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To: Children Families and Education Policy Overview Committee  
- 5 July 2007

Subject: KENT CHILDREN'S TRUST PARENT SUPPORT STRATEGY

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Summary: This report provides an update on the development of Kent Children's Trust Parent Support Strategy and sets out the draft core principles for Members comments and views.

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## **Introduction**

1. (1) During October 2006 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) launched guidance for local authorities clarifying the necessity for the development of single strategy for parent support. At the recommendation of CFE Senior Management Team, in November 2006 a proposal for the development of a Parental Support Strategy and a Charter for Parents was taken to the Children's Trust. The Trust endorsed the timetable for the production of this core strategy document and the Parent's Charter by autumn 2007.

(2) In order to progress the development of the strategy, a multi-agency steering group (*reflecting Children's Trust membership*) has been established to guide the process. Members of the steering group have agreed to feedback development issues to the groups and organisations they represent.

(3) This strategy recognises that the people who raise children are not only birth mothers and fathers, Adoptive parents, foster carers, stepparents, members of the extended family and grandparents may all be involved in raising children. Therefore, when we use the term "parent(s)/carer(s)" we are referring to the significant caring adult(s) for the children in any type of family.

## **Consultation arrangements**

2. (1) In order to gather the views of partners and stakeholders we have embarked on a phased consultations process.

(2) Officer and agency consultation 5 March 2007

Our March event brought together 120 delegates from across Children, Families and Education, District Councils, Schools, the Communities Directorate, Health, Faith groups and the Community and Voluntary Sector. Delegates were briefed about the national picture and the timeframe for developing Kent's strategy. We were then able, through a series of questions, to gather delegates views on the shape of parent support

provision across the county. We also pulled out the challenges they felt families faced and also those that they are professionals supporting families faced.

(3) Parent Consultation

June-September 2007

Consultation with parents will take on various forms. We will be working with an organisation experienced in public consultations, particularly with engaging “hard to reach” groups. A general population sample will be undertaken to capture the views of a cross section of the community. In addition Family Liaison Officers and Parent Support Advisors will be carrying out consultation with groups of parents who currently access services through schools. Finally, following officer and agency consultation in March, a number of partner organisations have agreed to support this element of the work and will use the questionnaire we devise in order to consult with individual and groups of parents that they work with. This consultation will inform the strategy but will contribute to the development of the Parent’s Charter in particular.

(4) Parent Fora

Working with Partnership with Parents, Parent For a are being set up in each District to provide parents with a voice in engaging with, challenging and shaping the services available to them, raising concerns around gaps in provision and supporting other parents. For a have so far been set up in the following Districts: Dover; Maidstone, Swanley, Malling; Ashford and Thanet with a Gravesham event to launch its For a taking place in October.

(5) Parent Voice

Autumn 2007

To ensure that parents are listened to from the top down we plan to arrange a “Meet the parents” event. This is where representatives of the Parent Flora have an opportunity to meet and talk with Children’s Trust members and senior officers from Children, Families and Education, to discuss what it is like to be a parent in Kent in 2007.

## **Drivers for Change**

3. (1) The government sets out a vision for “responsive public services, increasingly driven by even greater numbers of parents with high aspirations for their children” *Every Parent Matters DFES April 2007*. Locally we are aware that whilst support services are available across the County they are fragmented and often not consistently available to meet local demand. Parent Support is also part of the core offer of services, both for the development of Extended Services in and around schools and for the development of Children’s Centres. This requires agencies across all sectors to work together, share information and move to a position where their common approach means parents and carers can access support in a way that is meaningful to them and supportive of their needs.

(2) Kent has a strong and effective network of Family Liaison Officers, supporting parents and carers. Working from schools this professional workforce provides locally focussed support to meet the needs of children and families. This network has recently been expanded to include 40 Parent Support Advisors, deployed across the county to clusters, groups of schools and linked to attendance and behaviour as part of a pilot programme. This national pilot is highlighted as a core strand for the delivery of parent support services within the DfES document published in April of this year, **Every Parent Matters**.

## **Strategic Direction**

4. In Kent we have long recognised those children with parents who are positively engaged in their life, both in and outside of school are the most successful. Parents are the single most significant influence on how a child will develop and interact with their surroundings. Keeping this at the centre of our thoughts we have developed, in consultation with partners, a set of draft core principles to guide our strategic direction and the development of both the strategy and the Charter. It is important to note that these are still being actively consulted on with a range of organisations and parent groups, and may be subject to revision.

The 15 principles are set out below:

1. *The well being of children and young people is the responsibility of **all** people, agencies, and services in contact with them.*
2. *“Working in partnership” includes parents, carers, children and young people as well as across agencies and groups, both statutory, voluntary or community.*
3. *Parents, carers and children’s views must be reflected in development of services.*
4. *There is commitment for continuous improvement in quality, standards and parent workforce development through national accredited training.*
5. *Engaging, empowering and establishing relationships with parents will enable them to build on their own strengths and make informed choices about the services they choose to access.*
6. *Diversity and different is valued and respected and does not prohibit access to services.*
7. *All agencies should use a common professional language so that there is coherence in what services offer and what parents receive.*
8. *Promote respect, and value the involvement of parents and carers at all levels of society.*
9. *Promote flexible services, organised around the views of the parents, carers, children and young people who use them. Parents, carers, children and young people will be influential in what we do, and we will have robust mechanisms to ensure that this occurs as part of practice.*
10. *Evidence based practice, research, evaluation and monitoring outcomes underpins the planning and development of new and existing services.*
11. *Services will be available in line with the needs of parents, carers, children and young people and support will be provided wherever possible by universal services in a variety of local and centralised, welcoming areas. This includes Children’s centres and Extended Schools.*
12. *All agencies value and recognise the role and impact of an extended family/models of family’s life and networks.*
13. *We accept that the role of the parent changes but does not stop.*
14. *Good parenting = good citizenship. We will provide a positive and consistent needs-led approach to help parents respond effectively to concerns regarding their children’s behaviour in the community.*
15. *Parents are the key to ensuring that Every Child Matters.*

## **Conclusions**

5. The development of a Parent Support Strategy for the County will provide a strategy framework under which parent support services can be commissioned, developed and delivered. Following consultation, we will identify a set of pledges that will form the basis of an action plan for the next phase of activity in this important area of work. We have benefited from the advice, guidance and experience of our Steering Group and intend to use this body of expertise to pull together the next steps for presentation to the Kent Children’s Trust at their October meeting.

## **Recommendations**

6. Members of the Children, Families and Education Directorate are asked to:
  1. Note the process for consultation with parents
  2. Give views on the principles as they are set out in section 3 Drivers for Change

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### *Background Documents:*

Every Parent Matters DfES April 2007  
([www.teachernet.gov.uk/everyparent\\_matters](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/everyparent_matters))