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Mrs Hohler, Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education

To: Children, Families and Education Policy Overview Committee
September 18th 2009

Subject: CFE Participation and Consultation – Annual Report to Policy Overview Committee.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: The purpose of this report is to update Members with developments regarding participation with children and young people. The report provides the context of participation and consultation and provides a summary of the key activities undertaken by the Children, Families and Education Directorate during 2008/9 and the activities planned for 2009/10.

Introduction

1 (1) The Children, Families and Education Directorate and the Kent Children's Trust are committed to the participation and involvement of children and young people. Involving young people can lead to a number of benefits, not least making services more responsive to the people that use them. It also encourages children and young people to become active citizens, developing confidence and skills that will help them in other settings.

Policy Context

2 (1) The Kent County Council 2010 target 14 states we will "Listen to young people's views and opinions and develop their ideas to improve education and life in Kent".

(2) A key theme of the *Every Child Matters* agenda is to ensure the views of children and young people are heard and acted upon. In this context participation is about not simply taking part or being present but rather having some influence over the decisions and actions affecting them. Participation can be seen at a personal level with children and young people able to influence decisions that affect them as individuals. It can also be considered in the broader context with children and young people as a group having input into, for example, service planning and development.

(3) The U.N Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 12 states "Children and young people have a right to have a say on all issues that affect them and for these views to be taken seriously."

(4) The Local Government and Public Health Act 2007, which came into force on 1 April 2009, and the “Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities” Statutory Guidance place a duty on Local Authorities to involve local people – providing greater opportunities for people to be able to influence decision making and to get involved. The Act also provides the legislative framework for the development of Local Involvement Networks. The networks provide local people and groups with a voice in the monitoring and commissioning of health and social care services. The aspiration is to embed a culture of engagement and empowerment.

Participation with Children and Young People in Kent.

3 (1) The Kent Children’s Trust agreed a Participation Framework in 2007 which promotes good practice and a coherent approach to participation across children’s services in the county. It is not expected that all participation will be the same, as children are not a homogenous group. Children with specific needs, for example disabled children, or younger children, might need different methods of participation. Nevertheless it is expected that all groups of children and young people will be engaged and participation and consultation activity will be conducted to a high standard. It is also expected that their views will not just be listened to but also acted on.

(2) An action plan is being produced to further promote participation with children and young people through partnership working. This includes:

- Continuing to provide training and professional development on participation for people who work with children and young people.
- Communicating examples of good participation practice and the outcomes from participation.
- Continuing to ensure that children and young people receive feedback from participation that they have been involved in.
- Producing a policy and protocols regarding involving children and young people in recruitment and selection.
- Ensuring that participation is inclusive and involves children and young people who are “seldom heard”.

(3) All the Local Children Services Partnerships (LCSPs) are being encouraged and supported to establish local forums for involving children and young people and many already have these in place. The children’s organisation ‘Participate by Right’ is assisting by providing local workshops and providing advice on good practice.

(4) Participation with children and young people has helped to:

- Inform the development of strategies and policies.
- Inform planning for services and performance management.
- Identify needs and preferences.
- Provide feedback on services and the support provided for children and young people.
- Influence services and information produced for children and young people.

Participation with Parents and Carers

4 (1) It is also important to involve parents and carers. In Kent, parents and carers have played a key role in developing a Parent Support Strategy and producing a charter for parents. Through this work, the Kent Children's Trust has made a commitment to involve and listen to the views of parents.

(2) Most of the Local Children Services Partnerships have parents' forums in place, providing parents with an opportunity to influence local priorities and services. For example in Ashford, parents advocated strongly for a road safety project to be established and for road safety to be included in local plans.

(3) 'Partnership with Parents', a Parents' Voice Coordinator, and local Family Liaison Officers and Parent Support Advisors have a key role in ensuring the views of parents are considered at a local and school level.

(4) When consulting with parents and carers, there can be a tendency to overlook the views of fathers. An "Engaging Fathers" research project at the Seashells Children and Families Centre in Sheerness highlighted the benefits of positively involving fathers.

Significant Developments in Involvement Activity This Year.

5 (1) Set out below are some of the key consultations that took place in 2008/09 and consultations planned for 09/10.

(2) **Children and Young People of Kent Survey:**

- (i) A key survey conducted in 2008 was the 'Children and Young People of Kent Survey' (2008). This was an extensive survey involving over 45,000 children and young people in the county. The findings of the survey were reported to this committee in November 2008. The survey produced a wealth of data regarding the perceptions of children and young people on the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes and life in Kent. A further survey is planned for Autumn 2009. The findings from the survey have been used at a school, local and county level, providing invaluable data to inform commissioning and service delivery.
- (ii) In March 2009, the research company Ipsos-Mori were commissioned to conduct qualitative focus group research with young people in the county and explore some of the areas of concern raised by the 'Children and Young People of Kent Survey'. This provided an opportunity to cover issues with young people in more depth. With focus groups the research is illustrative rather than statistically valid, providing useful insights into young people's perceptions. This work has informed the Kent Children's Trust annual Every Child Matters Needs Assessment process.

(3) Involvement in the Children and Young People's Plan:

In June/July 2008 young people were consulted on the Children and Young People's Plan. Many of the young people consulted were from a background where they might be considered less likely to be involved in mainstream consultation work and are often perceived as "seldom heard". This included children with a disability, young people from minority backgrounds and young people not in education, employment or training.

(4) KCT Board panels of children, young people and parents:

Panels of young people and parents have been established to act as reference groups for the work of the Kent Children's Trust Board and its Executive group. The panels give a view on key issues being considered by the Trust and act as a sounding board for the Trust. In addition the panels will also have an opportunity to raise their concerns and issues with the Children's Trust.

(5) Kent Children in Care Council:

A further development is the Kent 'Children in Care Council'. This is a recent initiative; an event took place in April 2009 with approximately 40 young people in care who have expressed a desire to help form a Kent Children in Care council. The Council will be the main forum by which children and young people in, and leaving care, in Kent will express their views to Kent's corporate parenting forum. All local Authorities are expected to establish a Children in Care Council in 2009.

(6) Meetings with Kent Youth County Council (KYCC):

The county has a very active Kent Youth County Council which debates issues that are important to young people. Close links are maintained with the KYCC including regular meetings between the Children, Families and Education Senior Management Team and the KYCC Education Group. Earlier this year members of the KYCC assisted with an event for younger children with 60 primary age children attending the first meeting with a view to setting up a council for primary age children.

(7) A list of the consultations conducted with the public in 2008/09 and those planned for 2009/10 are included in Appendices 1 and 2.

Conclusion

6 (1) The Children Families and Education Directorate and the Kent Children's Trust have a proactive approach to participation and consultation with children, young people and parents/carers. This is in line with the *Modernising Government* and the *Every Child Matters* agendas. A range of approaches to participation and consultation are adopted, recognising that children with different needs and of different ages need to participate in different ways and to different degrees. There continues to be a broad range of consultations and they form an integral part of planning, procurement and performance review activity.

(2) This year the directorate aims to further promote participation and consultation activity through the KCT arrangements so that children, young people and parents have some influence over the decisions that affect them. It is intended to ensure the views of children and young people who are perceived as "hard to reach" are also

heard and that the Local Children's Service Partnerships are well equipped to consult with relevant stakeholders in their locality.

Recommendations

7 Members are asked to note this year's developments in involvement and participation activity with children and young people.

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Background Documents: None

Other Useful Information: None