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To: Vulnerable Children and Partnerships Policy Overview and  
Scrutiny Committee – 29 June 2010

Subject: **KCAS ABANDONMENT RATE**

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: To report to Members on the level of abandoned calls experienced at Kent Contact & Assessment Service (KCAS) and detail the measures that are in place to mitigate this.

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## **Introduction**

1. (1) A review of duty arrangements in 1999 identified that this was provided by over 50 teams across the then twelve social services districts for both Adults and Children's services. There were also separate arrangements for Mental Health, Fostering, YOT and Hospital Teams. This was an issue of concern at the time of the Joint Inspection of Kent Social Services in 2000 by the Audit Commission and the Social Services Inspectorate. A consequent report to the Adult Social Services Policy Overview Committee agreed proposals to streamline existing duty arrangements with a view to introducing a 'screening' service supported by the KCC County Call Centre by the end of 2001 to improve public access to services, consistency and reduce pressure on staff.

(2) The County Duty Service (CDS) was established in 2002 providing a single unified system. It received contacts and referrals for all social care related matters other than for acute mental health, which has an integrated screening service with the Health Service. CDS was regarded as an innovation, staffed by primarily unregistered staff under the supervision of registered staff with significant operational experience.

(3) It was agreed at the point of disaggregation of Adults and Children's services in April 2006 that the County Duty Service would remain a generic service hosted under KASS with the Out of Hours service hosted by CFE. Both services are located at Kroner House which means that a 24 hr Duty Service operates from a single site.

(4) In July 2009, the County Duty Service changed to become Kent Contact & Assessment Service in preparation for the restructure of KASS in October 2009 to deliver the new system of Self Directed Support. This heralded an intention for KCAS to build on its previous core responsibilities of call handling, provision of information and advice and signposting to the assessment and commissioning of preventative services such as enablement and equipment as well as urgent services. The purpose of this change was to provide a faster service response to people following contact assessment as well as enable local teams to focus on people with more complex needs.

## Issue

2. (1) When CDS was established, it was estimated that it would handle 84,000 contacts and referrals per year. This demand has increased year on year. Data evidenced 130,000 contacts and referrals were handled by KCAS during 2009/10, a 14% increase on 2008/09. Business remains predominantly by telephone contact, (approximately 80%) with the remainder by post, fax, e-mail and on-line. A call handling study undertaken in June 2009 established the breakdown of call volumes to be approximately Adults 60% and Children's 40%.

(2) Despite a highly motivated, stable and skilled staff group, this increasing demand has resulted in a level of abandoned calls that has understandably raised concerns about not only public satisfaction but also potential risk related to adult/child protection. It is worth noting therefore that two recent surveys have reported high levels of public satisfaction. Also, that there have not been any issues raised in Serious Case Reviews during the previous three years; this is in respect of both Adults and Children's services.

(3) Notwithstanding the above, it is fully accepted that improvements to the abandoned call rate are required. Detailed below are the key actions that have either been taken already or are planned:

- (a) From April 2010 all activity other than call handling and fast track equipment provision was either ceased or put on hold pending achievement of a significantly improved response rate
- (b) New and enhanced telephony system has been installed which will significantly improve prioritisation of response against type and length of wait as well as enable an automatic feedback to Contact Kent after an agreed length of wait. It also allows for use by staff outside of the KCAS base such as those working in Gateways or flexibility during peak periods.
- (c) Development and training programme is underway to upskill Contact Kent operators to minimise inappropriate referrals to KCAS, deal directly with enquiries for social services lower level Information, Advice and Guidance as well as directly forward enquiries to local teams from people already known to KASS. Two call handling studies during 2009 indicate that this should reduce demand on KCAS by around 35%.
- (d) Process Improvement exercise using internationally recognised approach (LEAN 6 Sigma) commences June 2010 to ensure that business processes are as effective and efficient as possible ie, identify any 'waste' in the system and, if there is any, remove it.

(4) It is encouraging that since April 2010 the abandoned call rate has shown an overall average reduction to 16% per week. There is high expectation that when the measures at 2, 3 and 4 above become fully operational over the coming few months there will be a further significant reduction. Performance with call response/abandonment rate is reported weekly to the responsible SMT officer and the impact of the above actions on this rate is subject to monthly reporting to all of KASS SMT.

(5) Members need to be aware that the current activity and performance by KCAS is supported by £144k investment from the Social Care Reform Grant which will not be available from April 2011. A meeting will shortly be held with colleagues in CFE to discuss future requirements from KCAS by each Directorate, and the appropriate, respective resource requirements to support their delivery. These discussions will be considered in the context of the Access & Assessment Review which is currently being undertaken by Chief Executives Department which includes the relationship between Contact Kent, KCAS and Out of Hours. This report is therefore being shared with the appropriate lead officer in CFE who is similarly required to report to its Members.

### **Recommendations**

Members of the Vulnerable Children and Partnerships Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment on the contents of this report.

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Background documents: None

Other Useful Information: None