Homewood, Mr S Manion, Mr M J Northey, Mr K Smith, Mr M J Vye, Dr D Wadman (Vice-Chairman) Mr C T Wells

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES:

PARENT GOVERNORS: Mr P Myers

TEACHER ADVISERS:

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P W A Lake Mrs J Whittle

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Newsam (Interim Corporate Director of Families and Social Care), Mr A Pettigrew (Senior Manager) Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

44. Membership

(Item A2)

Members noted that Mr P J Homewood had joined the Committee in place of the late Mr G Horne, MBE

45. Declarations of Members' Interest in items on today's agenda

Mr C T Wells made a general declaration of personal interest as his wife is employed as a Social Worker in Kent.

46. Votes of Thanks

1. The Chairman thanked the Teacher, Parent Governor and Church representatives for their attendance at the meetings of the POSC and for their contribution to its debate. She said she hoped that the good working relationship established would be able to continue.

2. The Vice-Chairman then thanked the Chairman and Members of the POSC for their welcome of the Teacher, Parent Governor and Church representatives onto the Committee. She said she had been very impressed with the level of discussion at the POSC's meetings.

47. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2010

(Item A5)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

48. Children's Champions Board Minutes, 21 October 2010

(Item A6)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Children's Champions Board held on 21 October 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman, that being the final meeting of the Board.

49. Update by the Cabinet Member and Interim Corporate Director

(Item B1)

1. Mrs Whittle gave an oral update and responded to comments and questions from Members on the following topics:-

- Improvement Priorities
- Monthly statistics of Social Worker vacancies
- Integrated Children's System
- CAMHS
- Adoption
- Educational Attainment of LAC
- Restructure and the new Directorate

2. In discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- a) they supported the priorities listed in the update, and the new ways of working described;
- b) they asked that a Social Worker be invited to a future meeting of the POSC to give a first-hand account of life on the front line, as well as Members being given the opportunity to shadow a Social Worker. This will help their understanding of life 'at the coal face' and help them develop their scrutiny role;
- c) they supported the establishment of a system of which will allow SWs to develop an expertise in one area;
- d) some Members expressed the view that the concurrency panel could be re-established;
- e) the improvement targets set need to include a timescale and a monitoring process;
- f) it is important that this issue is subject to good scrutiny, and this is a vital role of the POSC. Members need to have a frank appraisal of the situation, including good and bad news;

- g) the six headings for change listed on pages 16 and 17 of the report will need to be formed into an action list with a timescale included against each action; and
 - h) an IT system is needed which will both record and manage cases.
3. Mrs Whittle and Mr Newsam responded to Members' comments and assured them that:-
- a) the report to today's meeting was not intended to answer the issues listed in the Ofsted notice. The improvement plan will be set out in reports to the Improvement Panel, which will in turn report on progress to the new Specialist Children's services POSC;
 - b) the Improvement Plan will include performance indicators which will measure performance using outcome-based indicators;
 - c) Kent's Social Workers are as good as, if not better than, those in other Local Authorities, but cannot practise as well as they might do as they are not supported by the six 'pillars' or key themes which are listed on pages 16 and 17 of the report; and
 - d) The vacancy rate among Kent Social Workers is not excessive – only about 4.5% - but there is a need to increase the number of experienced staff. It is difficult to define the extent of the shortfall as Kent has not identified the 'baseline' number of Social Workers it needs.
4. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to Members' comments and questions be noted.

50. Governance Arrangements for Children's Social Care Improvement *(Item B2)*

1. Mrs Whittle introduced the report and tabled additional appendices which set out the revised draft terms of reference of the Corporate Parenting Panel and the draft terms of reference of the Children's Services Improvement Panel. The report would go to the County Council for approval on 6 April, and meetings of both new Panels would commence in April 2011.
2. In discussion, some Members expressed the following views:-
- a) a number of suggestions were put forward to shape the new Panels, covering the need to have measurable targets and a clear way of identifying progress, access to as much data as possible, improve the clarity of that data, to give better value to the POSC and continuity with the new SCS POSC, the need to listen to and act upon advice given;
 - b) there had been much ground to cover between the Ofsted notice of improvement and the improvement plan being drafted, and progress had in fact been rapid, given the volume of work involved;

- c) it is important to be realistic – there is only so far one can travel in one year; and
- d) all County Council Members need to be updated on progress and how it is being achieved, and will need reassurance that issues identified by Ofsted are being addressed. A briefing for all Members will be arranged by the Cabinet Member to update them on progress since the new year.

3. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information in the report and given in response to Members' comments and questions be noted;
- b) the issues and suggestions raised by Members in discussion, listed above, be considered by the new Panels; and
- c) a further report be made to the new SCS POSC, and all the issues mentioned be referred on to new POSC.

51. Update regarding the work of the Virtual Head Teacher for Looked After Children.
(Item B3)

Mr T Doran, Virtual Head Teacher for Looked After Children, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Doran introduced the report, set out the key themes and challenges in his role and responded to comments and questions from Members. Points highlighted were as follows:-

- a) the new title of 'Virtual Head Teacher' and the virtual school team had brought with it a new delivery model, which will bring together information on care planning, health and education matters for LAC;
- b) the multi-agency approach also included advocacy for LAC, and would track their progress through school and achieve the best possible outcomes for them;
- c) VSK support assistants would work alongside school teachers and support staff;
- d) Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are now more standardised across the county;
- e) the success of the new model will be measured by tracking the attendance of LAC and mapping it against their attainment;
- f) an integral part of developing a good service is to address the issue of children missing in education; and

- g) an update on the Thanet enquiry (into the number of LAC being placed in Thanet) was requested at a future meeting of the new Specialist Children's Services POSC.

2. RESOLVED that the recommendations in the report be agreed.

52. Preventative Services Manager Update

(Item B4)

Mr N Fenton and Mr A Rogers, Preventative Services Managers for Dartford and Dover respectively, were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Pettigrew introduced Mr Fenton and Mr Rogers, and they each gave an update on issues emerging in their respective areas and responded to comments and questions from Members. Points highlighted were as follows:-

- a) Ofsted had acknowledged the role of the PSMs and highlighted that many children were receiving earlier and more integrated support than previously;
- b) good quality partnership working is very important in meeting the needs of vulnerable children. Dartford had run a successful pilot scheme for Head Teachers to shadow Social Workers, and Social Work Assistants were currently being seconded in to the Dover Preventative Services team. There were many potential links to be made, with District Councils, Health, etc, to reduce duplication, and the Preventative Services team worked hard to help partners to understand each other's roles;
- c) Kent receives more Child Protection referrals than neighbouring authorities, and needs to improve the way in which it deals with those referrals. An indicator of the success of the Preventative Services role would be the number of referrals re-directed from Children's Social Services to the Preventative Services network, so children receive the right services at the right time; and
- d) Members asked that future reports include figures for the number of young people subject to the single point of access process who were 'stepping down' from CSS involvement.

2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to Members' comments and questions be noted.

53. Children, Families and Education Directorate Equality and Diversity Plan

(Item B5)

RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, and that Members' specific questions be responded to outside the meeting.

54. Select Committee - update

(Item C1)

RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted.