

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, 11 March 2009.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mrs C Angell, Mr J Curwood, Mrs V J Dagger, Dr T R Robinson and Mr J D Simmonds

ALSO PRESENT: Mr L B Ridings

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs K Weiss (Head of Policy & Performance), Mr K Arthur (Head of Children's Safeguards Service), Ms A Gilmour (Kent & Medway Domestic Violence Co-ordinator), Mrs J Doherty (Policy Manager) and Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

25. Chairman's Announcements

(Item A4)

The Chairman and Mrs Weiss advised that, following a delay caused by necessary data being unavailable, the Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) Annual Report 2007-08 and Business Plan 2008-11 was now ready to share with Members and would be sent to all Board Members following the meeting. The document was to be considered by the CFE POC on 27 March 2009.

26. Minutes of the Board's Meetings held on 24 September 2008 and 3 December 2008, and of the first special meeting held on 12 February 2009

(Item A3)

(1) RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2008 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising. The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2008 are already signed and had been included for reference only.

(2) The Board also considered the Minutes of its special meeting held on 12 February 2009 and RESOLVED that, subject to the addition of Mr L B Ridings to the list of those in attendance and a small amendment to paragraph (5) of Minute 24, the Minutes of the meeting are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

27. Feedback from the special meeting on 12 February 2009

(Item B1)

(1) Mr L B Ridings advised Members that the seven recommendations in the report on Phase 1 of the Safeguarding Review, which the Board had considered on 12 February, had subsequently been reported to an informal meeting of Cabinet

Members. At that meeting, recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 had been supported by Cabinet Members, and further consideration of recommendation 5 (the proposed establishment of a Senior Consultant Practitioner post reporting directly to the Chief Executive) had been deferred to allow the issue to be discussed with the new Managing Director of Children, Families and Education (CFE) when she arrived.

(2) Several Members expressed concern about the fact reported in the presentation on 12 February that not all staff surveyed had agreed that all children's social care cases had an allocated social worker. Mrs Weiss undertook to check the situation behind these statistics and advise Board Members.

28. Domestic Abuse - Initiatives to better protect children

(Item B2)

(A presentation by Alison Gilmour, Kent and Medway Domestic Violence Co-ordinator)

(1) Ms Gilmour introduced the papers which outlined various initiatives and work to address domestic violence issues, and, with Mr Arthur and Mrs Weiss, answered questions from Members. Arising from the discussion, and in response to Members' questions, the following points were highlighted:-

- (a) work on domestic violence covered two strands – help and support for present cases and preventative work to avoid future cases;
- (b) preventative work in the Domestic Violence Safer Schools Project had shown that young people were more tolerant of domestic violence, highlighting the need for early intervention to help young people understand what a good healthy relationship looked like. Therefore, much effort was put into working with schools, and primary schools were a particular key target area for preventative work to introduce children to a positive message as early as possible and try to reduce the domestic violence issue in the next generation;
- (c) various networks existed which could be used to identify problems and promulgate domestic violence protocols/initiatives, but sufficient project workers and resources were also needed to take work forward once a link had been made. There was much interest in taking forward domestic violence work but very limited resources;
- (d) The Kent and Medway Domestic Violence Strategy (KMDVSG) Group included representatives from all statutory and voluntary organisations, so was a solid link between organisations. One representative of the KMDVSG served on the Safer and Stronger Communities Group, and the KMDVSG also used local forums, Community Safety Partnerships and School Improvement Partnerships in their work;
- (e) Several of the projects which helped address the issue of domestic violence had their own methods of evaluating success and there was no one central evaluation method;
- (f) Health visitors had a key role in linking to families and could help identify families with potential domestic violence issues. However, the health visitor service was not evenly resourced across the county. NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent had appointed six domestic violence health visitors in December 2008 but NHS West Kent had none.

- (g) Patterns of domestic violence tended to pass from generation to generation and were therefore perpetuated and could almost come to be accepted as 'normal';
- (h) Witnesses and victims of domestic violence needed specialist support, and courts were now starting to provide this support (for example, in Maidstone) This support would make it easier to pursue prosecutions;
- (i) Some work was also targeted at helping perpetrators to avoid re-offending, via volunteer programmes;
- (j) KCC and several other employers had protocols for dealing with domestic violence issues being experienced by employees, whether they be victims or perpetrators;
- (k) A new initiative currently being piloted was Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) which dealt with the highest risk cases with the aim of lowering the risk. MARACs involved the participation of all agencies and were being rolled out with the aim of introducing them to all areas of Kent by April 2009. This was another way of bringing together agencies and allowing information sharing which could show up repeated patterns and possibly highlight cases which might be missed by one agency looking at behaviour in isolation;
- (l) Different cultures had different attitudes to family relationships and what was and wasn't acceptable. This is called "honour-based violence" and was linked to forced marriages. Much work had been done on honour-based violence, and all schools in Kent had been issued with guidance on this issue. A policy on honour-based violence was presently being prepared by Kent Police. Services to deal with it were available in North and Mid Kent but not in other areas of the county;
- (m) Funding for domestic violence work was accepted from wherever it was offered, but had to be bid for year by year, and there was currently no comprehensive funding stream. The Chairman suggested that the Children's Champions Board could try to help to identify potential funding sources;
- (n) Although much work on domestic violence related to the effects on children and hence was addressed via schools and children's services, domestic violence was also experienced by many couples who did not have children. These people could not benefit from the links and connections which existed between the various children's services;
- (o) Where it was present, domestic violence was known to be part of a range of troubles experienced by families. For example, 70% families experiencing child abuse were known also to experience domestic violence, and 30% of domestic violence cases start during pregnancy. Domestic violence was also a factor in family break up, and children entering care and becoming adopted.

(2) RESOLVED that the content of the report, and the information given in response to questions, be noted, with thanks.

29. Discussion about how and when the Board should receive an Annual Report on Safeguarding

(Item B3)

(1) The Board discussed the various strands of safeguarding information it received on a regular basis:- the Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) Annual

Report and Business Plan and the Annual Report of the Children's Safeguards Unit (CSU), which sits within the Strategy, Policy and Performance Division of CFE. The two reports, however, were prepared to different timetables: the KSCB report usually emerged in the summer (although this time it had been delayed) and the CSU report, prepared as summary of the academic year, appeared later in the year. The CSU reported to the KSCB at the end of the year so there was already a link between them.

(2) The Chairman suggested that the Board have a meeting given over entirely to safeguarding reports, although Mrs Weiss pointed out that this would mean considering a very large quantity of information at one time. Mrs Weiss undertook to consider, with Mr Arthur, how best to organise and pace the information to make it as accessible as possible for Members. Any report considered by the Board could also then be considered by CFE POC.

(3) At the end of the public part of the meeting, Mr Arthur answered questions from Members on his Unit's Annual Plan, which had been included with the agenda as an information item. His responses and the brief discussion around them highlighted:-

- (a) the links between his Unit's work and the work of domestic violence groups, which the Board had just heard about; and
- (b) that the report of the 2007/08 academic year reflected for the first time the increased profile and breadth of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role in children's social services and the bringing together of information from all professionals – community, church, Police, etc – for the first time.

(4) Mrs Weiss advised Members that Kent County Council was unusual in having a dedicated Children's Safeguards Unit. Mr Arthur's unit had been cited and used by the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCSF) as a model of good practice.

(5) RESOLVED that the Board consider the issue further once they have the advice of Mrs Weiss on how the information could best be organised and structured.