

By: Alex King – Deputy Leader
Peter Sass - Head of Democratic Services

To: Cabinet – 9 January 2012

Subject: Recommendations from Cabinet Scrutiny Committee – 13 December 2011
Recommendation following the Specialist Children’s Services POSC – 17 November 2011

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report sets out the decisions from the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee, items which the Committee has raised previously for follow up and any specific recommendations from the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

1. (1) Attached as Appendix 1 is a schedule that contains the decisions from the most recent meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on 13 December 2011, together with the response of the relevant Cabinet Member. The schedule also describes any outstanding requests for information from the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee which have not to date been discharged by the Committee.

Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committees

2. (1) At its meeting on 15 July 2010, the Scrutiny Board agreed that any specific recommendations to Cabinet arising from Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committees (POSCs) should also be fed back to the Cabinet. All the POSCs make a valuable contribution in their specific areas through detailed debate and discussion of policies and services.

(2) Following the Specialist Children’s Services (SCS) POSC on 17 November 2011 the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Spokesman would like to make the following recommendation:

"As the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Spokesman of SCS POSC, we would seek to ensure that adequate funding is made available to cover the investment in Children's preventative services, which will continue the improvements being made and deliver savings in the future"

Recommendation:

3. That the Cabinet agree responses to these decisions, which will be reported back to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee and agree a response to the recommendation in 2(2) which will be reported back to the Specialist Children's Services Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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Background Information: *Nil*

Kent's Multi-Agency Looked After Children Strategy (13 December 2011)

Cabinet portfolio: Mrs J Whittle

Synopsis: The report presented the draft Looked After Children Strategy.

Reason for call-in: Members wished to examine the deliverability of the Looked After Children Strategy, in particular:

- (a) The reduction of numbers of Looked After Children (LAC) and how will this be achieved
- (b) Placements of LAC by KCC outside of Kent and the circumstances surrounding these placements
- (c) The movement towards Permanently Looked After Children (PLAC)
- (d) In relation to the Reduction in Volumes referred to in the Children's Services Improvement Plan - Quarterly Update, the fact that there has been no reduction in LAC (despite a reduction in all other indicators)
- (e) How the £19.8million to be spent on Children's Social Services in 2012/13 (as referred to in the Autumn Budget Statement) will be allocated

Recommendations and responses:

- 1. Thank Mrs Whittle, Mr Ireland and Mr Brightwell for attending the meeting and answering Members' questions. Members considered that there had been an excellent debate and were reassured by the discussion had with the witnesses**
- 2. A bullet point should be added to page 10 of the strategy regarding the importance of listening to the Looked After Children and how, as Corporate Parents, Members can facilitate this.**

Agreed by Cabinet Member; Paul Brightwell to action.

- 3. The addition of a bullet point on page 11 of the strategy mentioning alcohol or confirmation that alcohol is included within the 'substance misuse' reference on that page.**

Agreed by Cabinet Member; Paul Brightwell to action.

- 4. Look at examining the link with Kent Drugs and Alcohol Action Team possibly as part of the prevention strategy.**

Agreed by Cabinet Member; Paul Brightwell to action.

- 5. Further details to be provided about the bullet points on page 11 of the strategy:**

- **'The average number of placements that our looked after children**

- experience during their time in care' and
- 'The average length of time that a child/young person is looked after before achieving permanence or leaving care'

Paul Brightwell to provide information to Cabinet Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Parenting Panel why the range of figures is so high and what can be done to tackle these figures.

- 6. The inclusion of targets regarding number of placements per child within the strategy and clarification of those targets.**

Paul Brightwell to explore

- 7. Clarity should be provided for carers in relation to permanently looked after children and special guardianship possibly via workshops.**

Paul Brightwell to action

- 8. Explore distance learning for looked after children, possibly via the virtual school or other means.**

Tony Doran to explore and report back to Corporate Parenting Panel

- 9. Clarification should be sought regarding the admissions criteria for schools and the situation regarding prioritisation of looked after children within that criteria.**

Paul Brightwell to discuss with Tony Doran and report back to Cabinet Scrutiny.

- 10. Independent Reviewing Officers should consider challenging their counterparts in placing authorities regarding the appropriateness of placing looked after children in Kent.**

Paul Brightwell to action

- 11. Identify other local authorities who have similar problems regarding looked after children being placed within their boundary and working with them to find a solution.**

Cabinet Member to action although problems more acute in Kent than anywhere else

- 12. Write to London Boroughs to encourage them to work with each other to use vacant places in their boroughs to place looked after children.**

Cabinet Member to action

- 13. Write to the Children's Minister, Tim Loughton to encourage him to enforce local authorities who place children more than 20 miles from their home (the 20mile limit) – include statistics separating the number of**

asylum seeking children in Kent and the number of looked after children placed by other local authorities in Kent.

Letter already written and reply received Note: The letter to and response from Tim Loughton MP is available from the Research Officer to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on request.

Paul Brightwell to send over the statistics required which have been compiled by the Management Information Unit

14. Provide Members with details of the successor bodies to the Kent Improvement Board and Children's Services Improvement Panel to ensure Members continue to be part of the chain receiving information.

At the present time both the Board and the Panel will continue to exist until Kent's Children's Social Services receives an adequate judgement from Ofsted. However the CM would like to provide an assurance that the successor body or bodies will ensure that Members remain at the helm in driving through improvement and scrutiny of Children's Social Services through access to reliable and high quality performance management data.

Cabinet Member's Response:

I thought it was a very constructive meeting and reflective of a sea change in Member involvement and engagement in Children's Social Services over the past year. I hope my comments as per the above are helpful and I will ensure the information requested is shortly distributed to Committee Members.

Date of Response: 18 December 2011