

By: Sarah Hohler, Cabinet Member, Children, Families and Education
 Rosalind Turner, Managing Director for Children, Families and Education

To: Cabinet – 10 January 2011

Subject: Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services – Recovery and Improvement Plan

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides information on the recovery and improvement plan, following the OFSTED Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children Services in Kent

Introduction

1. (1) A report was presented to Cabinet on 29 November 2010 on the outcome of the Ofsted announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in Kent that took place between 11-22 October 2010.

(2) The inspection concluded that the overall effectiveness of safeguarding services is inadequate and that capacity for improvement is inadequate. It concluded that the overall effectiveness of services for looked after children is also inadequate, while the capacity for improvement is adequate.

(3) The Leader of the Council and Cabinet requested a follow up report outlining the recovery plan was brought to the meeting of Cabinet on 10th January 2011.

(4) A seminar for all Members on 26th January 2011 which will include an in-depth discussion on the issues concerning Children's Social Services.

Improvement Plan

2. (1) A meeting with the Minister for Children, Tim Loughton, took place on 14 December to review arrangements for improvement, and to consider next steps. Kent was represented by the Leader, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education, Group Managing Director, Managing Director for Children, Families and Education, and the Chief Executive of Eastern and Coastal Kent PCT. A presentation was made to the Minister and DfE officials, analysing the current position and expressing firm leadership and determination to address the improvement and recovery. A draft improvement and plan was discussed with the Minister and his officials. An updated plan is attached as Appendix 1. This will need to be amended in the light of the targets set in the improvement notice.

(2) The DfE was impressed by the determination and resolve of the local authority, and the strong support from Health and other partners. They advised a long term programme of reform and change, emphasising that change needs to be sustainable, focusing on cultural change and not just process improvement. The DfE expects to scrutinise the improvement programme over the next couple of years. They advised that there may still be further systemic problems as yet uncovered. It is anticipated that the Minister will issue an improvement notice in January, with targets. An improvement Board will be required, with an independent chair nominated by DfE.

Progress since the inspection

3. (1) A review of all active cases has been underway since mid November (around 7000 children) due for completion by 23 December. These include children with child protection plans, children in need and looked after children who came into the service in the past year. The remaining looked after children cases will be reviewed by the end of January 2011. At 21 December 5976 (83%) had been reviewed; total remaining was 1185 (17%). The total where concerns have been raised is 541 (9% of the total number of cases reviewed so far). Key themes identified included drift in care planning, delay in management decisions, delays in convening final strategy meetings after child protection investigations and lack of appropriate focus in work with vulnerable teenagers. Other issues included timescales and quality of assessments, health assessments not in place for looked after children, and some did not have a personal education plan. Management action is now in place for all these cases. .

(2) A Head of Service Improvement has been recruited, Pam Rowe, who has assisted Surrey with their improvement programme in the past 2 years. Eva Learner, a very experienced advisor, who has worked with several services subject to an improvement notice, has been recruited to lead the improvement plan for the Duty and Initial Assessment teams. Malcolm Newsam, previously a Director of Social Services and Director of Children's Services for Bedfordshire, and recently interim Director of Children's Services in Essex, leading their improvement programme, will join the service in January.

(3) The improvement team will be further developed in January. This will include project management, HR capacity, recruitment, workforce development, performance monitoring and quality assurance. ISG will work closely with the improvement team, leading on necessary changes to the ICS electronic social care recording system. Costings for the programme are currently being worked on.

(4) The Improvement Steering Group established after the unannounced inspection in August, chaired by Cabinet Member, Mrs Hohler will continue to meet until the Improvement Board is established. The Steering Group includes frontline staff who will continue to be involved in the improvement programme through a focus group. The proposed governance arrangements are set out on page 5 of the improvement and development plan. Elected members will be fully involved and service users will play an active part, including the children in care council.

(5) Following initial analysis by external consultants, all duty and initial assessment teams will be subject to external audit and RAG rating in January to ensure safe practice. The focus needs to be on safety as well as quality at

the front door of the service. Core social work vacancies have reduced to 9% in December, but there is a need now to build experience and ensure manageable caseloads. There are currently 8000 allocated cases in the 12 districts. While it is difficult to define an “acceptable” caseload for a social worker, given that levels of experience and competence play a part, we should aim for an average of 20. This would require a review of existing social work capacity. There is also a need for focussed recruitment to the 16 principal social worker vacancies, alongside consideration of increasing the establishment by 12 to strengthen the duty and initial assessment teams. Another unannounced inspection of these teams could be as early as Spring of this year.

(6) The focus since the unannounced inspection in August has been primarily the duty and initial assessment teams, the front door of the services. A chart explaining the workflow is attached as Appendix 2. The work from January needs to include the long term children and families teams. These will be subject to external audit in January/February. Change plans will be developed to ensure dedicated focus on looked after children, while the children in care council will be actively involved in refreshing the local authority pledge. The education team for looked after children, led by Tony Doran, the “virtual” head teacher needs strengthening. Education attainment for Kent looked after children at GCSE is poor compared to other authorities. This is a problem in many authorities and it is important that we develop qualitative as well as quantitative improvement. However, this is an Ofsted limiting judgment, which means that until attainment improves, services for looked after children in Kent will continue to be graded as inadequate.

(7) Other keys aspects of the improvement plan include:

- Review of the effectiveness of Kent Contact and Assessment Service (KCAS)
- Continued focus on prevention and early intervention to reduce referrals to Children’s Social Services through embedding the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The establishment of CAF Coordinators needs to be increased to a minimum of 1 per district
- Work with Adult Services, the NHS and other partner agencies to reduce the number of referrals and develop family based services, notably to tackle domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and parental mental illness
- Improving accountability through the Kent Safeguarding Children Board to better manage the performance of all partner agencies.
- The Care Quality Commission produced more detailed recommendations for Health with regard to safeguarding and looked after children. These require a health led improvement plan by early January.

Improvement Board

4. An Improvement Board will be established, overseen by the Leader, and reporting quarterly to Cabinet. The work of the current Improvement Steering Group will be integrated into the overall improvement plan. All agencies will be involved as appropriate, both on the Improvement Board and through the Kent Safeguarding Board. Additional capacity and external support have been

brought in to assist the recovery plan. Appendix 3 (to follow) details the Membership of the Board.

Conclusion

5. Progress has been made in developing a sound improvement plan and in reviewing all active cases. The improvement programme presents a massive challenge to transform social work with children in Kent.

Recommendations

6. Members are requested:
to note the report and improvement plan

Background Documents:

Report to Cabinet on 29 November 2010 - Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

OFSTED Report – 19 November 2010: Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services. [www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/la_view/\(leaid\)/886](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/la_view/(leaid)/886)

Unannounced inspection letter August 2010

Ofsted grade criteria and inspection framework

ADCS report on national safeguarding pressures

Interim report of the Munro review of safeguarding

Report to County Council on 1 April 2010 - Safeguarding Children in Kent: Defending and Developing the Service

Reports to County Council on 14 October 2010;
Progress Report in response to Safeguarding Children in Kent: Defending and Developing the Service

Author Contact Details

Helen Davies

Director of Specialist Children's Services

✉ Helen.davies@kent.gov.uk ☎ 01622 221573