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To: Vulnerable Children and Partnerships Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 31 March 2010

Subject: Children's Social Services Activity Figures

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This report provides an overview of core activity for Children's Social Services in respect of:

- Referrals
 - Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan
 - Looked After Children
 - Other Local Authority Children (OLA)
 - Social Work Vacancies
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1. Referrals

In this most recent year (2008–2009) referral activity across Kent Children's Social Services increased dramatically from 10,222 to 17,358 (44.4%).

These figures do need to be approached with caution as the data is taken from two different databases. The introduction of ICS in Kent in January 2008 required a changed reporting arrangement whereby every child in a family was recorded as an open referral at that first point. Previously, at referral, it was usual for only one referral to be opened in respect of the family. More recent analysis of referral activity taken from the new ICS database only, suggests that referral activity has increased during 2009, at approximately 21%.

Nationally, referral activity to Children's Social Services has increased by 1.6% for the period 2009-2010. However, the picture is not consistent with some local authorities reporting increases at around 30-35%. Anecdote might suggest that this, and Kent's increase, is related to an increase in anxiety post recent national safeguarding cases reported in the media and, indeed, this may be a contributory factor. Other possible explanations are increased early identification of need through more community based services such as Children's Centres and the implementation of training for the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

Table 1 – Cumulative Referrals (April to March)

Area	31/03/08	31/03/09
East Kent	3182	5,114
Mid Kent	3316	5,421
West Kent	3346	5,268
Disability	378	663
16+	0	56
Asylum	Not recorded	573
KCC, inc Asylum	10,222	17,095
KCC, exc Asylum	10,222	16,522

Data Source: MIU Referral Source Sheet - April 07 to March 08 taken from SWIFT. April 08 to March 10 taken from ICS.

Please note that SWIFT and ICS record referrals differently and therefore comparisons of numbers taken from the two systems are not recommended.

Referrals figures for the period 2009 – 2010 will not be available until 31/3/10. However Table 2 sets out comparisons with previous years by comparing the cumulative figure for the period April – January each year. It is clear from this information that referrals to Children’s Social Services will most probably be greater for the full year 2009 – 2010 than previous years.

Table 2 – Cumulative Referrals (April to January)

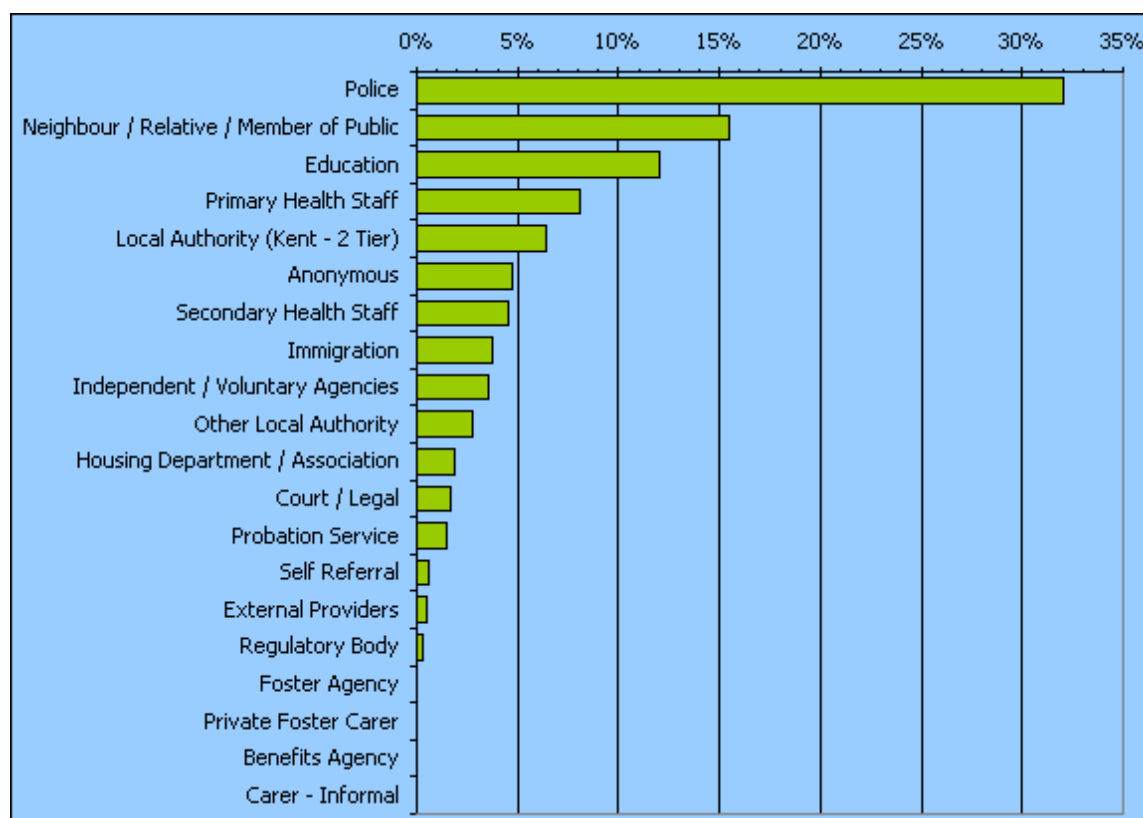
Area	31/01/08	31/01/09	31/01/10
East Kent	2683	4,239	4,648
Mid Kent	2789	4,520	4,854
West Kent	2790	4,324	5,119
Disability	314	558	515
16+	0	50	42
Asylum	Not recorded	496	322
KCC, inc Asylum	8,576	14,187	15,500
KCC, exc Asylum	8,576	13,691	15,178

Data Source: MIU Referral Source Sheet - April 07 to January 08 taken from SWIFT. April 08 to January 10 taken from ICS.

Please note that SWIFT and ICS record referrals differently and therefore comparisons of numbers taken from the two systems are not recommended.

Notwithstanding the increase in total referral numbers, the proportion of referrals to Children’s Social Services from individual agencies has remained in line with last year’s profile.

Table 3



As Table 3 demonstrates, the largest number of referrals received was from the **Police**, with a total of 5,150, which made up 30.2% of the total number of referrals for 2008-09, a slight increase on the previous year's 28.1%.

This figure should be considered in the context of the high numbers of domestic abuse referrals in Kent and elsewhere which do not lead to an initial assessment. It raises a question regarding how appropriate it is to refer these families to Children's Social Services, and whether their needs would be better met by the provision of targeted early intervention domestic abuse services in the community. This issue has been identified as an area that requires further exploration between the Police and Children's Social Services, and work is currently underway to explore this.

Referrals from members of the **public** (neighbours relatives, friends and strangers) made up 16% of the overall referrals into Children's Social Services throughout 2008-2009, and accounted for the second highest referral source across the service. This significant referral rate does suggest that members of the public are aware of referral mechanisms and what to do if they have concerns about a child.

Referrals from the **Education** section of the Directorate across the county accounted for 1,929 referrals into Children's Social Services throughout 2008-09. Although Education referrals account for the third highest referral source across the county during this period, this equates to a drop in the overall referral proportion of all referrals, at 11%, in comparison with the previous year's proportion of 15%.

Although the overall numbers of referrals from **Health** staff across the community have increased, to 1,305, this still only forms 7.5% of the overall referrals to Children’s Social Services throughout 2008-09.

Significantly, a total of 52.5% of **all** referrals received by Children’s Social Services during 2008-2009 did not meet the Children’s Social Services eligibility criteria. This finding suggests that further analysis is required to establish how confident the wider community services are in addressing the needs of vulnerable children and their families, how the Common Assessment Framework is being utilised by the children’s workforce to meet the additional needs of children and young people and, if the mix of services is appropriate, to meet the need.

As part of phase two of the Independent Safeguarding Review, the Kent Children Safeguarding Board have identified agency understanding of thresholds as an area for development in Spring 2010.

2. Children with a Child Protection Plan

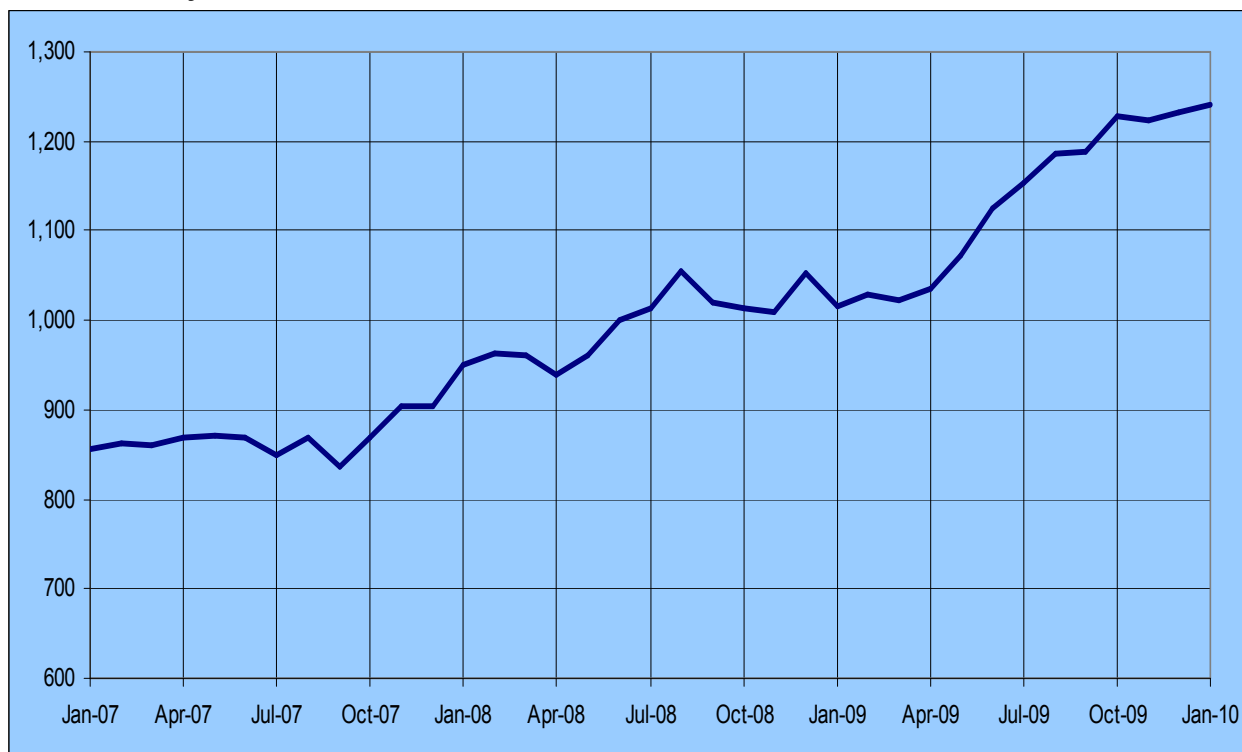
The total number of children subject to a child protection plan in Kent at the end of January 2010 was 1,241, an overall rise of 385 additional children in comparison to January 2007 and a 45% increase over the last three years. The significant increase during 2009 is suggestive of professionals’ heightened awareness and anxiety about managing risk in the community post Haringey.

Table 4 – Children with a Child Protection Plan

Area	31/01/08	31/01/09	31/01/10
East Kent	328	344	428
Mid Kent	332	369	458
West Kent	274	281	324
Disability	17	21	31
KCC	951	1,015	1,241

Data Source: MIU CP Source Sheet

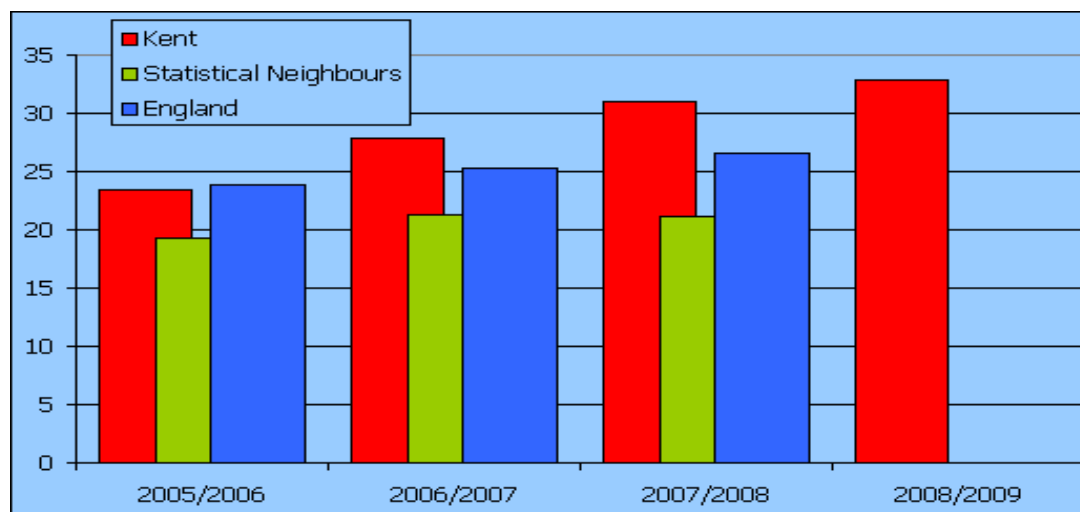
Table 5 – Volume of children (excluding Looked After Children) with a CP Plan from January 2007 to January 2010



(Source Data: SCS CP Source Sheets)

The increased numbers of children in Kent subject to a child protection plan reflects a national trend. However, as Table 6 demonstrates, Kent has a greater proportion of children subject to a child protection plan than its statistical neighbours and this trend has been growing.

Table 6 – Children subject to a CP Plan per 10,000 populations (0-18 year olds)



A policy decision in 2007 to ensure increased scrutiny and focus on child protection plans in order to prevent plans being ended prematurely may have had some impact on the increasing numbers of children subject to a plan. Other factors, such as the heightened awareness and publicity following Haringey, the recession, the introduction of the Public Law Outline in 2008, and the high social worker vacancy rate may all have contributed to the increasing numbers of children subject to a child protection plan across the county.

The increase in children subject to a child protection plan has resulted in pressure on the whole range of services available to support such children and their families e.g. specialist assessments, therapeutic work, and family support services.

The increases in referrals to Children’s Social Services and the increased numbers of children subject to a child protection plan indicate an urgent need to develop a Kent wide preventative multi-agency strategy and action plan through the Kent Children’s Trust and the Kent Children Safeguarding Board. The Children, Families & Education (CFE) re-structure will also support improved integrated approaches to early intervention with the objective of reversing the current activity trends.

3. Looked After Children

Kent’s citizen Looked After Children numbers have increased during 2009: see Table 7. Factors such as the publicity surrounding Haringey, the recession, the Southwark Judgement (which stipulates that local authorities have a duty to accommodate young homeless 16-17 year olds if they are homeless and “in need”) and the changes in practice as a result of *Care Matters* e.g. young people actively encouraged to remain with foster carers until age 18 years, have all played a part in the increase. The largest increases in cohorts of children needing to be looked after are babies (0 years) and 13, 14 and 15 year olds.

Work is underway to review the needs of the 13, 14, and 15 year old cohort of young people needing to be looked after to see what early intervention strategies and interventions can be put in place to maintain these young people safely within their communities.

Table 7 – Looked After Children

Area	31/01/08	31/01/09	31/01/10
East Kent	408	377	404
Mid Kent	315	300	302
West Kent	227	230	250
Disability	59	59	62
16+	161	165	178
Asylum	244	298	253
KCC, inc Asylum	1,414	1,429	1,449
KCC, exc Asylum	1,170	1,131	1,196

Data Source: MIU LAC Source Sheet

4. Other Local Authority Looked After Children (OLA LAC)

Table 8 shows that the numbers of OLA LAC have increased during 2009 – 2010. It is anticipated that this figure will gradually decrease as Local Authorities will in future have to meet a ‘sufficiency’ requirement by providing sufficient care placements for Looked After Children within authority. However, current figures show that Kent has 52 more other local authority looked after children than Kent children including Kent unaccompanied asylum seeking children as part of the total figure.

Table 8 – OLA Looked After Children

District	31/01/08	31/01/09	31/01/10
KCC	1,355	1,320	1,501

Data Source: Jan 2008 and 2009 taken from Impulse Reports. Jan 2010 taken from ICS.

5. Social Work Vacancies

Table 9 below summarises the social worker vacancy position as of the end of January 2010. The combination of increased demands for services from Children's Social Services and social work vacancies has created a pressurised environment for both managers and staff striving to protect and support children and meet the National Indicator targets. The difficulty of recruiting and retaining sufficient social workers is a national concern which the Government is targeting. A key objective for 2010-11 is to reduce the social work vacancy rate in Kent to 10 - 15% across the county.

Table 9

Team Leader			Principal Social Worker			Senior Practitioner			Social Worker		
Est	Vac	%	Est	Vac	%	Est	Vac	%	Est	Vac	%
33	1	3%	55	8.3	15%	57.9	5.2	9%	334	96	29%

Est (Establishment) Vac (Vacancies) – Information produced by Business Performance and Management Unit

A recruitment group, which reports to the Specialist Children's Services Management Team, monitors the recruitment and retention of social workers. A proactive recruitment strategy is in place, details are set out below and the current level of vacancies is being gradually reduced:

- 9 social workers have been recruited from Northern Europe via Jacaranda and have started in West Kent in the last two months.
- 27 social workers have been recruited from the USA, arriving in Kent on the 7th February and, after an induction period, took up post from mid February.
- 22 final year social work degree students have been recruited through the bursary scheme and take up their posts as newly qualified social workers from July.
- East Kent interviewed European social workers in February and recruited 8 to 10 social workers who will start employment in April/May.
- KCC is approaching final year students at universities.
- Targeted recruitment activity has taken place at recruitment fairs to raise the profile of Kent; a few social workers have been recruited in this way.
- Mid Kent plans to recruit in Northern Europe in May.
- Children's Social Services will also review 'growing our own' social workers.

Consideration is also being given to converting some social work posts to assistant social worker posts, changing the skill mix of the teams.

Recommendations:

Members of the Vulnerable Children and Partnerships POSC are asked to note this report for information.

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