

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, 2 December 2009.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Brightwell (Policy & Performance Manager - Looked After Children), Mrs J Doherty (Policy Manager), Mr A Heather (Principal Educational Psychologist) and Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

13. Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 September 2009

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2009 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

14. Matters Arising from Minutes

(Item)

Minute 10 – Protecting Children in Kent Review

Mr Ridings updated the Board on a number of developments since the Board's previous meeting:-

- a) Although it had been planned that Phase 3 of the review should be reported to the full County Council on 10 December, this would now be delayed to accommodate discussions about the establishment of a Royal College of Social Work. Mr Ridings suggested, and it was RESOLVED, that Phase 3 of the review be reported instead to another special meeting of the Board in late January or early February 2010, and that the Board refer any points arising from that meeting to the full County Council if it deems it appropriate. *NB: 4 February, 2.30 pm, was subsequently set as the date for the special meeting of the Board;*
- b) The review of the ICS was progressing well, with much work having gone on this year. The latest version was version 5.2, and the first of the new exemplars would be published in the new year; and
- c) 100 new Social Workers had now been recruited; 62 via Canterbury Christ Church University, 29 from Boston in the United States and 9 from Northern Europe via the Jacaranda Programme. Such a large intake of new Social Workers would require a major training

programme, and the Head of Children's Social Services would be running a rolling recruitment and training programme.

15. Ongoing Issues following on from previous Meetings

(Item)

1) Mr Ridings raised the issue of suitable housing for young care leavers, a subject which the Board had been following closely for some years. Further work was needed to address the ongoing problems of providing and monitoring suitable accommodation for young people aged 17plus leaving KCC care to live independently for the first time.

2) The Chairman added that the former Kent Community Housing Trust (KCHT), now called Avanti, was keen to work with the County Council to address this issue.

3) In response to points raised by Members, Mr Brightwell set out the following:-

a) The assessment of accommodation for care leavers was part of Kent's Pledge to young people;

b) Kent currently had 151 providers of supported accommodation, and all these premises are monitored regularly by KCC;

c) In addition to the above, some young people live in privately rented bed and breakfast accommodation, but the quality of the latter varies. 16+ have been assessing all accommodation used for young care leavers, and have found that some bed and breakfast accommodation was of excellent quality, and young people living there were quite happy with it;

d) the Southwark judgement had reinforced the responsibility of local authorities to assess the needs of 16/17 year olds, and the expectation that all young people leaving care will be accommodated under Section 7 of the Children and Young People Act. Arising from the Southwark judgement, KCC and district councils had reviewed housing provision for young people;

e) Because young people could not claim benefits until age 18, KCC had a particular responsibility to meet the needs of those leaving care at 16/17. Mr Brightwell reminded Members that the KCC's role as Corporate Parents to young people in care extended to 25; and

f) Any future report on this to the Board would need careful timing; it was vital to that the Children in Care Council (CICC) be given a chance to express a view before the Board next considered the issue.

4) Mrs Doherty added that young people's housing was a priority for the Children's Trust Executive Board (CTEB), and had been mentioned at its most recent meeting. Angela Slaven, Director of Youth and Community Support Services, had been tasked to produce an issues paper for the Executive covering progress on the housing priority in the Children and Young People's Plan. Mrs Doherty undertook to

highlight the Board's ongoing concern at the next CTEB meeting and report back to this Board on progress.

5) In discussion, Members expressed the view that Kent's range of accommodation for young people varied greatly in quality, with some districts making excellent provision and others giving it a lower priority. A full analysis of all current provision would show the full picture.

6) RESOLVED that the Board reconsider this issue at a future meeting, taking into account the point made by Mr Brightwell at paragraph 3) f) above, and make an appropriate recommendation to the Cabinet Member and Safeguarding Board for further action.

16. Chairman's Announcements

(Item A4)

The Chairman reported that she had joined members of the new Children in Care Council on a day trip to the Houses of Parliament in October, and that the day had been very enjoyable and educational.

17. The placement of Looked After Children by other local authorities in Kent

(Item B1)

The Chairman secured the Board's agreement to consider items B1 and B2 as urgent business as the papers had not been placed in the public domain with the required period of notice.

1) Mr Brightwell introduced the report and outlined KCC's efforts over the years to have it addressed at a national level, with limited success. The wording of the most recent Regulations relating to LAC placed out of area, which came out in November 2009, had been disappointing, but KCC would be responding to the consultation by the deadline of February 2010. In responding to questions raised by Members, Mr Brightwell explained the following:-

- a) KCC has a good record of placing LAC out of county only when absolutely necessary, and is also the only authority to have a Pledge which covers the needs of LAC placed by other local authorities (OLAs) as well as its own LAC;
- b) Kent can reclaim a limited amount of the money spent on a child placed by an OLA, but the process for doing this is difficult and slow;
- c) The Waltham Forest judgement had been good news for Kent's hope to reclaim funding, although the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) had reversed this beneficial effect by amending the 'Belonging' Regulations;
- d) some OLAs had a long-standing pattern of placing many LAC in Kent, and this might be because of a lack of suitable Foster Parents in their own area;

- e) The Children Leaving Care Act 2000 had introduced a rule that the last authority to care for a LAC must take on the responsibility for meeting their needs once they leave care;
 - f) The average cost of a placement in Kent with a KCC Foster Parent was approximately £40,000 per annum. Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) charges vary from £600 – 700 per week. Rising to £1,500 or £2,000 for residential care, and the IFAs would charge the placing authority this amount; and
 - g) The funding mechanism was very complex, but an OLA placement in Kent would not necessarily bring with it sufficient finance to cover all a child's costs. It was difficult to identify all the costs in each case and what was and was not reimbursable.
- 2) In discussion of the issue, and in response to some of the information provided, Members expressed the following views and concerns:-
- a) To get a full nationwide picture, Members need to know how many out of county LAC are placed with OLAs across the UK, and compare these figures to the number of OLA LAC that Kent is asked to take on;
 - b) Members need to know what level of payment per placement is claimed by OLAs when accepting an out of county LAC placement, and compare this the £337 per week per child that Kent receives. Some London Boroughs are known to get £900 per week per child. If looking after a child in London costs £900 a week, and that child is then placed in Kent, at a cost to the London Borough of only £337, the London Borough is saving itself more than £560 per week, at Kent's expense;
 - c) It is not helpful that the DCSF sends out mixed messages by encouraging authorities not to place out of county but introducing a financing structure which does not support this. Members expressed the opinion that the legislation was right but the financing was not;
 - d) Members felt that the whole sum of money intended to fund a child's placement should come to KCC direct from the DCSF;
 - e) OLAs placing a LAC do not always provide the host authority with sufficient and timely information to allow them to make the best placement for the child, so the need for earlier and fuller information needs to be acknowledged and built into a formal process;
 - f) The report which Mr Brightwell had prepared for the Board for today's meeting should also be used for a meeting with GOSE which Mr Ridings and Mr Brightwell were to attend on 8 December, but to it should be added the views and concerns which Members expressed above; and
 - g) When the Board has all the information it has identified as being necessary, it should press for debate of the issue at a higher level and make recommendations for more to be done to address the issue.

3) RESOLVED that:-

- a) The report presented to today's meeting have added to it the views and concerns expressed by Members, listed above, and it be then used to shape discussion at the meeting with GOSE on 8 December;
- b) The Deputy Cabinet Members submit a Freedom Of Information request to the DCSF for the information set out in paragraph 2) b) above; and
- c) When the Board has all the information it has identified as being necessary, it press for debate of the issue at a higher level and make recommendations for more to be done to address the issue.

18. Update on the Development of the Children in Care Council (CICC)
(Item B2)

1) Mr Brightwell introduced the report and summarised progress so far. He emphasised that Kent was a large and diverse county, with a large number of young people in care – 2200 Kent young people, plus 1400 placed by other local authorities, plus some 300 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People (UASCYP), so if it was decided that the CICC would cover them all it would have a large audience. Progress had necessarily been slow as each step had to be carefully considered, as it is vital that young people make each decision themselves and progress at their own pace. A provisional CICC had been established in April 2009, and elections to the Council are planned for spring 2010.

2) Members welcomed progress made so far and congratulated the young people and their helpers. Members supported a number of suggested future actions, as follows:-

- a) the CICC had produced an excellent DVD, 'Care to Listen', and this would be shown at a future Board meeting, with a party of young people to present it and talk about its production. Members discussed the possibility of showing it at a full County Council or CFEPSC meeting, but these would need careful consideration, and the agreement of the young people concerned, as both meetings would be webcast (whereas this Board's meetings are not) and, by showing it there, the DVD would effectively be 'broadcast' to the public. Members also suggested showing the DVD at a Head Teachers' conference, which would not raise such problems;
- b) the Board would receive a further report setting out arrangements for the CICC elections in Spring 2010;
- c) the Chairman of the Children's Champions Board be invited to the CICC's next meeting, in January 2010, to ask the CICC about the relationship it wishes to have with the Board;

- d) it was suggested that CICC representatives meet regularly, informally, with KCC people who share level Corporate Parenting responsibility – eg, The Chairman of the Children’s Champions Board, The Managing Director of CFE, the Cabinet Member, etc;
 - e) Members particularly welcomed the success of the apprenticeships scheme, to which one young man had already been appointed. One more apprentice was in the process of being appointed, and Mr Brightwell said he would very much like to appoint a third. Members supported a discussion of the funding for this post at full council; and
 - f) Members suggested that Scott King, the first CICC apprentice, be invited to a meeting of the Board, and that he shadow the Cabinet Member to see the role of a Corporate Parent
- 3) RESOLVED that Members’ support for suggested action, and actions suggested by Members themselves, listed in paragraphs 2) a) to f) above, be taken forward.