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To: County Council

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Subject: Progress report in response to Safeguarding Children in Kent: Defending and Developing the Service

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report summaries the actions taken in response to Safeguarding Children in Kent: Defending and Developing the Service

Introduction

1. (1) A review of child protection in Kent was commissioned by elected Members in December 2008, following the publication of the urgent joint review in Haringey, following the death of baby Peter. The final report of the review of child protection arrangements in Kent, 'Safeguarding Children in Kent: Defending and Developing the Service' was considered by the County Council on 1 April 2010.

(2) The report concluded that much has been done in Kent to assess the robustness and integrity of child protection arrangements, and when necessary, steps have already been taken by KCC and the Kent Safeguarding Children Board, to strengthen further those arrangements, including the investment of additional resources for front-line teams.

(3) Nevertheless, The 'Safeguarding Children in Kent: Defending and Developing the Service' highlighted areas for further improvement to counter issues such as high and increasing levels of referrals to the children's social care teams, and the difficulty in recruiting qualified social workers. These are factors experienced by most other local authorities, and is the subject of much national concern and debate.

(4) The report considered by the County Council in April 2010, made a total of 19 recommendations, which were agreed by the Council. This report provides a summary of the actions taken in response to the review findings.

(5) In addition, since the County Council report, the service has had an unannounced inspection of its duty and assessment service, and this is referenced below.

Actions taken in response to recommendations agreed by County Council 1 April 2010

2. (1) The main elements of the proposed strategy should be the basis for further detailed review and refinement by the Managing Director of Children, Families &

Education Directorate, the Director of Specialist Children's Services and their staff, including an analysis of the national reports published on 18 March 2010.

- (i) The National reports included Sir Roger Singleton's response on behalf of the government to the second Lord Laming report, following the death of baby Peter, and a proposed update of government guidance on multi-agency safeguarding "Working Together".
- (ii) Following an analysis of these reports, and following consultation on the proposed restructure of Children, Families and Education Services, the new posts of Preventative Services Managers were created for each of the 12 districts and the postholders began work on 1 September. Their role is to drive the preventative strategy in each District, focussing on earlier intervention to prevent children's needs escalating to the point where they require specialist services.
- (iii) In addition, the social care teams have been boosted back to 12 (from 10) which is enhancing capacity. There has been considerable success in recruiting newly qualified social workers and social workers from abroad, although the service is still struggling with high levels of vacancies.
- (iv) Kent Safeguarding Children Board has also considered the guidance in relation to multi-agency working, and the business plan for KSCB is also for consideration by County Council at this meeting.
- (v) The Coalition Government has recently announced a national review of Child Protection and Safeguarding by Professor Eileen Munro. KSCB and CFE are actively contributing to this review. The final report is due April 2011.
- (vi) In August, an unannounced Ofsted inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Kent's Children's Services identified a priority action in relation to the timeliness of initial assessments, and a number of areas of development, alongside some strengths. The inspection is part of a national rolling programme of inspections following the Haringey Serious Case Review of baby Peter. The inspection framework was changed from 1 April 2010 with an increased emphasis on priority actions.
- (vii) The Ofsted letter providing feedback on the Kent inspection was published on September 9th. The outcome was reported to Cabinet on 13 September and was also considered by Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on 15 September and the Joint CFE Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 September. Copies of the inspection letter and the Cabinet Member's statement have been sent to all elected members. Scrutiny Committee asked that County Council should consider the action plan which has been put into place to address the findings of the inspection (attached as annex 1).
- (viii) The plan includes:
 - Immediate actions to improve safeguarding practice

- Strengthened quality assurance processes
 - Strategies to further increase the capacity of social work teams through continuing a robust recruitment strategy, a competitive reward system, and increasing the establishment of administrative staff, social work assistants and trainee social workers
 - Strategies to improve retention of experienced social workers, including manageable workloads and good supervision.
 - Review of the integrated Children's System (ICS)
 - Work with partner agencies to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to Children's Social Services.
- (ix) This action plan will be monitored by an Improvement and Development Team, led by the Cabinet Member and Managing Director for CFE. Regular reports will be provided to Cabinet and the POSC for Vulnerable Children and Partnerships.
- (2) The Kent Safeguarding Children Board should give positive consideration to undertaking a multi-agency peer review of a sample of current child protection cases to assure itself about practice standards across agencies. (See Paragraph 20)
- (i) Kent Safeguarding Children Board is currently developing a multi-agency quality assurance framework. This framework will consider a range of qualitative and quantitative review and audit approaches for work throughout 2010-2011. The recent findings of the unannounced inspection indicate a need to focus energy and resources on embedding multi agency understanding regarding referral and eligibility criteria and the consistent application of the common assessment framework. This issue will therefore form the central focus of the multi-agency audit programme for the forthcoming year rather than child protection planning.
- (3) The Kent Safeguarding Children Board should identify and report on steps taken to improve the culture of openness and exchange between member agencies to establish greater accountability to the KSCB for child protection standards within member agencies.
- (i) The new process which is being introduced for the development of KSCB's Annual Review / Business Plan will support this, as it will focus on the effectiveness of partner agencies' safeguarding work: what difference they have made to the safety and well-being of children. The multi-agency local liaison groups (already in place) are being strengthened further to enhance the culture of openness and constructive challenge between professionals.
- (ii) For example, an externally facilitated multi-agency audit took place during July 2010, examining referrals and threshold criteria. The findings of this audit have been reported through KSCB and shared with multi-agency partners.
- (iii) New procedures have also been developed to clarify eligibility and threshold criteria for access to Children's Social Services. These have been endorsed by KSCB for use as draft procedures, pending a period of review by multi-agency partners.

- (iv) KSCB continues in its work to develop a culture of openness and information exchange between member agencies. It has updated the Safeguarding Children Procedures to reflect this. All agencies are now required to share their inspection reports where safeguarding is an element.

(4) The independent Chairman of the Kent Safeguarding Children Board should present an annual report to Kent County Council. It is also recommended that this report is also taken to all other relevant public bodies in Kent at Board level (See Paragraph 22).

- (i) KSCB has completed its third annual report, which will be presented to member agency governance boards / committees, including this County Council.

(5) Kent Children's Social Services should make regular use of the Social Work Task Force's organisational self-appraisal tool to ensure it is achieving high standards as a social work employer (See Paragraph 43).

- (i) Kent Children's Social Services has commenced work on the use of the self-appraisal tool, which will be implemented by October 2010.

(6) The Kent Safeguarding Children Board should, as a standard practice, deliver multi-agency seminars and targeted training following every Serious Case Review to ensure that the lessons from the Reviews are quickly and efficiently promulgated. (See Paragraph 52)

- (i) Briefings and seminars are already in place following the conclusion of a Serious Case Review.
- (ii) All existing training courses and sessions are being reviewed by the KSCB to ensure that, where applicable, the issues raised from SCR Reports, are appropriately included.

(7) Kent Children's Social Services should maintain a continuous review programme to ensure the adequacy of administrative support services and systems for social workers with a view to reducing professional social work time spent on administration and increasing the direct client contact time (See Paragraph 57).

- (i) Children's Social Services has undertaken a review of its administration capacity, and increased capacity in the Duty and Initial Assessment Teams. The current arrangements will be subject to further review through the Improvement and Development plan, with a focus on increasing the role and function of social work assistants and trainee social workers.

(8) Kent Children's Social Services should establish partnerships with other local authorities to share approaches aimed at minimising the administration workload of social workers and to seek shared solutions through the joint development of efficient, casework-oriented, and user-friendly information technology programmes (See Paragraph 57).

- (i) A number of changes has been made to the Integrated Children's System (ICS) which has made the system more effective. The burden of data quality has been reduced somewhat by additional administration capacity, although it is still a very bureaucratic and unwieldy system, and more needs to be done to help the teams monitor and track their workloads.
- (ii) As part of the Improvement and Development plan, a further review is in hand to consider the functionality of ICS and possible solutions. ICS is currently a national requirement, although it is left to each local authority to determine how best to implement it. The future of ICS and statistical recording requirements is being considered by the national review of Safeguarding, as mentioned above.

(9) Kent Children's Social Services and the Kent Safeguarding Children Board should ensure a good standard of referral information through training programmes and quality assurance audits with partner agencies (See Paragraph 58).

- (i) Kent Children's Social Services Professional Development Unit is currently developing a training programme for Kent Contact and Assessment Service staff with a focus on ensuring good quality referral information.
- (ii) KSCB has undertaken an audit with multi-agency partners, to consider referral thresholds and referral quality. The findings of this audit have been reported to KSCB and shared with Board members.
- (iii) All existing trainers for KSCB courses have been requested to reiterate the importance of referrals being of an appropriate standard when submitted by agencies to Children's Social Services.

(10) Urgent action should be taken by Kent Children's Social Services to reduce the rate of abandoned calls to the Kent Contact and Assessment Service, based at Kroner House (See Paragraph 60).

- (i) Responsibility for Kent Contact and Assessment Service (KCAS) sits with Kent Adult Social Services (KASS). KASS has developed KCAS to undertake a wider remit of assessment and fast track equipment provision, in addition to its core call handling function. From April 2010, KASS has undertaken to cease KCAS's role in engaging this wider assessment activity in order to enable the service to focus on call handling until achievement of a significantly improved telephone response rate.
- (ii) A new and enhanced telephony system is being installed and a training programme is underway to up-skill Contact Kent operators to minimise inappropriate referrals.
- (iii) Children's Social Services has also provided additional funding to increase capacity within Kent Contact and Assessment Service.
- (iv) It is encouraging that since April 2010 the abandoned call rate has shown an overall reduction. This is subject to ongoing review.

(11) Kent Children's Social Services should give high priority to the current review of their staff supervision policy with the objective of making professional social work supervision a guaranteed and protected element of the service with protected time for practitioners and supervisors. (See Paragraph 62)

- (i) Kent's staff supervision policy has been reviewed and a new policy developed, which takes account of the complexity of the social work task across different parts of the service. The policy was launched on the 3 August 2010, and is supported by an implementation plan, detailing how the policy will be embedded into practice via a training programme. A well known expert and trainer in this field has been commissioned to devise a programme which will be ready for dissemination in the autumn of 2010.

(12) The Kent Safeguarding Children Board should develop in partnership with appropriate academic and other training institutions electronic and interactive training packages that can be used for workplace training and team development of skills necessary for child protection work across and specific to agencies (See Paragraph 63).

- (i) KSCB has developed a training college of facilitators, in partnership with the NSPCC and Christchurch University College. Additionally, several e-learning training packages have been developed with the Children's e-Academy.
- (ii) KSCB's approach to learning and development is also being reviewed. A new learning and development strategy, based on an analysis of learning needs, will be developed during 2010/11 as part of the Board's Business Plan. This new strategy will take into account both local and national messages about priorities for practice development. There will be an increased focus on different approaches to learning (including interactive video), in order to develop professional skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes in a more experiential way.

(13) Kent Children's Social Services should establish a trainee scheme for suitable candidates for professional social work training and provide financial assistance through training professional training in return for a contractual commitment to remain in employment with the county for a minimum of two years after qualifying (See Paragraph 66).

- (i) Two trainee schemes are in the process of being developed. Ten Social Work Assistants currently employed by Children's Social Services will be funded to undertake the Open University social work qualification pathway. Additionally, a trainee graduate scheme for the MA in social work has been developed which is due to start in December 2010. Ten places will be available for graduates in the autumn, ready to begin their MA in September 2011.

(14) Kent Children's Social Services should seek to establish a number of bursaries or sponsored places on suitable social work training courses (See Paragraph 67).

- (i) This scheme is in place. The aim is to recruit between 30 – 40 Final Year Students this year.

(15) Kent Children's Social Services should establish close partnerships with suitable centres of academic excellence to develop training and research programmes that will meet the demands of child protection social work (See Paragraph 70).

- (i) Kent Children's Social Services have been working closely with the University of Kent to develop training and research programmes.
- (ii) Training has taken place exploring decision making in risk management. In addition, the new supervision policy has been implemented in Children's Social Services, which will be supported by a comprehensive supervision training programme, delivered by a nationally renowned trainer.
- (iii) As part of the training and development work on risk management, the University of Kent are undertaking Action Research into how staff perceive risk and then make decisions. It is intended this work will improve the quality of decision making in child protection work and create a robust evidence base for safeguarding.

(16) The Kent Safeguarding Children Board and Kent Children's Social Services should develop training initiatives that will ensure that all professionals in the course of their qualifying training have joint training modules to increase the shared professional understanding of child protection work and to establish a core of inter-professional skills and knowledge (See Paragraph 70).

- (i) Current qualifying training programmes for health, education and social work staff already include inter-professional modules on safeguarding. In respect of core social work degrees, Universities seek stakeholder consultation with Kent Children's Social Services on the development of the graduate programmes.
- (ii) This proposal will be explored further as part of the development of the Safeguarding Board's new Learning and Development Strategy.

(17) Kent Safeguarding Children Board and Kent Children's Social Services should seek to establish a multi-agency specialised training unit, ideally in partnership with all agencies, within the county aimed at developing the necessary skills for working with difficult uncooperative families (See Paragraph 71).

- (i) KSCB is establishing a 'College' of multi-agency trainers who will be used to deliver multi-agency Safeguarding training. These staff will bring a variety of specialist skills to the training college. By using 'operational' staff to deliver training, a more practical and job-related approach to training is being developed. The use of video and role actors is being planned, with skilled staff facilitating training and de-briefing to ensure learning is transferable to the workplace and really makes a difference to the children of Kent.

- (ii) The possibility of establishing a specialist training centre will be considered further as part of the development of the new Learning and Development strategy referred to above.

(18) Kent Children's Social Services should establish robust mechanisms for providing advice and alerts to senior managers and to elected Members and which will also provide reassurance to social workers that their professional values and ethics are being promoted and safeguarded (See Paragraphs 72 and 73).

- (i) Significant work has been undertaken in respect of this action. A new protocol has been introduced (the serious incident reporting protocol) across Children, Families and Education Directorate, aimed at ensuring effective reporting to senior managers. The Children's Services alerts procedure has been updated and re-issued to all front line practitioners and managers. A protocol for reporting the findings and publication of serious case reviews has also been agreed by Cabinet Scrutiny Committee Members.

(19) The Leader and Chief Executive/Group Managing Director should arrange with the Director of Children's Services, the Director of Specialist Children's Services and the independent chairman of the Kent Children's Safeguarding Board an annual programme of reporting to Cabinet and full Council to provide an open and systematic approach to quality assurance. This programme should be managed through the Managing Director for Children, Families & Education and the Director of Specialist Children's Services and coordinated by Corporate Policy, supported with advice from a reference group comprising frontline practitioners (See paragraphs 72 and 73).

- (i) This report to County Council is the first report actioning this recommendation, and regular reports will follow as agreed on 1 April. Also, as mentioned above, there will be regular reports to Cabinet and POSC on the action plan following the unannounced inspection of the duty and assessment service. The Improvement and Development Team will include front line practitioners.

Conclusion

3. The findings of the unannounced inspection revealed significant areas of development in the duty and assessment processes. The responses to the 2009 review outlined above will assist in making the necessary improvements. However, the key issues are social work capacity, ensuring that referrals made to Children's Social Services are appropriate, that social work practice focuses on the basics (the needs of the child, sound assessment and care planning) and that there is effective management oversight and staff supervision. This is the focus of the Improvement and Development Plan attached.

Recommendations:

4. Members are requested:

- (i) to note the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Safeguarding Children in Kent report

(ii) to note the issues arising from the unannounced inspection and actions to address them

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Background documents

None