

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, 20 May 2009.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mrs C Angell, Mr J Curwood, Mrs V J Dagger, Mr I T N Jones, DL, Dr T R Robinson and Mr A D Crowther (Substitute for Mr J D Simmonds)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr L B Ridings

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs K Weiss (Head of Policy & Performance), Mr P Brightwell (Policy & Performance Manager - Looked After Children), Mrs J Doherty (Policy Manager) and Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

32. Oral Update - Progress of the Protecting Children in Kent Review (Item B1)

Mr M Ayre, Review Lead, and Mr P Thomason, Independent Child Protection Consultant, were in attendance for this item at the request of the Board.

(1) Mr Ayre and Mr Thomason updated Members on developments since the 12 February meeting, at which the Board had considered the findings of Phase 1 of the review, and set out the plans for Phases 2 and 3. Several major events had happened since 12 February to keep the issue in public focus:- the publication of Lord Laming's report and the Government's response to it, the conviction of Baby Peter's killers and the initial report of the Social Work Task Force.

(2) Mr Ayre and Mr Thomason then updated Members on the progress on each of the seven recommendations arising from Phase 1. Key points arising from the update, and given by Mr Ayre, Mr Thomason and Mrs Weiss in response to questions from Members, were as follows:-

- a) Mr Thomason gave a summary of the findings of the extended case audit undertaken, arising from recommendation 1, and explained that a fuller account would be included at the meeting on 21 July;
- b) 52 cases had been reviewed. These had been chosen from across the county and included cases from disability teams. More than half of these cases related to children of pre-school age;

- c) To gain comprehensive information, it had been necessary to use written files as well as the Integrated Children's System (ICS);
- d) All cases reviewed were considered to be safely managed, with child protection conferences and core group meetings taking place within the stipulated time scales and being recorded properly, and child protection plans being in place and monitored properly;
- e) There was some evidence that difficulties with the ICS had hampered the recording and co-ordination of information. Recording standards had dropped, hence the need for paper recording as well as using technology;
- f) Some delays had been experienced in transferring cases from duty to an allocated social worker. Ideally, there would be no delay in transferring, but Members were assured that, where delay occurred, it did not compromise the safety of any child. Managing the transfer well was more important than managing it quickly. If a transfer could not be effected within a few days, a child would always be visited, and the school kept informed, in the interim period;
- g) Recommendations 2 and 3: Mrs Weiss's team had done much work on the problems experienced with the ICS, and this work had been invaluable in contributing to the Government's response to the ICS problems;
- h) Recommendation 4: Practice Development Officers were now part of the general growth in children's social work arising from the £2.5 million government investment. This investment had funded the appointment of 33 new social workers and 11 new social work assistants;
- i) Recommendation 5: The proposed Head of Social Work for Kent had no national precedent and had proved controversial, with much concern being expressed by both Members and officers. A very slow and cautious approach to this issue had been adopted;
- j) Recommendation 6: A paper setting out a proposed practice audit had been sent to Board Members as an information item at the same time as the agenda for today's meeting; and
- k) Recommendation 7: Discussions with the universities – Canterbury Christ Church University and the University of Kent at Canterbury – were well under way and the approach was being welcomed by the universities.

(3) Phase 2 of the review will be considered at another special meeting of the Children's Champions Board, to which all County Council Members will be invited, on 21 July 2009. This will cover inter-agency working and will be prepared jointly with the Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB). All safeguarding agencies are required to complete a self-audit by 26 June, and the initial results of this would be available on 21 July. Mrs C Angell asked that the report on Phase 2 of the review include specific mention of the relationship between the County Council and Health in respect of the Health Visitor service, and also mention of the role of Police and the voluntary sector.

(4) Phase 3 of the Review will be reported to another special meeting of the Board in early Autumn. This will cover the development of national policy on child protection since Lord Laming's report on the Victoria Climbié case and will include the government's response to Lord Laming's second report.

(5) RESOLVED that the information given in response to Members' questions be noted, with thanks, and the progress made be welcomed.