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To: Cabinet – 29 November 2010

Subject: Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report summaries the outcome of the OFSTED Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Kent

Introduction

1. (1) An announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in Kent 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) This is of concern for the County Council and its partners in health and other key agencies. We are determined to put right the failings identified in the report, and to return the service to good standards, providing robust, quality driven and outcome based support for children, young people and families.

Actions taken in response to the inspection

2. (1) Following the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in August, an action plan was put in place to address the findings of the inspection. The plan has been monitored by an Improvement and Development Steering Group, led by the Cabinet Member and Managing Director for CFE. The inspection acknowledged that these actions were in place, but that it is too early to see evidence of sustained improvement.

(2) The main actions have been

- Development programmes for all the duty and assessment teams to improve safeguarding practice
- Reduction in social worker vacancies to 11% by October, compared with 26% in January 2010

- Introduction of a new staff supervision policy, combined with a training programme for all supervisors
- Work with partner agencies to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to Children's Social Services
- Establishing 12 preventative services managers (1 in each district) from 1 September to ensure that services intervene earlier and in a more integrated way

(3) In response to this full inspection, immediate action has been taken to safeguard the children identified to be at risk and actions are in place to address the areas for improvement. A full recovery / improvement plan to follow at next Cabinet meeting on 10 January 2011.

(4) The improvement plan will deliver the recommendations of the Ofsted inspection within the required timescale, which will include:

- Solutions to the Integrated Children's System (ICS)
- Streamlining of business processes minimising replication of forms
- A revised staff retention policy, particularly focussing on retention of experienced social workers
- Strengthened performance management framework with clarity about responsibilities of managers at all levels in the service
- A more robust quality assurance process, redressing the balance between audit undertaken routinely by frontline managers and offline audits by the Safeguarding Unit. The aim is to ensure that frontline managers embed audit into their practice
- A comprehensive workforce development programme for all staff, combining training in their teams with more traditional training courses
- A rigorous strategy to improving the education of looked after children, addressing attainment, attendance and inclusion
- Actions to reduce social workers' caseloads
- Redefinitions of the roles of the social worker assistants and administrative staff
- Proposals for the restructuring of the social work service

(5) Since the inspection report was published on 19 November, the Director of Specialist Children's Services has been visiting the 12 district offices to discuss with staff the implications of the inspection. Although very disappointed by the inspection outcome, staff are generally positive and

committed to improving social work practice. Many are relieved that they can now talk openly about the failings in the service and feel energised by clarity of purpose provided by their district improvement plans. There is a virtually unanimous view across districts that the actions in paragraph 2 (4) need to be addressed.

(6) In immediate response to the areas of improvement required by the inspectors, the following actions have been taken.

- A review, led by ISG and involving front line social work teams, of the operation of the electronic case management and recording system, benchmarked against operating systems in successful social care authorities, with recommendations on improvements or recommissioning within 3 months.
- All principal social workers and team leaders are reviewing the caseloads for which they are accountable to ensure the assessments and plans are sufficiently robust to safeguard children and ensure good outcomes. There are approximately 7,000 live cases in the system currently. This will be completed by 23 December 2010. The district managers will audit a sample of the cases to quality assure the review. For looked after children, the teams are addressing reviews of assessments and plans, starting with the children who became looked after in the past 6 months. This will be completed by 1 December 2010; they will then move to the cohort looked after 6-12 months, gradually ensuring that all assessments have been reviewed by the end of January
- Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) met on 18 November and all partners signed up to ensuring that their staff are conversant with social care eligibility criteria and to providing appropriate levels of referral information. Implementation will be driven by the KSCB coordinating groups in each area and the Board agreed to establish a quality assurance process for referrals which will be in place from 1 December 2010. Revised eligibility criteria were agreed by the Board in September. Kent police is the largest referrer to children's social services, most referrals being about children affected by domestic abuse. A new referral process has recently been agreed between the police and social services, whereby the police will screen more rigorously which domestic abuse incidents need to be formal referrals and which should be notifications. The new process is welcomed and will be implemented from December
- Development programmes have been in place since 8 November 2010 to improve the quality and timeliness of initial and core assessments in duty and assessment teams. In addition, a nationally recognised development

manager has been engaged to work with all the duty teams to drive improvement, especially improvement in quality

- The NHS Director of Commissioning, Child Health is addressing as a matter of urgency commissioning of appropriate CAMHS for 16-17 year olds. The CAMHS National Support Team reviewed CAMHS services in Kent in September and made a number of recommendations for significant improvement. A CAMHS improvement plan is being developed, which will have close linkage with the improvement plan for Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services. A letter of support and commitment on behalf of the PCTs is attached as appendix 1.
- Case planning for looked after children requires urgent attention. The permanence policy has been refreshed and a strategy for its implementation will be produced in December, due for implementation in January. This will result in a renewed focus on proactive care planning for our looked after children, along with improved health care and education overseen by the Headteacher for Looked After Children.
- Consideration is being given to developing dedicated social work teams for Looked After Children.

(7) In addition to the above actions, the recruitment policy continues to deliver results:

- All district manager posts are now filled, with the last recruit taking up his post in January 2011
- Only 2 team leader posts are vacant, and they are filled by 'acting' arrangements pending permanent recruitment
- There remain difficulties in recruiting principal social workers, and a new strategy of recruiting in Ireland, combined with a development programme for existing staff, will begin in the new year
- Social worker vacancies have reduced to 11% at the end of October, compared to 26% in February. In addition, 50 new social workers have recently been recruited from Europe, many of whom are experienced practitioners. They will join the service in 2 phases – half in January and half in March, so that a comprehensive induction programme can be put in place for them
- 33 social work students due to qualify in summer 2011 have already been recruited
- Interviews are underway for graduate trainee social workers; there are 36 shortlisted applicants for 22 places. The successful applicants will join the service in January

and will begin their 2 year postgraduate qualifying course in September 2011

- 20 social work assistants already working in social work teams will be sponsored on the open university social work qualifying course, starting in February 2011
- The administrative capacity of social work teams has been increased – 1 admin to 3 social workers in duty teams and 1 to 4 in children and family teams
- The social work assistant (SWA) ratio has been confirmed as 1 social work assistant/trainee social worker to 3 social workers
- A number of new administrative staff and social work assistants have been recruited in the past 2 months, and all will be in post in the new year

The absolute top priority is improving the quality of social work practice and the quality of child protection practice. This will be achieved by reducing social worker caseloads so that they have time for sound professional practice (a maximum caseload of 30 children was defined in November, with the aim of reducing caseloads further in the new year, once the new recruits are in post). The other top priority is increasing the complement of principal social workers (still 20% vacancies) to enable reflective supervision to take place.

(8) 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 will be brought in to assist the recovery plan

Conclusion

3. (1) The findings of the inspection reveal significant weaknesses and a transformation of children's social services is required, focussing on sound social work practice and effective management oversight and supervision.

(2) Other agencies and partners will have their own part to play in ensuring good practice and assisting with the multi-agency aspects of the improvement.

Recommendations

4. Members are requested:

to note the issues arising from the inspection and actions to address them

Background Documents:

OFSTED Report – 19 November 2010: Saeguarding 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

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