

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE - CORPORATE PARENTING

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Corporate Parenting held in the Swale 3, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 3 February 2015.

PRESENT: Mr R E Brookbank, Ms C J Cribbon, Mr S J G Koowaree, Mr M J Northey, Mrs P A V Stockell, Mrs J Whittle and Mrs Z Wiltshire

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms D Fitch (Democratic Services Manager (Council)), Mr G Romagnuolo (Policy Overview Research Officer) and Ms K Sanders (Business Intelligence Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Election of Chairman (Item 1)

Mrs P A V Stockell proposed and Mr G Kowaree seconded that Mrs Z Wiltshire be elected Chairman of the Select Committee.

RESOLVED that Mrs Z Wiltshire be elected Chairman of the Committee.

2. Draft Terms of Reference and Scope (Item 2)

(1) Mr Romagnuolo introduced the report which set out draft terms of reference and scope for the review. Also set out in the report was a proposed timetable based on the Select Committee presenting their report to County Council in May 2015, and suggested witnesses for evidence gathering sessions.

(2) The Committee discussed the report and made a number of points and suggestions which included the following:

- In response to a question on the existence of national guidelines for corporate parents which set out the legal definition of the role, including the accountabilities and protection for Members within a legal framework, Mr Romagnuolo confirmed that this was included in point 1 of the draft terms of reference and that there were responsibilities for the council as a whole and for individual members.
- Mr Romagnuolo confirmed that the corporate parent role applied to all County Council Elected Members.

- It was noted that references to “children in care” should be amended to “children and young people in care” as the corporate parent role remained in place for some until the age of 25 years.
- A Member referred to the recent press reports about the trafficking of children and young people, and the involvement of those within the care system, including the number of instances of children and young people in care within Kent being unaccounted for and whether this was within the scope of this review. The Committee were advised that there were monitoring mechanisms within the Directorate which included this and that the focus of this Select Committee review was the Member’s role as an elected parent and the influence that they would exert through this role to benefit children and young people in care.
- In response to a question Mr Romagnuolo advised that research was already underway into the best practice of other Local Authorities using Ofsted reports for those authorities performing well and other authority strategies would be provided to the Committee.
- Mentioned was made of a recent presentation that had been given by colleagues from Essex County Council about how they had moved from “poor” to “good” within a short period, it was suggested that the slides from this presentation should be made available to the Committee.
- The Committee were reminded of the proposed visit to visit to the Swattenden Centre (section 8) on Thursday 19 February 2015, which would provide the Committee with the opportunity to meet different age ranges of children and young people in care, plus some care leavers and apprentices, in an informal setting.
- Mr Romagnuolo stated that there would be an opportunity to seek written evidence to supplement the oral evidence given by witnesses.
- A Member referred to the importance of Members being aware of the national problem in relation to the educational outcomes of children and young people in care and questioned what was being done to address this in other countries.
- There was a general discussion around the review addressing how Members received information about children and young people in care and a view was expressed that Members were only informed of issues when they were about to be reported in the press rather than involving them at an the earliest stage.
- In relation to the list of possible witnesses Members stated that it contained too many KCC officers, and that they would prefer to hear more from people outside of the County Council to gain a wider insight into the issues and indications of best practise. It was suggested that it would be sufficient to have the following KCC witnesses Mrs Allen (Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel), Mr Oakford (Cabinet Member for Specialist Children’s Services) and Andrew Ireland (Corporate Director - Social Care, Health and Wellbeing) would be sufficient.
- The following witness suggestions were also put forward :
 - The designated nurse for children in care and the mental health team.

- Jenny Molloy, who had provided guidance to central government and who had written a book about her experiences of growing up in care.
- Camila Batmanghelidjh from Kids Company was another possible expert.
- Birth families, for these parents to give their views of the care system related to the members role as a corporate parent. (Mr Romagnuolo advised that there were sensitivities around approaching birth parents. This could be done via advocacy services to see if there was a willingness amongst birth parents to engaged with Members in their role as corporate parents.
- A further visit that would provide the opportunity to speak with child and young people in care or who had been in care, possibility to Porchlight.
- Young people in the criminal justice system, possibly on probation. NACRO might have someone who could speak on the criminalisation of children in care and related policies. Nick Wilkinson (KCC - Youth Offending Service (YOS) Lead Manager) who had written a report on the criminalisation of children in care.

(3) At the suggestion of Mr Romagnuolo it was agreed that there would be a 20 minute “wash-up” session added to the end of each Select Committee evidence gathering meeting to provide the opportunity for Members to identify key issues from that days hearings.

(4) The Committee expressed concern about the short timescale for gathering evidence if their report was submitted to the May meeting of the County Council. Ms Fitch advised the Committee that they could recommend to the Scrutiny Committee that the timescale of the review was extending to enable to Committee to submit its final report to the July meeting of the County Council. This review could be the trigger for other reviews in to specific areas.

(5) The Chairman referred to the possibility of all Members formally renewing their commitment to children and young people in care.

(6) RESOLVED that:

- (a) the draft terms of reference, scope and general approach for the review, as set out in the report, be approved subject to minor amendments suggested by Members which would be circulated to all Members of the Committee for confirmation.
- (b) the witness list be updated to include the suggestions put forward by Members circulated to all Members of the Committee for confirmation.
- (c) the Chairman and Spokesmen on the Scrutiny Committee be requested to agree to the Select Committees final report being submitted to the July 2015 meeting of the County Council rather that the May 2015 meeting.

(Post meeting note: A copy of the approved terms of reference and scope are attached as an appendix to these minutes.)