

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

DARTFORD LOCALITY BOARD

MINUTES of the meeting of the Dartford Locality Board held on Thursday 10 January 2013 at 6.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor J A Kite, MBE (Chairman)
Councillor A R Martin
Councillor C J Shippam
Mrs A Allen
Mrs P Cole
Mr R J Lees
Mr J Ozog
Mr Avtar Sandhu MBE

ABSENT: Councillor Patrick F Coleman

Dartford Borough Council Officers:-

Graham Harris	–	Managing Director	
Sheri Green	–	Strategic Director	
Adrian Gowan	–	Policy and Corporate Support Manager	
Alan Twyman	–	Member Services Manager	

Kent County Council Officers:-

John Burr	–	Director of Highways & Transportation	
Jennie Edwards	–	Community Engagement	

29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Coleman.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests.

31. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 2012

The minutes of the meeting of the Locality Board held on 10 December 2012 were confirmed as a correct record.

32. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items. However the Chairman did raise an issue relating to the chairmanship of the next local board meeting held by Kent County Council members and asked whether any of the Members who had not chaired a meeting so far wished to chair the next meeting. Some concern was expressed about the value of recent meetings given limited public interest unless there was any substantive business to be conducted. One option proposed was to combine it with an event to celebrate the achievements of projects which had been awarded grants by the local board. It was noted that any such event would need to take place before 26 March when the “purdah” period for the County Council elections would take effect. The Chairman agreed to give this some more thought.

33. TROUBLED FAMILIES

The Locality Board was provided with an overview of the Troubled Families Programme and how it was proposed to take this forward across Kent and in the Dartford area. The Government had estimated that there were 120,000 “troubled families” nationally in which multiple problems such as worklessness, anti-social behaviour, truancy and drug and alcohol misuse cost the public purse an average of £75,000 per family each year. The DCLG had stipulated that Kent should work with 2560 troubled families over the 3 years of the Scheme, of which the number allocated to Dartford for 2012/13 was 40. However it was recognised that these figures were not based on assessment of actual need but were an arithmetical extrapolation from the Government’s initial data and therefore not wholly reliable. The Government had estimated that it would take £10,000 to turn around a troubled family and would make a contribution of £4,000 per family with the remainder being funded from existing budgets.

The criteria for identifying “troubled families” was explained which related to a history of crime/anti-social behaviour, repeated truancy and worklessness within the family. Families which met all 3 criteria had to be included in the programme but there was also local discretion to include a family where they met 2 out of 3 criteria but were also a concern to the Local Authority and/or local partners.

The Locality Board felt that there were three distinct tranches of work within the programme. The first related to those families which had complex problems across many of the criteria areas and the second related to families with more manageable issues but still across many criteria. It was felt that these cases required professional interventions and expertise. However there was a third tranche where the family had become troubled as a result of a chaotic lifestyle or lack of direction within the family. It was felt that these families could be most assisted by a different approach and that this was where the Locality Board should focus its efforts. Members believed that there was an opportunity to work innovatively and were keen to see a programme developed which called upon the skills and experiences of volunteer mentors to work with both individual family members and whole families to help them to understand how their lives could be improved, to act as role models and also as a single point of contact for other agencies. It was recognised that this

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would require positive commitment from the families themselves which could then be supported.

The governance arrangements across Kent were discussed and the proposed governance model for Dartford, under the direction of the Locality Board, was noted.

Members expressed concern about the perceived lack of progress on this important project and delays in recruiting mentors and getting them actively working with troubled families. It was explained that the governance arrangements had not yet been formally signed off by Kent County Council and that the recruitment of mentors would require complex checks, an assessment of individual's suitability and then appropriate training to be provided. The Council had neither the skills nor the capacity for this and to take on a pseudo employer role would carry some risk for the Council. It was intended therefore that mentors should be recruited and managed through a provider with the necessary expertise and that it was important to keep the recruitment and employment relationship separate given the risks concerned. Members were also keen to understand whether all the necessary agencies were fully supportive of the programme and that relevant information would be freely shared. It was noted that all of the Kent Authorities had signed the Kent Information Sharing Agreement but that there had been some delay waiting for the Government to put regulations in place to allow data sharing by government agencies. Protocols were now in place to allow agencies such as the Department for Works and Pensions and Job Centre Plus to share information with local authorities. The Strategic Director confirmed that there had been a very positive and open meeting of the local agencies involved in the programme before Christmas and commitment to sharing information as and when necessary. She also confirmed that the Local Children's Board, schools, academies and education welfare agencies were very supportive and keen to work with the programme officers.

The Chairman voiced his wish that the programme should represent a vibrant new approach to engaging with troubled families rather than retreating into existing social work practices and staid conventions whereby the programme was seen as an end in itself. He was also concerned that practitioners were focussing on young people rather than the whole of the family and that, whilst child welfare was important, the point was to make the family take responsibility for this itself. Whilst he recognised that the families needed to engage willingly he could not accept that reluctance to engage should be accepted as a reason for abandoning that family and moving on to easier cases. He felt that stronger measures should be taken to encourage such families to engage, possibly including threatening that the Council would disengage and not provide support in future. It was also felt that in many cases engagement would kick in when families were on the cusp of statutory interventions occurring. However if a family would not engage it would be necessary to move on to another family to ensure that Dartford's allocation of 40 families was dealt with under the programme.

Members asked to be advised of when the County Council would approve the governance arrangements and were keen for this to happen quickly so that steps could be taken to recruit the mentors and start identifying and working with the families. It was noted that another multi-agency meeting would be held on 25 January and it was hoped that work would begin to engage with the identified troubled families soon thereafter.

Resolved: that

(1) the Locality Board welcomes and supports the Troubled Families Programme and the proposed governance arrangements for Dartford; and

(2) that Kent County Council be requested to give formal approval to Dartford's proposal including the governance arrangements as soon as possible to enable work to begin.

34. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Strategic Director advised the Board that a meeting had taken place before Christmas with a view to producing a detailed specification for Lot 4 youth work. The importance of ensuring that Lot 4 projects complemented the other 3 Lots was recognised.

It was confirmed that the contract with Walk Talk for Lot 3 works had been signed and that Pauline Campbell had been appointed to the Detached Youth Worker post.

The meeting closed at 7.15 pm

CHAIRMAN

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