

**To:** Communities Policy Overview Committee – April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008

**By:** Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Communities  
Amanda Honey, Managing Director for Communities

**Subject:** Kent Children’s Trust: Strategy for Supporting Parents in Kent:  
“Thinking Family”

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary:** This report summarises the content and progress of the Strategy for Supporting Parents in Kent with particular reference to the services in the Communities Directorate. The strategy is subject to formal consultation through the Kent Children’s Trust Partnership until April 25<sup>th</sup> 2008. Full copies of the consultation draft of the strategy can be made available or printed from the following link:

<http://apps.clusterweb.org.uk/forum/messages/13933/21589.html?1204028562>

## **FOR INFORMATION AND COMMENT**

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### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The Strategy for Supporting Parents in Kent has been commissioned by the Kent Children’s Trust and developed by a partnership working group led from the Children, Families and Education Directorate. Flowing from the national Every Child Matters policy agenda, it recognises that good parenting is the foremost factor in improving outcomes for children and young people. The strategy has been strongly influenced by the DCSF Children’s Plan, by “Every Parent Matters” (DCSF 2007) by “Think family: Improving Life Chances for Families at Risk” (Cabinet Office 2008). The Children Act 2004 requires local authorities to have regard to the importance of parents and carers in the development of services for children and young people and to designate a Commissioner for Parenting Support Services.

1.2 Family life is changing and some of the traditional means of support for parents, particularly from the extended family are no longer readily available. The strategy recognises the variety of modern family life and the changing roles of mothers, fathers, grandparents and other carers. For the purposes of the strategy, the term “parents and carers” refers to adults in any type of family with a significant caring role for children and young people.

1.3 The development of the strategy has been informed by a substantial piece of research by MORI with parents across Kent which sought their views about priorities for their children along with some important messages about services and the way they are delivered. Coupled with the Pupil Survey conducted by the National Foundation for Education Research, this provides a rich source of information to inform future planning and commissioning by the Kent Children’s Trust and the local Children’s Services Partnership. Professionals working with children, young people and parents have also been asked for their views.

## 2. Developing a shared vision

2.1 The purpose of the strategy is to build support for a shared vision and set of principles which will improve the planning, commissioning and provision of services to parents, and, through parents, to children and young people. The consultation seeks approval for and adoption of a set of principles across agencies and sectors.

2.2 The overarching vision is based on that stated in the County Children and Young People's Plan:

*"In Kent's successful communities, achievement exceeds aspiration, diversity is valued and every child, family and parent is supported. Parents are positive about their own and their children's futures and are able to be effective in ensuring that their children have every opportunity.*

*Kent Parents are confident in supporting their children so that they are:*

- *nurtured and encouraged at home*
- *inspired and motivated by learning*
- *safe and secure in the community*
- *living healthy and fulfilled lives"*

2.3 The vision is accompanied by a set of principles to be adopted by organisations and individuals working with parents, carers and their families so that they will work together to ensure that:

- parents and carers' views, faith, beliefs, strengths and knowledge of their children are respected and their involvement in the design, delivery, evaluation and development of services is encouraged and supported continuously
- diversity and difference is valued – including different models of family life
- Support is provided wherever possible by universal services in a variety of local and centralised welcoming areas, this includes Children's Centres and Extended Schools.
- the importance of natural community support systems is recognised and encouraged
- seeking help will be seen as a strength, not a weakness and will lead to better outcomes
- services value the role of fathers and are sensitive to father's needs, lives and motivations
- all services will draw on the best available research evidence of what is effective and staff will be supported by appropriate training, information and supervision
- the wellbeing of children, young people and vulnerable adults is paramount and is the responsibility of all those working with families.

2.4 Based on messages from research, the strategy has a strong preventative focus which aims to build resilience in families. Amongst other factors, research highlights the importance of extended families and wider social networks within the community for families.

2.5 The strategy is designed to meet the needs of all families and special attention is given to fathers, to teenage parents and to families where children have additional or special needs.

### **3. Messages from Mothers, Fathers, Carers, Children, Young People and Service Professionals.**

3.1 An important part of the development of the strategy has been wide-ranging consultation by means of survey (by face-to-face interview) complemented by focus groups. A total of 1,211 mothers, fathers, grandparents and carers took part in the survey across Kent. This information was supplemented by results from the NFER Pupil Survey and by a series of workshops and events for service professionals from the public and the voluntary and community sectors. Focus groups were organised for young parents, foster parents, adoptive parents and for the parents and carers of children with additional educational needs.

3.2 A number of key messages emerged and they are summarised below:

- Increased number and quality of places to play
- Expansion of accessible things to do and places to go for young people, including more opportunities for sport and physical activity
- Tackling bullying
- Improved transport – availability, cost and safety ( plus young parents asked for staff to be more helpful and understanding of young children, buggies etc)
- Improved access to NHS Dentistry
- Greater clarity on where they can go for information, advice and guidance on all subjects relating to parenting
- Increased out of hours and holiday access to services
- Parents to be treated as partners in their children’s learning and development and to be communicated with regularly and treated with respect
- Excluded pupils to have continuity of support services
- Services to be available locally through universal access points and to be available at the point they are needed (early intervention) with (professionals and services) wanting one clear assessment and referral mechanism.
- Using other parents/ carers and building capacity within local communities to help families
- More awareness raising and advice to parents on how to ensure children and young people’s safety when using the Internet.
- Improving our workforce skills for engagement with fathers and ensuring those fathers are part of the action taken to build local community capacity.
- Improved training and employment opportunities for young people and also their access to low cost housing.
- Workforce training to ensure a common professional language, greater ability to join up services and improved approach to dealing with parents (respect and partnership). This to extend to as many front line services as practical i.e. transport workers, receptionists etc

### **4. Implications for the Communities Directorate**

4.1 As a member of the Kent Children’s Trust and as a provider of services to young people and to families, Communities Directorate has been fully engaged in the development of the strategy.

4.2 The strategy recognises that much has been done in Kent to support parents and pertinent service developments are highlighted in the strategy along with many detailed examples of innovative services. Services and teams within the Communities Directorate have contributed in a variety of ways including:

- The Youth Service makes a particular contribution to supporting young mothers and fathers who themselves fall within the purview of “Every Child Matters”;
- Adult Education make a major contribution to improving outcomes for children and for parents through family learning initiatives;
- Libraries offer Booktime and Bookstart (together with the Registration Service) , providing free books and information sessions to parents to encourage and support reading aloud with children;
- The Youth Offending Service provide parenting services and support to parents of children and young people at risk of or who have offended;
- Representatives from Communities have supported the development of the “Families at Risk” project managed through the Social Innovation Lab, Kent (SILK);
- The Community Safety Unit contributes to safer communities for families through Community Wardens in particular;
- A range of services and teams in Communities are recognised as important providers of advice and information to parents and for their contribution to strengthening social and community networks.

4.3 The Communities Directorate is also well-placed to respond to some of the key messages from parents, children and young people. Concerns about community safety and drugs and alcohol ranked high among parents. They wanted to see more and better advertised activities for children and young people in their neighbourhoods. They expressed anxieties about insufficient opportunities for children and young people to exercise and linked this in part to concerns about road safety and a lack of safe places to play.

4.4 Young people were very concerned about public safety and also wanted to be given more opportunities to engage in sports. They were generally well disposed to the idea of making a contribution to their communities through volunteering but wanted to be sure that their views and contributions would be taken seriously.

4.5 A strong endorsement for universal access points, such as Libraries, came from Service professionals who also wanted to see the development of more positive activities for the whole family.

## **5. Taking the Strategy Forward**

5.1 Adoption of the proposed vision, values and principles by all partners in the Kent Children’s Trust will be followed by the publication of a Kent Children’s Trust Parent’s Charter. This will be widely publicised and made accessible to all parents and carers in Kent. It will form the basis on which services will work together and in partnership with mothers, fathers and carers to support children and young people.

5.2 The adoption of the strategy by Kent Children’s Trust partners will be followed by a more detailed implementation plan, which will be linked to the 2010 framework, the LAA and the over-arching Children and Young People’s plan.

5.3 The strategy will be managed and developed through multi-agency arrangements reporting to the Kent Children's Trust and chaired by the Parenting Support Commissioner. Delivery will be through the Local Children's Services Partnerships.

5.4 Continuing participation of parents, carers and communities is a key commitment in the strategy. Each Local Children's Services Partnership will set up a parent's forum which will be involved in the development of services and provide a representative voice on Local Children's Services Boards.

## **6. Proposed Strategic Outcomes**

6.1 A set of high level strategic outcomes, to be achieved by 2010, has been developed which will form part of the success criteria of the strategy. These are as follows:

- All Local Children's Partnerships will reflect the need to support parents and carers within their local CYPP and will take account of and involve parents and carers in the development and delivery of services.
- All children, young people and their families will have access to services that are based on the best available evidence and are provided by staff with an appropriate range of skills, knowledge and competencies
- Parents, carers and families can easily meet their needs for information and advice
- Parents, carers and families can access support which is delivered locally, takes account of their needs as a whole and is delivered at the earliest point to prevent crisis
- Adult services take account of the needs of their clients as parents when delivering services or assessing need.
- Parents and families with complex needs receive high quality and timely support
- A culture of partnership between professionals, services, parents, carers and families is established
- A culture of parents and families actively participating in, leading and delivering local community services is established, so that families feel empowered to influence decisions in their local communities and be part of the solution.

## **7. Recommendation**

Members are asked to:

- (i) NOTE the development of the Parenting Support Strategy
- (ii) COMMENT on the proposed principles (paragraph 2.3) and strategic outcomes (paragraph 6.1)
- (iii) NOTE the contribution made by Communities towards the Parenting Support Strategy and parenting support services in Kent.

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