

By: Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services
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To: Vulnerable Children and Partnerships Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 30st March 2011

Subject: Update by the Cabinet Member and Acting Managing Director

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: The verbal update clarifies for all Members of the POSC the improvement priorities for Specialist Children's Services. The priorities come together to form the plan that is presented to the Improvement Board, independently chaired by Liz Railton to support rapid and sustainable improvement of services that safeguard children and support looked after children. This will include monitoring the targets set out in the Kent Improvement Notice issued by the Secretary of State in January 2011.

In order to provide some additional national context to the improvement priorities this update also provides Members with a short overview of the interim report published by Professor Eileen Munro on child protection.

1. Improvement Priorities

Putting Children First, Kent County Council Safeguarding and Looked After Children improvement Plan, is the document that will guide the work of the service over the next two years. This plan, developed in response to the Ofsted Inspection in October 2010, describes the actions to improve services to children and/ or support looked after children. We are dealing with immediate priorities for action as well as the longer term focus that will embed and sustain improvements irrespective of challenges in the local or national landscape.

The improvement programme and associated actions are built around six key themes. These are outlined below and provide an overview of the priorities we are taking forward. Each priority is underpinned by key tasks, with officers assigned and accountable to the Improvement Board for delivery.

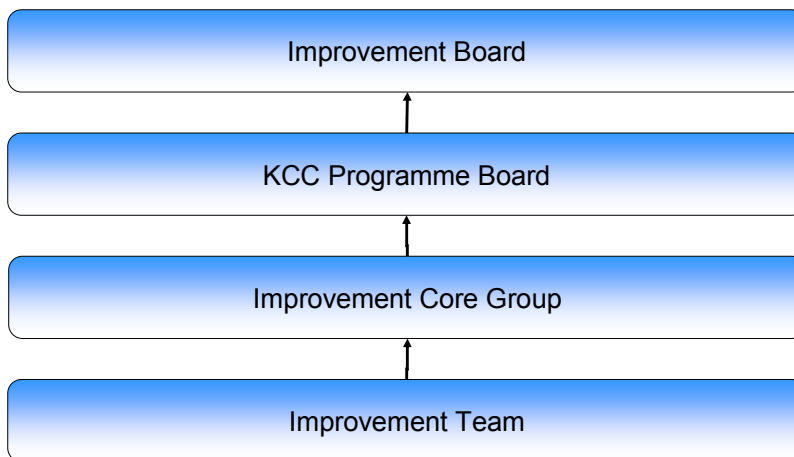
1. **Leadership and Management** – Providing confident leadership with clear vision and sense of direction, modelling professional competence, confidence and self belief. This requires leadership at every level prioritising swift action to achieve change that is manageable, achievable and can be sustained. This requires that we hold people to account and that management response is proactive and solution focussed. We must reward and celebrate success and ensure that at all times we communicate clear expectations throughout the organisation and across our key partnership groups.
2. **High Quality Front Line Practice** – Will be achieved through effective multi-agency early intervention and prevention. We will build a range of services that ensure families and their children are supported at the earliest point of need. This will support the management of risk and ensure professionals have the confidence to know when to intervene. We must ensure thresholds are consistently and appropriately implemented and that we have a robust system for responding to referrals. All referral points will be underpinned by high quality practice standards, with high quality, child centred social work assessment services supported by timely decision making and family support.
3. **Creating an organisation fit for purpose** – This priority will begin with the creation of a sustainable structure that is effective and accountable. Compliance throughout the organisation will be regularly reviewed and clear priorities will be established to align resources to support these priorities. Infrastructure changes that ensure front line teams receive the support they need, will include adequately supported IT and other systems, and a front door service that is delivered from offices that are fit for purpose.
4. **Strengthening partnerships to make a difference** – A shared vision by all partners and a commitment to working together to improve services that safeguard and look after children and young people is at the heart of this priority. The work of partnership boards must support high quality safeguarding (Kent Safeguarding Children Board) and ensuring better outcomes for all children and young people, (Kent Children's Trust). There will be clear lines of communication across partnerships and joint commissioning of services that keep children safe and free from harm.
5. **Becoming the employer of choice** – In the region we will work to ensure the effective source and supply of social workers and managers. We must provide a compelling offer, supporting a reward package for recruitment and retention. The long term focus on the growth and development of the Children's workforce will be supported by high quality induction for a range of staff recruited from different countries at different levels. We will have sufficient line management and supervision capacity to guide and support those at the front line. This is vital to support high quality decision making and ensure workers feel safe to carry out their duties.

- 6. Robustly managing performance** – Underpinning all management actions will be a comprehensive performance system that is informed by accurate and timely management information. Individual achievement will be measured and supervision will be robust and accompanied by effective quality assurance of practice. We must ensure staff at the front line are listened to, understood and supported to do their job. We will operate with complete transparency and will not tolerate unacceptable practice and behaviour.

1.2 Governance of improvement priorities

The Improvement Board will review the actions across the plan. Reporting structures will support the delivery of timely and sustained actions across each priority area. Officers have been assigned from across the County Council to ensure each element of the structure is appropriately supported.

Reporting Structure



Actions associated with leadership already reflect the importance of engagement with Members. We do need to undertake additional work around governance to support member's role as the corporate parent.

2. Munro Review

Professor Eileen Munro published her interim report into Child Protection on 1 February 2011. Whilst the final outcome of the review is not expected until April of this year, the interim report focuses on child protection procedures that question first whether they have helped children, and closely examines where reforms need to take place.

The report highlights the importance of having multi-agency services based in the community to help keep children safe and support their wellbeing, identify the children and families most in need and give them help as early as possible.

The areas of reform in the interim report include;

- the importance of a management and inspection process monitoring whether or not children receive the help they require
- developing social work expertise and keeping experience, senior staff on the front line, providing better support to more junior social workers
- giving other professionals easier access to social work advice
- revising and reducing statutory guidance
- considering having a national system of trained reviewers of serious case reviews.

3. Next Steps and Recommendations:

Members will be provided with regular updates on the improvement programme for Specialist Children's Services. Members are to prioritise training events and information briefings as dates are circulated. This will help to ensure we continue to take collective action to improve outcomes for children and families across the County.

Officer Names and contact information

For further information on the improvement plan priorities please contact;

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Background Documents:

Interim report of Munro review

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01.02.2011

www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/interim-report-of-munro...

Other Useful Information

Reconstruct Research Services

www.reconstrcut.co.uk