

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION - VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND PARTNERSHIPS POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children, Families & Education - Vulnerable Children and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee held at Swale 3, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 18th September, 2009.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen (Chairman), Mrs P T Cole, Mr H J Craske, Mr R Frayne, Mrs E Green, Mr S Manion, Mr K Pugh and Mr C T Wells

ALSO PRESENT: Mr L B Ridings

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr B Anderson (Director Children's Social Services), Mrs J Wainwright (Director Commissioning (Specialist Services)), Mr A Mort (Policy Manager) and Miss T Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

3. Membership

Miss Grayell reported that Mr K Pugh had joined the Committee in place of Mr R Tolputt.

4. Election of Vice-Chairman *(Item. A2)*

The Chairman announced that this item would be deferred to the Committee's 6 November meeting. This was because so many of the Members who served on more than one CFEPOC had sent apologies as the three CFEPOCs were meeting concurrently on this occasion.

5. Dates of Future Meetings *(Item. A4)*

RESOLVED that the dates set for the Committee's meetings for the remainder of 2009 and 2010 be noted, as follows:-

Friday, 6 November 2009 - 10.00 am
Friday, 15 January 2010 - 10.00 am *(joint meeting of all three CFE POCs)*
Wednesday, 31 March 2010 - 10.00 am
Tuesday, 29 June 2010 - 10.00 am
Thursday, 16 September 2010 - 2.00 pm
Wednesday, 10 November 2010 – 10.00 am

6. Areas of Focus for Future Meetings *(Item. B1)*

(1) The Chairman and the Deputy Cabinet Member introduced the item by suggesting issues and discussion of how these issues could be approached then followed. The issues listed were as follows:-

- (a) *A Review of Children's Partnerships*, to gain first hand experience of the issues which the Committee was asked to consider. This could be achieved by visiting Partnerships;
- (b) *Health Visitors*. Concerns had been expressed to Members by nursery and playgroup leaders, who did not get visits from Health Visitors. Health Visitors played a key role in engaging with new parents and, as such, were well placed to see early signs of child protection issues. Health Visitor visits stopped when a child reached a prescribed age, leaving the onus on parents to visit children's centres instead. Some parents were either not motivated to attend, or had practical problems in attending. Mrs Wainwright and Mr Ridings suggested that PCTs could be asked to present the facts about Health Visiting to the POC, or possibly linking with the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, via the Cabinet Member Mr Marsh, to recommend action to resolve issues identified;
- (c) *Reduction in Grants for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People (UASCYP)*, and the resulting substantial cost impact for Kent. Mr Anderson pointed out the complexity of funding around the issue of UASCYP in Kent and the conflicting legislation relating to it, but offered an item for the November meeting when new Government policy would be more defined. Members asked if the issue could be linked into the budget setting process. Mr Anderson invited Members to visit the teams and centres which worked with UASCYP;
- (d) *Differing levels of Children's Social Services activity in East and West Kent*; and
- (e) *Research on Serious Case Reviews since 2000*, undertaken by Dr Witney of Edinburgh University.

7. CFE Participation and Consultation - Annual Report (Item. B2)

(1) Mr Mort introduced the report and emphasised the Directorate's commitment to engaging with young people and seeking their input into policy setting, and the successes it had had in the past. He reminded Members that Every Child Matters gave all young people the right to take part in decision making which affected them, and that such engagement was also one of the KCC's targets in Towards 2010.

(2) Arising from discussion, and in response to questions raised by Members, the following points were highlighted:-

- (a) Schools and colleges were being actively encouraged to take part in the National Federation for Educational Research (NFER) survey, and this had been very helpful in past years in feeding useful info into the

KCC's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). Participation was no longer automatic, but some 400 schools had so far signed up, giving a good range of primary and secondary school and college participation. The questionnaire would be based on the elements of Every Child Matters and on school life, and would be kept concise;

- (b) participation had been evenly spread across Kent, as roadshows had covered the whole county. What was proving difficult was to engage with the hard-to-reach groups, such as BME communities and those for whom English was not their first language, and the disabled, rather than any geographical area of the county; and
- (c) although surveys were conducted at Children's Centres, which tended to be frequented more by mother than fathers, there were centres and schemes aimed specifically at engaging fathers. Mr Anderson pointed out that engaging young fathers who wished to be involved with their children was part of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, as it had been shown that young men who were actively involved in the practicalities of bringing up a small child were less likely to become young fathers for a second time.

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

8. The Government's Action Plan in response to the Lord Laming Report: the Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report
(Item. B3)

(1) Mr Anderson introduced the report and set out what Children's Social Services (CSS) was doing in response to the recommendations in Lord Laming's report. He reassured Members that CSS had maintained work standards despite a 40% increase in workload, but emphasised that working with this level of pressure could not be sustained for long. CSS had exceeded its targets for recruiting new staff, with 62 new qualified social workers having been engaged, and recruitment continuing in the USA, Northern Europe and Scandinavia. However, having such a large intake of new staff at one time would mean that approximately one third of the total workforce would be inexperienced. Some of the government funding allocated to recruitment would be used to give new staff intensive support in the first year of their careers.

(2) He quoted from the interim report of the Social Work Task Force and highlighted the 6 key themes it focussed on. He undertook to send a copy of it to all POC Members.

(3) Mrs Wainwright pointed out that interim staffing arrangements would apply from 1 October 2009 to cover the reorganisation period while staff were being realigned into new directorates. Consultation with staff and unions would begin in December 2009 and continue for the requisite three months until March 2010, with the new structure being in place from September 2010. The new Directorates would match the POC headings, with Mr Anderson being the new Director of Vulnerable Children and Partnerships from 1 October until his retirement in December 2009. The first update report on the reorganisation would be possible in December 2009.

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