

SPECIALIST CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Specialist Children's Services Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 28 September 2011.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mr M J Vye (Vice-Chairman), Mr M J Angell, Mrs P T Cole, Mr H J Craske, Mr T Gates, Mrs E Green, Mr J D Kirby, Mr S Manion and Mr J M Ozog

ALSO PRESENT: Mr N J D Chard, Mr P W A Lake and Mrs J Whittle

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Newsam (Interim Corporate Director of Families and Social Care) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

15. Minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 21 June 2011

(Item A4)

1. RESOLVED that the Minutes of the POSC meeting held on 21 June 2011 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman.
2. The Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel meetings held on 21 June and 31 August, and the Children's Services Improvement Panel meetings held on 22 June and 13 July are attached for information only and are noted.

16. Dates of Meetings in 2012

(Item A5)

Members noted the dates reserved for the POSC's meetings in 2012, as follows:-

Thursday 19 January, 2.00 pm
Thursday 22 March, 10.00 am
Thursday 21 June, 10.00 am
Friday 28 September, 10.00 am
Friday 23 November, 10.00 am

All meetings will take place at County Hall and those starting in the morning may continue into the afternoon if the weight of business dictates.

17. Oral Update by Cabinet Member

(Item A7)

1. Mrs J Whittle gave an oral update on the following:-

Children's Services Improvement Panel – the Children's Services Improvement Panel is working well as a cross-party body and can tackle issues in depth, for example,

Performance Management and the Quality Assurance Framework, to build the service back up to being 'good' or 'outstanding'.

Corporate Parenting Panel – The Corporate Parenting Panel is also working well.

Progress on Improvement Plan – huge progress had been achieved since Mr Newsam had taken up his post, for example in addressing backlogs and assessment timetables. Part of the next phase of improvement will be to address the quality of casework.

Independent Review of Adoption - Martin Narey is shortly to complete his review of Kent's Adoption service. This has taken longer than envisaged due the size of Kent's Children's Services unit, which is the second largest in the UK. A report on this is to go to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 5 December and to County Council on 15 December.

Foster Carer recruitment – the county now has over 700 Foster Carers to look after its 1,200 LAC. As the number of LAC has increased, the KCC has also had to engage Foster Carers via IFAs. The issue of the number of LAC being placed in Thanet continues to appear in the media. The Chairman referred to an initiative to recruit new Foster Carers via schools, which was being trialled in Dartford, and former employees of Pfizer have also been approached about becoming Foster Carers. Kent's unit costs for its Fostering service are lower than the national average due to the number of in-house Foster Carers.

Assisted Boarding Scheme – a meeting with Head Teachers is to take place shortly. Some places on a scheme could be free or subsidised, and the Royal National Children's Foundation is able/has offered to sponsor some places.

Short Breaks statement – this will be made on 1 October and relates to short breaks for disabled children and their parents.

CAMHS services for LAC placed by other Local Authorities – work is in progress to recover the money spent by Kent on providing these services. *A further report will be made to the November meeting of the POSC.*

Costs of care to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People awaiting repatriation – discussions with the Home Office are going on around allowing for more funding in the KCC's base budget to cover this.

Social Workers in Schools scheme – it is planned to pilot a scheme to place Social Workers in schools, as this is a vital tool in helping to prevent children becoming LAC and/or having a Child Protection Plan. *A further report will be made to the November meeting of the POSC.*

Corporate Parenting training – training sessions are going well, and a feedback report will be considered by the CPP on 7 October.

Early Intervention and Preventative Strategy (EIPS) - A further report will be made to the November meeting of the POSC.

2. Arising from comments and questions from Members, the following points were highlighted:-

- data could identify some London Boroughs as sending more LAC to Kent, and Mrs Whittle undertook to advise Members outside the meeting of those Boroughs sending the most. It would then be possible to press the Minister Tim Lawton to write to these authorities about reducing the number they send;
- LAC placed away from their home county are not supposed to be placed more than 20 miles away from their home, and although this is a best practice convention it is not enforceable by law. Mrs Whittle undertook to advise Members of how many LAC placements adhere to this rule;
- the excessive amount of paperwork issued to Adoption Panels, on which many KCC Members serve, has been identified both by Members and by Martin Narey in his review of the service. Although paperwork must be thorough and complete, there is scope to look at streamlining what is provided to Adoption Panels;
- Foster Carers in Kent appreciate and praise the support they receive from the KCC's Adoption service. Existing Foster Carers around the county could play a part in recruiting more Foster Carers. Mrs Whittle undertook to advise Members of the percentage of KCC in-house Foster Carers who have joined the service recently;
- The number and distribution of LAC around the county shapes the number of Foster Carers required in any one area, and Mrs Whittle undertook to advise Members of where in the county Kent's own LAC are placed.

3. RESOLVED that the information given in the update and in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

18. Children's Services Improvement Plan - Quarterly Update

(Item B1)

1. Mrs Whittle introduced the report and thanked Mr Newsam, the District Managers and Social Work teams for all the work they had put in to turn round the service, and the rigour that had been applied to improving performance management. For example, it is now possible to do assessments so much faster than had been possible one year ago.

2. Mr Newsam highlighted the three key elements which had contributed to the rapid progress made. These are strong leadership, driven by the Leader and Cabinet Member, and supported by all Members, a whole Council approach involving all the Corporate Management Team, and thirdly the unremitting focus on fixing the most important things first. This approach had delivered rapid improvement but needs to be sustained in Phase 2. The report set out the 7 key points of Phase 2.

3. Mrs Whittle and Mr Newsam responded to comments and questions from Members. The following points were highlighted:-

- a) the 7 steps listed give a good framework for future scrutiny. For example, Members could check the preventative services available in their own local area;
 - b) it is important to take a balanced view of both the number and complexity of cases, rather than just look at numbers. However, the number of Child Protection Plans has doubled since the Baby Peter case, and once a child has a Plan it is difficult to move them away from it. Thresholds need to be clear and consistent, and direction and monitoring need to be robust. Each case must be judged individually and sensitively;
 - c) domestic abuse has an impact on the number of children having a Child Protection plan and coming into care, and services to address domestic abuse need to be streamlined and supported;
 - d) some of the cases recorded as not having been allocated a social worker have been assessed as not needing a specialist worker but needing only some support now and then, eg for respite. However, once they have been registered on the case database they are counted as part of the caseload;
 - e) social work staff, like all other KCC staff, can address any concerns they might have about the improvement programme with senior managers via the 'Talk to the Top' initiative, and this contact can be anonymous if wished; and
 - f) the social work recruitment issue had been addressed by focussing on three issues:- to seek to fund recruitment properly, to be more energetic about recruitment, and to address terms and conditions so they are no longer a handicap to recruiting good quality staff.
4. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks, and that Members' congratulations on the progress achieved be passed on to the staff concerned.

19. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) - a progress report on the development of the service

(Item B2)

Ms H Jones, Head of Commissioning, Specialist Children's Services, and Ms K Sharp, Assistant Director of Child Health Commissioning, NHS Kent and Medway, were in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Jones and Ms Sharp introduced the report and explained that the KCC and NHS are working together to address the failings in the CAMHS service which were identified by the Care Quality Commission. Kent had also undertaken some of its own investigation and had identified that, at worst, some young people had been waiting up to 102 weeks for an appointment, agencies were working in silos, making services difficult to navigate, and Kent lagged behind other authorities in the model of service provision it was using. The conclusion was that Kent's services needed to be

re-designed. The new model, set out in the report, had been formulated by clinicians, and a major part of it is a new procurement process.

2. Ms Jones and Ms Sharp responded to comments and questions from Members, and the following points were highlighted:-

- a) Members welcomed news of the progress which had been made, as CAMHS had been of great concern for a long time;
- b) a major part of a the new protocol is to improve the transition process from children's and adolescents' to adult services by engaging with young people earlier, at 17 rather than 18;
- c) the improvements need not necessarily require more funding; practical and organisational changes could be made to improve the way services link and work together;
- d) an explanation was given of the Tiers of service provision, as follows:-
 - Tier 1 – Universal services, which could be delivered by GPs and via schools,
 - Tier 2 – Targeted services, for young people who need support with a breakdown or depression
 - Tier 3 – Specialist services, ie psychiatric interventions
 - Tier 4 – Residential services, ie inpatient
- e) the service works very closely with GPs as they are the first port of call for most young people with anxieties. Support to GPs will be strengthened in the new model, with a single point of access;
- f) using the new model, waiting times will be reduced from 102 to 18 weeks. Other local authorities in the South East who use the new model have achieved this impressive reduction; and
- g) KCC's role in the new service delivery will be in early intervention. *A report on the early intervention and prevention strategy is planned for the POSC's November meeting.*

3. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks;
- b) the POSC receive regular update reports on the progress of the new model and on the new processes, starting with a report on the early intervention and prevention strategy to the November meeting; and
- c) a copy of the report be sent to Members of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) for their information.

20. Specialist Children's Services Budget Forecast Report 2011/12
(Item C1)

Miss M Goldsmith, Families and Social Care Finance Business Partner, was in attendance for this item.

1. Miss Goldsmith introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from Members. The following points were highlighted:-

- a) as in past years, an Informal Member Group had been established to look in detail at the budget, and the views of the Group will be reported to the POSC's November meeting;
- b) Mrs Whittle pointed out that the Specialist Children's Services budget was facing several pressures:- the increase in LAC, filling social worker vacancies, improvements to social worker pay and conditions, and the financial impact of judgments such as the Southwark judgement. This investment is necessary to improve the service and re-shape the workforce, and Mrs Whittle stated her aim to have these increased costs built into the base budget; and
- c) work is being done to identify the potential impacts if the SCS budget were to be asked to absorb a hypothetical £1m cut, a £5m cut, etc.;

2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

21. Connecting with Communities - 2010/11 Annual Report on Consultation, Engagement and Involvement Activity
(Item C2)

Mr N Warren, Consumer Monitoring Manager, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Warren introduced the item and explained that, since drafting the report, the Community Engagement Management team had increased from 7 to 12 posts. He responded to comments and questions from Members, and the following points were highlighted:-

- a) the Children In Care Council is a valuable working partner for the KCC and should be included in the list of consultees; and
- b) the POSC would need to be able to identify all voluntary sector organisations with which it might be able to partner in future commissioning, and Members requested a future report to set out this information.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks; and
- b) a report be made to a future meeting of the POSC to list all the voluntary sector organisations which might be able to partner the KCC in future commissioning.

22. Complaints 2010/11

(Item C3)

Mrs A Kitto, Customer Care Manager, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Kitto introduced the report and explained that complaints had increased, both for Children's and Adults' services, but this a national trend and is not confined to Kent. Most complaints are resolved early, and fewer than previously proceed to stage 3. Kent's social care services have always viewed complaints as a useful indicator of shortcomings and have used them as a learning tool to improve aspects of service delivery, staff training, etc;

2. RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks

23. Update on Select Committee work

(Item D1)

RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks, and the proposal for a Select Committee review of Domestic Abuse be welcomed.