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To: Kent Children's Trust Board

Date of Meeting: 4th March 2011

Subject: Supporting Family Literacy

Classification: Confidential to KCT Unrestricted For Information Only

Summary of Paper:

This paper provides the background and context to the significance of literacy as a factor underpinning family stability. It identifies how poor levels of literacy could be identified via the CAF process and outlines the next steps support the training needs of lead professionals to enable identified literacy needs within the family to be addressed positively.

KCT Board members are asked to:

Receive this information report.

1. Introduction & Background

1.1 Research quoted by Naomi Eisenstadt recognises that the home learning environment has '*three times the impact of high quality early education, and is more important in literacy than numeracy*'.¹ Literacy is a key enabler underpinning communication and early language development in children and is central to ensuring confident and effective parenting.

1.2 The body of evidence supporting the significance of home literacy is compelling; *Grasping the Nettle*, research commissioned by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) has identified that:

'Disadvantage is not a block to good parenting, but low levels of literacy, numeracy and confidence are obstacles'.²

Furthermore the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Report 33 states:

*'It is known that what parents do at home with young children has the greatest impact on a child's social, emotional and intellectual development.'*³

2. Specific issues for KCT consideration

2.1 When looking at vulnerable communities and families at risk one common factor is low levels of literacy, and the impact of low levels of literacy on quality of life and life chances in general is significant:

¹ Naomi Eisenstadt, Senior Research Fellow Oxford University, speaking at the National Literacy Trust Literacy: Leaders in Local Government Conference, December 2010

² *Grasping the Nettle: Early intervention for children, families and communities*, Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services, 2010

³ *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education, Report 33*, Institute of Education, 2004

- *Individuals with poor literacy are more likely to live in non-working households and in overcrowded housing*
- *95% of all employment in the UK requires employees to be able to read*
- *41% of UK employers are concerned about their employees basic literacy skills*
- *50% of offenders leaving prison are unable to read and write*
- *Men and women with the poorest literacy or numeracy skills were the least likely to have voted in the 1987 and 1997 general election*
- *Community participation is higher amongst men and women with higher literacy skills⁴*

3. Participation and engagement

3.1 Through Partners in Literacy, an initiative developed by the National Literacy Trust and funded via the Department for Education, Kent is developing a strategic and co-ordinated approach to delivering key outcomes for families around supporting literacy in the home. The initiative relies on a collaborative multi-agency approach to literacy provision and has enabled a range of key partners within KCC and external partners from social housing, the wider voluntary and community sector and district councils to come together to better co-ordinate and deliver family literacy interventions. The table below identifies how Partners in Literacy supports the seven areas of need identified in the 2011-14 CYPP planning process:

How Partners in Literacy supports the priorities proposed in the 2011-2014 Children and Young People's Plan	
Priority	Linked outcomes
Healthy Start in Life	<p>Increased parental involvement in home learning activities</p> <p>Higher frequency of home literacy practices</p> <p>Improving early childhood development</p>
Emotional and Mental Health	<p>Improved literacy levels leading to increased confidence and self esteem amongst children and young people</p> <p>Increased family and community cohesion</p> <p>Improved emotional health for children and families</p>
Safeguarding	<p>Improving literacy amongst targeted communities</p> <p>Increased family and community cohesion</p> <p>Improving literacy amongst vulnerable children through targeted work.</p>
Primary Children's Learning	<p>Increased literacy of children and parents</p> <p>Enjoyment of learning and improved school attendance</p> <p>Increased awareness and participation in family learning opportunities</p> <p>Narrow the gap in educational achievement of all children</p>
Adolescent Engagement	<p>Reduction in the number of young people not in education, employment or training</p> <p>Young people feeling positive and enjoying learning</p> <p>Young people engaged extended learning activities</p>

⁴ National Literacy Trust, 2009.

	More young people volunteering
Housing / Accommodation	Improved literacy levels to equip young people with the skills necessary to complete the transition to independent living Increased understanding of the importance of literacy amongst social housing landlords
Family Poverty	Parents enabled to access and take up learning and employment opportunities Increased awareness and participation in family learning opportunities Increased literacy of children and parents Increased civic participation

4. Equalities

4.1 Literacy is an enabler to the delivery of the Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy currently under development and will be identified as a key focus for the forthcoming Child Poverty Strategy. However, the process whereby families with poor literacy levels are identified and interventions put in place to improve literacy outcomes is not clear. There are excellent examples of family focused interventions in place, such as Doorstep Library currently operating in Millmead and Seashells Children's Centres with dedicated book workers working directly with families on the doorstep of their homes; baby bounce and rhyme sessions in Kent Libraries and the Bookstart programme delivered in partnership with health visitors, as well as local support offered by the wider voluntary and community sector. However, the identification of family literacy needs is not systemic to practice and relies heavily on the skills of a wide range of individual staff members e.g. FLOs, PSAs and Children Centre Staff.

4.2 The timely identification of family literacy as a key issue affecting family life and child development requires a more formalised approach. Some parents and carers are able to self refer to a range of agencies and organisations including Adult Education and Skills Plus that offer support and learning opportunities, but these are more usually parents equipped with the confidence and communication skills to enable them to do so. In too many cases the literacy needs of parents are not picked up or effectively addressed.

4.3 The CAF process has the potential to be able to identify low levels of literacy as a risk factor for families participating in the process. However, currently there is no specific element in the CAF summary that relates directly to literacy. There is no desire to make the CAF framework any longer than it already is and rather than adding additional literacy themed questions within the assessment summary, it is suggested that clear guidance and prompts be provided to the lead professional to enable them to glean whether literacy and communication is an issue affecting either the development of the baby, child or young person, or the parents and carers.

4.4 Furthermore, in order to ensure effective interventions aimed at achieving positive literacy outcomes for children and families are accessible there needs to be a greater awareness of the resources, initiatives and activities currently in existence. Lead professional and colleagues engaged in Single Point of Access (SPA) meetings, therefore, need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills base around literacy to be able to make effective referrals.

5. Next Steps

5.1 As part of the development of the new CAF guidance, it is suggested that guidance is included on identifying low literacy levels amongst children and families

5.2 Additionally, the Commissioning Unit will work with the Integrated Processes Team to identify support and training that can be offered to lead professionals to raise awareness of the kind of interventions in existence to support and promote effective literacy skills. Kent Libraries and Archives are leading on the developing of the Kent Approach to Literacy and Reading - a literacy strategy and it is fitting that their community development and early years specialists lead on literacy training and awareness raising with lead professionals

5.3 Family literacy interventions throughout the county, both formal and informal, will also be mapped at a district level and made available to the relevant SPA in order that effective referrals can be co-ordinated and delivered as necessary.

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