Children’s Social Services in Kent
Photographs courtesy of www.johnbirdsall.co.uk
Both the government’s Every Child Matters framework and the Children Act 2004 require staff within social services and education to work more closely together. Kent County Council responded to this challenge in April 2006 by setting up a new Children, Families and Education Directorate that brought education and children’s social services teams into one directorate. Members of the public will not notice any difference in the way they access these services but they should notice the two parts of the service working much more effectively together as time goes on.

This leaflet explains the work of the children’s social services part of the directorate.
A happy family is the most important thing in a child's life. All families, though, experience difficulties at some time, perhaps because of personal or health problems. While some people are able to cope with these difficulties, others find that without extra help the strain can have serious consequences. It is then that Kent Children’s Social Services can offer advice and practical support.

Our aim is to help families to stay together wherever possible, avoiding the sadness and trauma that inevitably accompanies the break-up of a family. The Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004 govern our work with children and families and require us to help and protect children in need by working in partnership with parents and carers.

Kent Children’s Social Services work in close partnership with other organisations such as schools, Kent Police, health services, district councils and voluntary organisations. Working in partnership with
others, our emphasis is on meeting the best interests of the child. Our aim is for every child, whatever their background or circumstances, to have the support they need to:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well being

**Keeping families together**

When a family crisis occurs that may adversely affect the lives of the children, a social work assessment can be requested. The social worker can give advice and guidance and, if there is a need for ongoing support, identify what services could be available. This may include assistance from a family support team.

We do not intend people to become dependent on social services, and so wherever possible families are supported through a crisis and then encouraged and helped to cope independently.
In some instances, we will arrange a “family group conference” involving the child and significant adults in their life. The aim is to plan how best to assist the child, and it is important to remember that wherever possible Kent Social Services tries to keep families together.

**Children in need**

As the local authority, KCC aims to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need and gives priority to children most in
need. The authority also promotes the upbringing of children by their parents.

A ‘child in need’ may be:

- Disabled
- Unlikely to have a reasonable standard of health or development without services from a local authority
- Unlikely to progress in terms of health or development without services from a local authority

Families faced with a serious illness, long-term disability or developmental delay affecting a child often need extra help in a number of ways. We can offer advice and help on practical matters, including benefits and allowances, put families in touch with groups who have first-hand knowledge of the difficulties they are facing and if appropriate, arrange respite breaks that suit their child’s age and their family’s needs.
In some circumstances the local authority can provide aids and adaptations to make life easier around the home. In addition, some families receive a direct payment that allows them to choose and pay for their own care rather than use the social care services on offer from the local authority.

**Child protection**

It is a sad fact that not all children are as well treated as we would wish. Some are abused - physically, sexually or emotionally. Others are neglected and suffer long-term damage as a consequence. Whenever a child is harmed we have a duty to make enquiries into the situation and to protect the child. In doing so we work with colleagues from other agencies and we try wherever possible to keep the child within their own family.

Separating children from their families is so distressing for everyone that it is never contemplated lightly. Children can be ‘Looked After’ by the local authority at the request of their parents, but children can only be removed against their parents’ wishes if it is done through a court process. The court will decide
if the child should be committed to the care of the local authority after considering the views of the parents and the child.

The local authority is responsible for protecting children who are at risk of significant harm through abuse or neglect. In providing child protection services, social workers work closely with colleagues in other agencies such as the police, schools and health professionals. Throughout any child protection enquiries, the welfare and safety of the child is the most important consideration.

If you are concerned that a child is being abused or neglected, then please let us know. The contact details are provided in this booklet.

**Children looked after by the local authority**

Most children who are ‘Looked After’ by the local authority are placed in foster homes. This is because we believe that living in a family is the best and most natural way for children to be brought up. Some children who have had a very bad experience of family life may need a period of special help within a residential unit.
We actively promote children having contact with their parents and families unless it is contrary to their interests. It is important that parents remain involved in planning for the future of their children, and most children will later return to live with their own families. With this in mind, both parents and the child or children involved will meet regularly with a social worker to discuss progress and plan for the future.

There will be a small number of children, though, whose birth families will not be able to protect them from harm and meet their needs. Kent’s policy is to give these children the security of living in a permanent substitute family. To do this, Kent Children’s Social Services recruits, assesses and supports people to become foster carers and adoptive parents.
All children find growing up and gaining their independence to be a challenging as well as an exhilarating experience. Young people these days tend to be dependent on their parents for longer, and the Children Act 1989 extended the powers of local authorities so that they could continue to help young people until they reached the age of 21.

Kent Social Services’ 16 + service works in partnership with the Rainer Foundation to provide advice and support to young people in care who are moving towards independence.
Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

Kent County Council provides a service to help unaccompanied children and young people who enter the UK through the Kent ports and are seeking asylum. The children and young people are assessed and their needs met in the same way as those of any other young person without parental support who needs the care of the county council.

Listening to the views of children and young people

Because we want to provide the best service we can, it is important for us to hear the views of the children and young people who receive our services. This includes their views on the service they receive as individuals as well as any comments on the service in general.

We want to know when people are happy with the service, but also we need to know if people have a complaint. If you do have a complaint or compliment then please contact our customer care team via the contact details at the back of this booklet. People
with complaints can also contact the NCH complaints and representations service. Their contact details are available from the Customer Care Team.

Kent County Council endorses the United Nations’ convention on The Rights of the Child that is mirrored by the Children Act. The UPFRONT children’s rights service provides advocacy for children and young people who are ‘looked after’ by local authorities.
Contacting Kent Children’s Social Services

If you are currently involved with Kent Social Services then you can contact the person you are already involved with. If you want to make a new contact or a new referral, you will need to contact the County Duty Service.

The duty service is open from 8.30am to 5pm. Outside of these times, urgent calls that can not wait until the next day are dealt with by an out-of-hours service.

You can call our contact centre on 08458 247247 and ask to be put through to the duty service. The contact centre is open for business 24 hours a day seven days a week.

More information is available on www.kent.gov.uk

If you wish to make a comment, complaint or compliment about the service you have received from Kent Children’s Social Services, then please contact the customer care team at:

Customer Care
Kent Children’s Social Services,
Kroner House,
Eurogate Business Park
Ashford
TN24 8XU

Tel: 01233 652165
Fax: 01233 652160