

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, 19 May 2010.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr S King (Children in Care Council Apprentice) and Mr A Speller (Young Lives Foundation)

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms H Davies (Director For Specialist Children's Services Group), Mr A Hickmott (Head of Children's Services, West Kent), Mr P Brightwell (Policy & Performance Manager - Looked After Children), Mr A Heather (Principal Educational Psychologist), Ms P Davies (Kent Safeguarding Children Board Manager) and Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

26. Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed Scott King, the first apprentice of the Children in Care Council, who had been invited by the Board to attend and meet them. She also welcomed Adrian Speller from the Young Lives Foundation and Andrew Hickmott, Head of Children's Services, West Kent, who were also attending the Board for the first time. Those around the table then introduced themselves.

27. Minutes of Meeting held on 10 March 2010

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

28. Chairman's Announcements

(Item A4)

1. The Chairman said she had been very pleased that the Safeguarding Children in Kent report had been presented to and debated at full County Council on 1 April. This was a very valuable document which she hoped would be used by Local Authorities nationally.

2. Ms H Davies confirmed that it was already being used as a working document to shape the work of Children's Social Services, who were implementing the report's recommendations.

29. Children In Care Council (CICC) update (oral)

(Item B1)

1. Mr King outlined the process by which a council for the CICC would be elected. All LACs in Kent had been sent ballot papers and were eligible to vote, and good participation was expected. Every candidate's manifesto had been sent out and it was expected that most LACs in Kent would know at least one of the candidates personally, and so would feel engaged in the process.

2. Once the council had been elected and formally appointed, it would decide how and with whom it wished to establish links, although it was expected that CICC would link with Kent Youth County Council to address issues which were common to both their manifestos.

3. Mr Brightwell added that the CICC would meet four times a year on its own and would decide if and when it wished to invite or meet with the Board or Cabinet Members. In addition to these four meetings, there would be two meetings with those at the KCC who hold level 2 and 3 Corporate Parenting responsibility. Two CICC reps would sit on the Kent Corporate Parenting Group and there would be two seats reserved for CICC reps on the Kent Youth Parliament. Once the CICC council was established, the CICC would be run by Catch 22 and Upfront. He said Scott's post as apprentice was funded by CICC and he hoped that it would be possible to fund a second apprentice post.

4. RESOLVED that the update be noted, with thanks.

30. Housing for Care Leavers *(Item B2)*

1. Mr Hickmott introduced the item and gave Members a copy of the joint protocol which has been prepared with partners. He and Ms H Davies answered questions from Members, highlighting the following:-

- a) it was hoped that the KCC would be able to work more closely with District Councils to address the issue of young people leaving care. Past difficulties had arisen around different interpretations of the Southwark judgement;
- b) Members expressed concern about the capacity and resources of the charity Catch 22, as the report recommendations included the review of the KCC's contract with them. Some social workers were known to have a caseload of 25 cases each, which was considered too high. Ms Davies emphasised that all Catch 22 social workers, personal advisors and other staff were fully qualified and had expertise in working with young people leaving care, and that the charity had full control of its budget for finding placements. She added that, although the Board was being asked to support a review of the contract with Catch 22, this review would not take place immediately;
- c) Members requested regular quarterly statistics of the number of young people being supported through the transition from care to independent living. Mr Hickmott undertook to supply these;
- d) Mr King pointed out that Catch 22 worked really hard to find suitable housing for young people. He supported Members' concerns about

resources. What was difficult, he said, was that, when a young person moved to a new area, they would go to the bottom of the waiting list for housing;

- e) young people leaving care were entitled to 'floating support' to help them adjust to leaving care and living independently; and
- f) Catch 22 were part of a SW practice pilot, which was due to end in March 2012, at which point the government would make a decision about extending it. Members requested an interim evaluation of the pilot.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the report be noted, and that the Board seek further evaluation regarding meeting the accommodation needs of vulnerable young people;
- b) the Board support the review of the contract with Catch 22 16plus by the Contracts Review Group to establish if the service can be extended to work with homeless young people who become Looked After Children after their 16th birthday, so consideration is given to the expertise of the service being used with this group;
- c) the Board support the consideration of the joint protocols for sign off by the respective management groups, following the Joint Policy and Planning Board in May; and
- d) the Board receive quarterly stats of the number of young people being supported through the transition from care to independent living, and an interim evaluation of the pilot of which Catch 22 is part.

31. The Placement of Looked After Children in Kent by Other Local Authorities

(Item B3)

- 1. Mr Brightwell introduced the report and set out key points as follows:-
 - Since the last update in November 2009, the number of LACs placed by OLAs has fallen by 42;
 - Kent has the highest LAC population in the UK, with as many again being placed by OLAs;
 - the key issue is the impact and pressures on education and health services for Kent's children;
 - Kent had been successful in lobbying government, and the introduction of the Sufficiency duty, a duty on all local authorities to commission sufficient LAC placement for their own LAC in their own area, would help Kent;
 - the situation won't change overnight, and LACs already settled here won't be sent home;
 - detail set out in the report shows placement patterns. Some OLAs show a very high level of placement, by many are very low and falling.

2. Mr Brightwell answered a number of questions from Members, and the points highlighted were as follows:-

- a) Kent is not the Corporate Parent for LAC placed by OLAs; this responsibility remains with the placing authority. Kent works with OLAs to remind them of their Corporate Parenting responsibilities and to see that they meet them;
- b) many LACs placed by OLAs have additional educational needs. The costs of these are not covered by the funding coming with the child so have to be absorbed by Kent. However, SEN statements needs are funded by OLAs;
- c) the approach made to OLAs is important. Kent should offer to help them to address the impact of their level of placements on their own and Kent's LACs;
- d) Members asked to be told what level of funding accompanies a LAC placed by OLA, and Mr Brightwell undertook to advise them of this figure;
- e) Members expressed concern that some children do not show up for funding for education needs as they arrive after the start of the school year and leave before the end of year and so are never counted as part of that year's cohort for funding purposes;
- f) the Sufficiency duty was welcomed as it will gradually address the issue and reduce costs to Kent;
- g) Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) are supported financially by London Boroughs who place children with them, and under the Sufficiency duty, it is important for Kent to work with IFAs to highlight the need to recruit foster carers in their own area. Recruitment of foster carers in London has always been a challenge, as housing and other costs are so high. The level of placements made in Kent exacerbates the shortage of foster carers in Kent and nationwide;
- h) Mr King referred to the damaging effects of moving frequently, and highlighted the behavioural and mental health difficulties which often arose from this, which would make a young person more of a challenge for social workers to work with.

3. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information set out in the report and given in response to Members' questions be noted, with thanks;
- b) the issue be kept on the Board's agenda for future meetings so the expected changes in patterns arising from the Sufficiency duty can be identified when they happen; and
- c) The Board reserve the idea of referring the issue to Cabinet in future if it feels it necessary to do so.

32. 'Care to Listen' DVD (Discussion about how the Board wishes to use this)
(Item B4)

1. Mr Brightwell circulated copies of the 'Care to Listen' DVD to all Board Members and commended it to them as a very good quality production. It had been launched in November 2009. The DVD has three parts – about coming into care, being in care and leaving care – and each part contains recommendations. He asked Members to view the DVD and think about how the Board should take forward the recommendations, and which ones in particular they felt most able to support. The CICC would also be taking forward the recommendations in the DVD, and might be presenting it to the full County Council. The DVD was also to be used to help train social workers and other professionals.

2. Mr King referred to a draft of a survey which would seek young people's views on KCC's Pledge to Children and Young People, and he undertook to share this with Mr Brightwell and perhaps add this to a future Board agenda.

3. RESOLVED that an item be placed on the Board's September agenda to cover the feedback on the DVD which had been received from the CICC, and to allow Board Members to give their own feedback and discuss how to use the DVD at future meetings.

33. Kent Safeguarding Children Board (oral update)
(Item B5)

1. Ms P Davies gave an oral update on the preparation of the Kent Safeguarding Children Board's (KSCB) annual report. The Annual report would show the KSCB's achievements and how effectively it is working, include statistical data, and outline its main areas for future work. It had identified two areas for focus in the next year: Mental Health and Domestic Violence, and all its partners were signed up to these priorities.

2. The KSCB has a statutory duty to look at all child deaths (of which, there were approx 101 in the last year) but Ms Davies emphasised that this included children who died as a result of premature birth and those who died of illnesses; a very small number of those were children who had died as a result of neglect or mistreatment.

3. The KSCB had established the habit of producing annual reports in the last few years, so had pre-empted the government requirement for annual reports to be produced. This would become a statutory requirement in April 2011.

4. The Annual Report would be reported to the September meeting of the CCB after being reported to the full County Council on 2 September 2010.

5. RESOLVED that the information given be noted, with thanks.

34. Update on issues arising from the Safeguarding Children in Kent report

1. Ms H Davies gave an oral update on progress on implementing the recommendations of the report, and set out the following:-

- the pressure on Children's Social Services identified in the report continue to be a challenge, with an increase in the number of referrals received, the number of children with a Child Protection Plan, and the number of LAC in Kent;
- social work vacancies were being addressed by the recruitment of a further 55 social workers this summer. The social workers who arrived from the USA in February had settled in well, and a further 9 social workers from Northern Europe had been appointed in Mid Kent;
- social work assistants (SWAs) will also be recruited, and some existing SWAs have a training route to qualify as social workers. This progression is seen as a good way to reward SWAs, it retains staff who are already committed to the job and grows the staff for the future; and
- graduate social workers can undertake 2 years of post graduate training, but the status of an MA requirement for new social workers was not yet clear.

2. Mr King commented that young people he knew who had considered social work as a career had been put off by the long hours and the negative press.

3. Members asked to be informed of the location and spread of social work vacancies by receiving a regular stats item. Ms Davies undertook to prepare an information paper for the Board's next meeting in September 2010.

Virtual Head Teacher

In response to a question, Mr Brightwell explained that, although Kent had embraced the concept of a virtual Head Teacher, it had been careful to title the role a 'Head Teacher for Looked After Children'. This role would be to check what had been done to improve the education outcomes of LAC and help ensure that the KCC met its Corporate Parenting responsibilities. A pilot scheme had been successful elsewhere. The Head Teacher for LAC would be a very good person for the CICC council to meet, once established. Members added that it would be very important for the Head Teacher for LAC to report regularly to a KCC scrutiny committee.

35. Kay Weiss, Head of Policy and Performance

Members noted that today's meeting would have been the last Board meeting that Mrs Weiss would have attended before taking up her new post. Members agreed that the Chairman write to Mrs Weiss to pass on the Board's thanks and very best wishes for the future.