

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 Medway Room on Thursday, 21st October, 2010.

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

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES: Dr D Wadman

PRESENT: Mrs S V Hohler and Mr L B Ridings

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms H Davies (Director For Specialist Children's Services Group), Mrs J Wainwright (Director Commissioning (Specialist Services)), Ms H Jones (Joint Commissioning Officer, Canterbury), Mrs L Totman (Head of Corporate Parenting) and Mrs C A Singh (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

37. Dates for Future Meetings 2011

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the meeting dates for 2011 as follows:

Wednesday, 30 March 2011

Tuesday, 21 June 2011

Thursday, 13 October 2011

(All meetings will commence at 10.00 am)

(After each meeting of this POSC the Children's Champions Board will meet. This is a public meeting)

38. Minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2010

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

39. Deputy Cabinet Member, Director of Children's Specialist Services and Director of Joint Commissioning and Partnerships Update
(Item B1)

(Verbal Reports by Mr L Ridings, Deputy Cabinet Member Vulnerable Children and Partnerships, Ms H Davies, Director of Specialist Children's Services and Mrs J Wainwright, Director of Commissioning and Partnerships)

(1) The Chairman asked Ms Davies to begin with her report. Ms Davies gave an update included the following:

- Following the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment services in August, an improvement plan was being implemented, and an improvement and development steering group, chaired by Mrs Hohler, was put in place to monitor progress.
- Additional administrative and social work assistant capacity had been made available to all 12 duty and initial assessment teams.
- The number of trainee social workers being recruited in autumn 2010 has been increased from 10 to 22. The number of social work assistants being sponsored on the Open University training course had been increased from 10 to 20.
- 58 newly qualified social workers joined the service from 13 September. 23 more social workers had been recruited from Europe; they would take up their posts in January. The number of social worker vacancies dropped to 15% at the end of August.
- 12 preventative services managers (one per district) came into post on 1 September and were developing strategies to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to Children's Social Services
- The number of children with child protection plans and the number of Looked After Children (LAC) continued to rise, causing capacity issues for the social work teams, along with financial pressures.
- An announced (i.e. 2 weeks notice) inspection of safeguarding and LAC services took place on 11-22 October.

(2) Mr Ridings felt confident that the funding would be available to get the staffing level up to the appropriate number within the social work teams. Recruitment of highly qualified social workers was considered as there was recognition of the need to have the very best social work teams. Every effort would be made to safeguard the service from any cuts in the budget.

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

(4) In response to questions by Mr Wells, Ms Davies advised that in terms of principal social worker posts the current vacancy rate was 20%, and every effort was being made to find suitable staff. In terms of capacity, there were 1350

children with child protection plans in Kent and approximately the same number of LAC in Kent this did create pressures for the experienced social workers within the teams as the less experienced staff would not be able to deal with those cases. Ms Davies assured the Committee that all of those cases were allocated to a social worker.

(5) Mr Wells mentioned that there were issues being highlighted outside the social workers' normal role that were having an impact such as leased cars.

(6) In response to a question by Mr Manion, Ms Davies said that the service was in the process of recruiting trainee social workers. The graduates being selected had to have a minimum of a 2:1 degree. Ms Davies was confident the graduates chosen in the recruitment process would have the potential to become good social workers. The successful graduates would then work in a team for 9 months before studying for a 2 year diploma. The Universities were also working with KCC on this.

(7) In response to a question by Mr Hirst, Ms Davies advised that the current focus was to improve and review the ICS computer system which was due to be finalised in November. She concurred that the next step would be to work on the social workers' paperwork.

(8) In response to a question by the Chairman, Ms Davies explained that ICS stood for 'Integrated Children's System', a nationally prescribed computer system for recording children's social services data. There had been concerns about the system. Work had been carried out to change the exemplars of the system.

(9) In response to a question by Mrs Cole, Ms Davies advised that the best way to retain social workers was to ensure that they had sound supervision, support and a manageable workload. In terms of supervision, a new supervision policy had been launched in August 2010 and training was currently being carried out. Ms Davies agreed to the request for a report on the Supervision Policy and the progress on the ICS computer system.

(10) In response to a request, Ms Davies agreed to supply Members with monthly statistics on the Kent social worker vacancies.

(11) Mrs Wainwright then highlighted the key issues affecting the Commissioning and Partnership Team which included the renegotiation of the last two years of a three year contract with Connexions, with an aim to reduce the price of the contract with the least possible impact on the contractual outcomes that were jointly sought. Mr Ridings advised the Committee that Mr G Bernard had retired and had been replaced by Mr S Kearns as Chief Executive of Connexions.

(12) Mrs Wainwright then spoke about work being undertaken on the attainment and wellbeing of children whose parents were in the armed forces in Kent, the results of which would help to advise teachers of how to support those children better. In response to a question by Mr Manion, Mrs Wainwright advised that there were approximately 700 service children in Kent; the majority of which reside in East Kent with small pockets of children in other areas of Kent. Mr Ridings added that the children's parents mainly worked for the Army as there were very few naval and air force personnel in Kent. Some of the children had changed school up to 6 and 7 times depending on their parent's posting. Mr Willicombe advised that

because the Royal Engineers were posted individually and were away from home for very long periods their children may need more support.

(13) In reply to a question by Mr Wells, Mrs Wainwright said that there had been no discussion for service children to have the same status as LAC in the school admissions process but agreed to take the request forward.

(14) Mrs Wainwright spoke on the support her team had given to the Local Children's Trust Board in understanding their new role. A full report would be made to the Kent Children's Trust Board on how that was progressing in the future and would include the next steps.

(15) Mrs Wainwright concluded by clarifying a mistake made by the DFE. This involved a proposal for the Kent schools complaints procedure to change. The original procedure was as follows: *Stage One* - Where a parent complained about the school this should be made to the headteacher in the first instance. *Stage Two* - If the parent felt that the complaint had been dealt with unsatisfactorily dealt with by the headteacher it would be referred to the governing body. *Stage Three* - If following the governing body's response the parent was unhappy that they had not followed due procedures then the local authority would be asked to take a view, but the local authority had no power of redress, and could only comment on the procedure. The new procedure was agreed through legislation that the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) would take on the 'stage three' role rather than the local authority.

(16) This was to be done in two stages of pilots; Kent was in the second pilot. The LGO trained many Kent headteachers in the new process. At the beginning of September 2010, KCC learnt that this was no longer going to happen and would be reverting to the previous process. However this was an administrative error on the DFE's part as it was written in primary legislation and could not be repealed easily so we were back to where we were. Mrs Wainwright suggested that this was good for the schools as the Ombudsman could adjudicate and also offer financial redress where necessary. In reply to a question by Dr Wadman, Mrs Wainwright advised that she thought the referral for the denominational schools followed the same route but agreed to check.

(17) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the Committee receive monthly statistics on the social worker vacancies by district in Kent be noted;
- (b) the request for a report on the Supervision Policy and the progress on the ICS computer system be noted;
- (c) consideration be given to the request that children whose parents were in the armed forces receive the same status as Looked After Children with regard to the School Admissions criteria be noted;
- (d) the complaints procedure for denominational schools be checked on whether it followed the same routes as non denominational schools and reported to Members outside the meeting; and
- (e) the verbal updates be noted.

40. Virtual Head Teacher for Looked After Children

(Item B2)

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

(Ms H Davies, Director of Children's Specialist Services was present for this item)

(1) The Committee discussed a report that identified the key roles around the Virtual School evidenced the current educational context of Kent Looked After Children (LAC) and highlighted issues within the current service (Integrated Looked after Children Support Service) and provided an outline programme of work to develop the service into the Virtual School.

(2) The Chairman advised that Mr Doran was expected to attend today's meeting but had received a sporting injury. The Committee agreed to invite Mr Doran to the next meeting.

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

(4) In response to a question by Mrs Green Mrs Davies advised that in terms of being able to intervene, Mr Doran had the authority to work with all partners in the education system. He would work with the Kent headteachers to ensure that the LAC were a top priority in the schools and to act as an advocate for the pupils where necessary. With regards to resources, he is the Leader of the Integrated LAC Support Service, a multi agency team including the Education Advisors. Mrs Hohler advised that Mr Doran had attended headteachers meetings and his ambition was to meet all LAC in Kent.

(5) In response to a question by Mr Vye, Ms Davies agreed to forward a structure chart of the Virtual School to the Committee Members.

(6) The Chairman advised that she had attended the Foster Care Awards and wished to thank all the foster carers for all the work they did and those staff that organised the event.

(7) RESOLVED that:

(a) the responses to questions by Members be noted;

(b) Mr Doran be invited to the next meeting of the Committee and a structure chart of the Virtual School be forwarded to Members outside the meeting;

(c) the variation in attainment of Kent Looked After Children and Other Local Authority Looked After Children placed in Kent be noted and support be given to the proposed programme of work in response to this issue be noted.

41. Costs of Residential, Foster Care and Placements. Challenges and Issues
(Item B3)

(Report by Mrs J Wainwright, Director, Commissioning & Partnerships, Ms R Turner, Managing Director and Mrs S Hohler, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education)

(Mrs L Totman, Head of Corporate Parenting, was present for this item)

(1) The Committee considered a report that outlined the management actions and measures that were in place to reduce the number and cost of Private and Voluntary (P&V) and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements across the County.

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

(3) In reply to a question by Mr Craske, Mrs Totman advised that Outcomes Based Care Plans were being introduced so that before a child was placed in residential or IFA care, it was very clear to the providers exactly what they were expected to achieve with the young people; this agreement would be reviewed on a six monthly basis. At present because there were no outcomes identified from the placements it was difficult to challenge.

(4) In reply to a question by Mr Hirst, Mrs Totman explained that Thanet did have the highest number of LAC. The aim was to return children back to their family and it was important to keep LAC at their current schools. Having looked at the issue of LAC in Thanet schools a small number had moved into the area but no unaccompanied LAC were placed in Thanet. She explained that local authorities could not disadvantage a child by placing them out of their area when it was not necessary as it was difficult to rehabilitate the child when they had to return home.

(5) Mr Wells requested a progress report on the Thanet Enquiry 2005.

(6) RESOLVED that:

(a) the responses to Members' questions and comments be noted;

(b) the request for a progress report on the Thanet Enquiry 2005 be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee and the report be noted.

42. Joint Commissioning in Children's Services - Outcomes & Priorities
(Item B4)

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

(Ms H Jones, Head of Commissioning was present for this item)

(1) The Committee considered a report that identified the national and local context for commissioning; examples of jointly commissioned services in Kent which have improved outcomes for children and young people; and the commissioning priorities for the Commissioning Unit.

(2) Following a brief introduction by Ms Jones Members were given the opportunity to make comments and ask questions which included the following:

(3) Mr Vye requested future reports on joint projects to demonstrate that the children's services were more efficient and effective.

(4) RESOLVED that:

(a) the responses to questions by Members be noted;

(b) the request for future reports on joint projects that demonstrate that the children's services were more efficient and effective with the joint planning and commissioning be noted;

(c) the examples of jointly commissioned services in Kent be noted; and

(d) agreement be given to the key priorities for the Commissioning and Partnership Group as outlined in section 4 of the report, be noted.

43. Select Committee - update
(Item C1)

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

(1) The Committee considered a report that highlighted the current topic review work programme as follows:

- Renewable Energy – which was due to submit its final report to the Cabinet in November 2010 and County Council in December 2010
- Extended Services (previously called Extended Schools) – which was due to submit its final report to the Cabinet in November 2010 and County Council in December 2010
- Educational Attainment of Pupils and Schools in Areas of High Deprivation – which was due to start its work in the Autumn of 2010
- Dementia which was due to start work in the Autumn of 2010 and report to County Council in April 2011.

(2) Mr Wells, Chairman Elect for the Select Committee for Educational Attainment of Pupils and Schools in Areas of High Deprivation anticipated that the focus of this review would be made wider to include Key Stage 2 results.

(3) Members agreed to revisit the need for a topic review on the attainment of Looked After Children (LAC) including children in hospital and hospices at a later date. Mr Wells suggested that following the work being started by the Virtual School headteacher for LAC a Select Committee be set up if necessary in 2-3 years time.

(4) RESOLVED that:

- (a) the suggestion of a topic review on the attainment of Looked After Children including children in hospital and hospices be added to the Committee's forward items list;
- (b) the current select committee topic review programme as detailed in paragraph (1) above be noted; and
- (c) Members agreed to advise the Democratic Services Officer of any items that they would like to suggest for inclusion in the select committee topic review programme.