

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

30. Minutes of Board Meetings held on (a) 3 December 2008 and (b) 11 March 2009

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2009 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising. The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2008 are already signed and had been included for reference only.

31. Chairman's Announcements

(Item A4)

(1) The Chairman announced that Mr Jones and Dr Robinson were attending their last meeting of the Board prior to retiring from the County Council at the June elections. She thanked them both for all their work on the Board and was supported by other Members in wishing them well for the future.

(2) Mr Jones thanked the Chairman for the way she had conducted the Board's meetings and business and asked that his thanks to all the officers who had attended and reported to the Board be recorded. He also paid tribute to the many officers working in the field of Children's Social Services across Kent, whose work had been reported to the Board. He said they did a remarkable job, often in very difficult circumstances. He said how useful he had found it to meet young people in care and leaving care and that this had reinforced his belief that all young people needed to have a good home. He thanked Members of the Board and reciprocated their best wishes for the future.

(3) Dr Robinson echoed Mr Jones' comments and added that he had found working with less fortunate children very thought-provoking. He thanked all the officers who had reported to and supported the work of the Board.

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.

33. Kent Children's Trust (KCT) Arrangements, including Local Children's Services Partnerships (LCSPs)

(Item B2)

RESOLVED that the information given in the report be noted, with thanks.

34. The Government's Response to Lord Laming's Report, 'The Protection of Children in England; A Progress Report'

(Item B3)

(1) Mrs Weiss introduced the report and answered questions from Members. She explained that the Social Work Task Force would publish its second report on 1 July,

so there would not be time to summarise this in time to include it at the 21 July meeting of the Board.

(2) Mrs Weiss undertook to seek clarification from CFE finance colleagues of the detailed allocation of money which accompanied the Report action plan.

(3) Mrs Weiss had prepared a detailed written response for the Cabinet Member, Mr Ridings, in response to a number of written questions sent to him by the Vice Chairman, Mr Vye, and these responses were summarised orally to the other Board Members.

(4) RESOLVED that the information given in the report, and in response to Members' questions, be noted, with thanks.

35. Discussion - Linking into the Primary Head Teachers' conference in June 2009.

(Item B4)

The Board was to have discussed what input it might have into the Head Teachers' conference in June 2009, via the attendance at the conference of the Vice Chairman, Mr Vye. The conference had taken place in April and Mr Vye had attended and given informal feedback to the Chairman. Through Members' attendance at this sort of event, the Board would have an ongoing link into Head Teacher bodies.

36. Discussion - Addressing items from the Board's Action Plan which arose at the awayday in July 2008.

(Item B5)

A list of 14 issues for future discussion identified by Board Members had been included in the papers for the meeting. Mr Brightwell suggested to Members that the agenda for each of the Board's meetings should carry a standing item under which these issues could be addressed, one or two at a time. This suggestion met with the Board's general agreement.

37. Presentation on the Children In Care Council and discussion on when and how the Board next wishes to meet with young people in care and leaving care, and how to engage the Children in Care Council.

(Item B6)

Ms L Warne from Upfront Advocacy Service and Ms J Bingham from Catch 22 were in attendance for this item at the invitation of the Board.

(1) Ms Warne and Ms Bingham presented a series of slides which set out the objectives and developments so far of the Children in Care Council, including a successful launch event in 2009 and plans for future events. A copy of these slides had been included in the papers for the meeting. Ms Warne and Ms Bingham explained that the Children in Care Council should be:- *inclusive*, covering the whole County and including disabled young people and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People; *owned by young people*, and run how they want it to be run; and that young people needed to feel safe and comfortable. Members endorsed this approach.

(2) Members were pleased to hear of the success of the launch event in April and congratulated those involved in arranging the event in a limited time. They also welcomed forthcoming summer events and a planned visit to parliament in October 2009 at which young people would be hosted by Julian Brazier, MP, and be able to find out about the democratic process. This should reinforce the fact that young people in care are taken seriously and would help boost their confidence. It was also suggested that a trip to Brussels to meet Members of the European Parliament would give young people a chance to see what issues are faced by young people in care elsewhere in Europe.

(3) One Member reported that he had been mentoring a young man whom the Board had met at a previous event. Such support was invaluable to young people needing networking opportunities, moral support and encouragement.

(4) Members then discussed the next steps in terms of meeting with and linking into the Children in Care Council, and it was emphasised that young people on the new Council first needed to establish relationships between themselves before meeting the Board. Members decided to wait for the young people to say how and when they wished to link to the Board.

(5) RESOLVED that the information given in the presentation, and in response to Members' questions, be noted, with thanks, and that Members wait to hear from young people on the Children in Care Council about how and when they wish to link to Board Members.

38. Discussion - Corporate Parenting Training for returning and new Members following Elections.

(Item B7)

(1) Mr Brightwell reminded Members of the three levels of Corporate Parenting responsibility held by KCC Members:-

- **Level 1:** Shared by all elected County Councillors as soon as they accept office;
- **Level 2 -Targeted responsibility:** Shared by all Members of the Children's Champions Board, and;
- **Level 3 – Specialist responsibility:** Shared by the Chairman of the Board and Cabinet Members. Mr Ridings added that a recent additional requirement was that the Leader should also share Level 3 responsibility.

(2) The Cabinet Member, Mr Ridings, suggested that all Cabinet Members should receive the same Level 2 training as Board Members, as Corporate Parenting issues cross most portfolio headings.

(3) Mrs C Angell suggested that reports to all POCs include a paragraph setting out the implications of any issue being discussed upon the County Council's Corporate Parenting role and upon the life of children in care in Kent, in the same way as reports might list resource implications or climate change implications, for

example. This would reinforce and raise the profile of Members' responsibility as Corporate Parents.

(4) Members then discussed the possibility of combining corporate parenting and safeguarding training at one event in Autumn 2009, as the government's plans for safeguarding training for County Councillors should be available by then. Mrs Angell suggested that such an event should include the role of district councils as housing providers for young people leaving care and the role of the NHS in providing the Health Visitor service.

(5) RESOLVED that Mrs Weiss and Mr Brightwell work up options for combining the two subjects – corporate parenting and safeguarding – in one event or treating them separately at two events in Autumn 2009 and offer these options to the Chairman and the Board to choose the approach they want to adopt.