

REVIEW OF NORFOLK PARENT PARTNERSHIP

APRIL 2008

**Commissioned by Commissioning & Performance Service, Children's
Services, Norfolk County Council**

Executive Summary

The Commissioning & Performance Service, Norfolk Children's Services commissioned this review of Norfolk Parent Partnership Services (NPPS) following the DCSF publication in November 2007 of 'Parent Partnership Services – Increasing parental confidence. Exemplification of Minimum Standards for PPS and Local Authorities'.

The LA manager responsible for NPPS recognised the issues relating to the management of NPPS and the consequent need for a review of its operations. This coincided with the publication of the Standards document and reinforced the need for the review.

The aims of the review are to enhance services provided by NPPS by conducting a review of the operations and effectiveness of the current service.

The review objectives were:

- ?? To obtain the perceptions of the effectiveness of NPPS, including the reach of the service, impartiality, outcomes for children, and partnership working with parents and other stakeholders.
- ?? To compare the performance of the NPPS with national standards and other local authorities, where possible.
- ?? To consider options for service delivery.

The review was conducted using the following methods; questionnaires, interviews and focus groups.

Two questionnaires were devised for the review. These were designed for completion by parents and other external stakeholders. The questions were determined by reference to the review specification and the exemplification of minimum standards document. In addition, specific questions were added to the different forms of questionnaire to cover questions related to the different forms of delivery options and to the quality of service provision.

Interviews were held with six key people drawn from the LA and NPPS and the NPPS Management Group (NPPS MG). These key people were chosen by the review consultant as those who were most significant in shaping the work and strategic direction of the NPPS. An interview schedule was devised for these interviews which were conducted by the review consultant. Three were conducted in person and three were conducted by telephone.

Two focus groups were held to elicit the views of NPPS MG and the Independent Parental Supporters (IPS's). These groups were organised by, and utilised a set of questions produced by, the review consultant. A set of questions was put to each group and the meetings were recorded for analysis.

The report covers perceptions of NPPS by parents and stakeholders including the operations of the service and the quality and effectiveness of the service. There are also sections on how respondents felt the service should be delivered and a section on comparing the performance of the service against the exemplification of national standards.

Overall Assessment of the Service

The perceptions of NPPS based on the review findings are that the organisation currently works well operationally. They provide a service that is impartial and confidential and they work well with other agencies. NPPS works hard to reach a wide range of service users across the county, however there is a major dominance of service users from a white British background which suggests more could be done to target minority ethnic and other hard to reach groups. An area of weakness in the operations of the NPPS concerns the functions of the NPPS Management Group which also has implications for the quality and effectiveness of the service.

Parents and Stakeholders believe NPPS provides a quality service and were satisfied with the advice and support they received. They also reported that children's situations had improved as a result of contact with the service. In terms of internal quality assurance, there is a robust system of QA for the Independent Parental Supporters; however this is not effectively communicated to external stakeholders. The main feature affecting the effectiveness of the service is the lack of clarity regarding the role of the management group, the group's lack of appropriate representation, its failure to communicate adequately with the local authority and represent parents' views at a strategic level.

The overall assessment of the method of service delivery is that the present system of operating at arms length from the LA works well and should be retained. This is supported by the views of respondents and is in line with current practice nationally.

When comparing NPPS against the Exemplification of National Minimum Standards, overall NPPS meets the minimum standards in all areas and approaches best practice in three exemplars; working with parents, training advice and support, and information and publicity. The key areas for improvement are those relating to management and informing and shaping local policy and practice. In addition there is non compliance with the requirement to produce a written policy on impartiality.

NPPS performance compared with the National Exemplars

Exemplar	Judgement	Reason
Funding/Budget	Minimum Practice	<p>?? Budgets and resources are not clearly specified.</p> <p>?? Budget is not influenced by priorities.</p> <p>?? Budget not adequate to meet NPPS needs.</p>
Management	Minimum Practice	<p>?? LA does not ensure appropriate Management structures.</p> <p>?? LA has not regularly reviewed and monitored the service.</p> <p>?? Management Group does not work effectively with the LA.</p> <p>?? Management Group does not report to the LA on effectiveness and impact.</p> <p>?? Management Group no longer has adequate parental representation.</p>
Working with Parents	<p>Best Practice most areas</p> <p>Two areas minimum practice.</p>	<p>?? NPPS do not offer practical support to wider groups of parents.</p> <p>?? NPPS unable to offer access to IPS's for all parents who ask.</p>
Information & Publicity	Best Practice all areas except one.	?? No written policy on impartiality

Training Advice & Support	Best Practice	?? Courses available for staff in schools, LA and NPPS.
Networking & Collaboration	Minimum Practice	?? No written NPPS policy on impartiality. ?? No formal written agreement with the LA to sustain policy and practice in relation to networking and collaboration.
Informing & Shaping Local Policy & Practice	Overall minimum practice	?? Parents views not routinely sought ?? LA does not routinely seek feedback from NPPS to inform its decisions on SEN Policy and Practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are based on the evidence that the NPPS works well with parents and operates successfully within a multi agency context. They should also provide an opportunity for NPPS to move forward in a positive manner to refresh and develop its service.

1. NPPS need to work more effectively to target minority ethnic and hard to reach groups. This could be achieved in a number of ways; further work with schools to encourage wider publicity of the service, publication of the NPPS information in a wider range of languages, an increase in IPS's to cover a wider geographical area of Norfolk; attention needs to be given to the lack of parental responses in the Thetford area. A number of these proposals would have implications for the NPPS budget.
2. The robust Quality Assurance system operated by NPPS should be fully documented and shared with the LA manager. An amendment should be made to the Parental feedback questionnaire to include a question to ascertain the degree of improvement in the child's situation as a result of NPPS involvement.

3. NPPS should, in addition to their current support to parents, investigate the provision of a wider range of services, in particular the facilitation of parents groups. These could be facilitated in each of the 5 Areas locations or in school cluster areas. There would need to be an increase in funding to the NPPS to achieve this.

4. NPPS should remain operating at arms length through the LA, but led by more effective and pro active management group. The benefits to the service of remaining arms length appears to outweigh the option of outsourcing the service. There may be some advantages of introducing formal input from the SEN sector of Children's Services to the management group to act as a conduit to and from the LA.

5. The LA manager should be responsible for overseeing the role and responsibilities of the management group; its terms of reference, NPPS QA processes and for determining the parameters within which NPPS operates.

6. The NPPS Management Group should be restructured. This restructuring should include;
 - ?? Revision of Terms of Reference to clearly establish the Management Group as the key channel of communication with the LA manager and to clarify its role as determining the character and purpose of NPPS.

 - ?? Overhaul of membership due to the length of service of existing members and the need to increase the level of parental and voluntary sector representation.

 - ?? Recognition of the key functions of the Management Group as being responsible for overseeing the management of NPPS and communicating with the LA manager.

7. In order to achieve compliance with all the exemplars, NPPS and the LA should urgently address the areas of noncompliance; Funding/Budgets, Management, Networking and Collaboration (no written Policy on impartiality), Informing & Shaping Local Policy and Practice. (see chart in conclusions section of report)