

**By:** Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services  
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**To:** Cabinet 23 May 2011

**Subject:** *Putting Children First*: Kent's Safeguarding and Looked After Children Improvement Plan

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary** Seeks endorsement of the Improvement Plan and reports on progress to date

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## **1. The Kent Improvement Plan *Putting Children First***

- 1.1 This was drawn up in response to the findings of the Ofsted inspections which took place in August and October 2010. It sets out the overall strategy and detailed actions to significantly improve services to children in Kent and support for looked after children. It directly addresses the requirements set out in the Ofsted Report and subsequent Improvement Notice from government. More widely, it also seeks to enhance the quality of practice and improve the whole system through which children's needs are assessed and met via a fundamental re-shaping of Children's Services.
- 1.2 The governance arrangements for children's social care improvement were approved by the County Council on 6 April. The Kent Improvement Board, which has an independent chair, Liz Railton (approved by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children & Families), meets monthly. That Board signed off the Improvement Plan at its April meeting and the Plan was subsequently emailed to all Members on 7 April, with hard copies left in pigeon holes. It is attached at Appendix 1 for convenience. The County Council also agreed to establish a Children's Services Improvement Panel which is an informal Member group that supports the Families & Social Care Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee by offering challenge and overseeing the monitoring of progress. That Panel met for the first time on 26 April, and will meet monthly. It in turn is supported by the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Staff Advisory Group.

## 2. Our Approach to Improvement

2.1 The Improvement Plan has been built around six key themes:

- Providing confident leadership and management across children's services
- Putting in place effective front-line practice
- Creating an organisation fit for purpose
- Strengthening partnerships to make a difference
- Becoming the employer of choice in the region
- Robustly managing performance

2.2 Members and officers are determined to deliver rapid, visible and sustainable improvement to our children's services and our approach will be steered by the following characteristics:

- **A sense of urgency** – we know that the current situation is unacceptable and we will not rest until services for children are safe
- **Connection to the Front-Line** - listening, understanding, supporting and taking action to assist front-line staff to do a good job
- **An unremitting focus on what is important** - fixing the most important things first
- **Management grip** - driven by strong performance management and tackling problems as they arise in an ongoing way
- **Intolerance of the unacceptable behaviours** - the first step of our improvement journey will be to eradicate unacceptable practice and unacceptable behaviour
- **Complete transparency** - we will produce information that allows elected members, partners, government and the public to understand our progress. Creating a culture of openness to encourage staff to raise concerns/issues
- **The top priority** for KCC and its partners

### The 10 Core Tasks

2.3 The Improvement Plan will deliver sustained improvement across all of children's services leading to improved outcomes for children and young people within Kent over the next two to three years. Our **core strategy**, however, focuses on tackling those areas of greatest risk first and laying the foundations for more effective practice. The 10 Core Tasks are as follows, and will be implemented over the next six months:

*We will improve the quality of practice by*

Core Task 1. Bringing in a peripatetic team to

- Reduce the number of unallocated cases
- Reduce numbers of incomplete assessments
- Restore timely assessment timescales.

Core Task 2. Strengthening the quality of work undertaken in the assessment teams with external support, monitoring and audit

Core Task 3. Restoring throughput, pruning caseloads and reducing the number of children in need

Core Task 4. Making structural changes for handling initial assessments, fixing Kent Contact and Assessment Service, introducing specialist looked after children teams and ensuring we have the right amount of staff in the right locations

Core Task 5. Strengthening first line management accountability and the quality of supervision through training, development and audit

*We will improve the children's system by*

Core Task 6. Implementing an effective management information and quality assurance framework

Core Task 7. Filling resource gaps by more effective recruitment and putting in place a compelling workforce strategy

Core Task 8. Building an effective commissioning framework and range of preventive services

Core Task 9. Strengthening the Kent Safeguarding Children Board and the Children's Trust arrangements, Common Assessment Framework and threshold arrangements

Core Task 10. Providing front line teams with suitable accommodation, ICT arrangements, infrastructure and support

### **3. Progress to date on the 10 Core Tasks**

- 3.1 On 6<sup>th</sup> April Sanctuary was awarded the peripatetic team contract to provide 30 social workers and six managers for six months. The team is organised in 3 "pods", one in each area (East, Mid and West Kent), and it will be fully operational from early May.
- 3.2 A Duty and Initial Assessment Team (DIAT) development programme was piloted in Swale from 21<sup>st</sup> March and will be rolled out across Kent within six months. The model provides external consultancy and off line support to the

DIAT Teams in order to strengthen practice and improve consistency and managerial grip/decision making across the County. As part of this a Duty Manual is being trialled and refined.

- 3.3 A case management tool (tracker) for new referrals, to ensure duty managers have a firm managerial grip on cases, went live on 4<sup>th</sup> April across the county. All DIATs have received 1:1 training on the use of the tracker to ensure compliance.
- 3.4 Practice standards in relation to child protection and assessment have been agreed, and standards in relation to looked after children are in development.
- 3.5 In addition to the peripatetic team, 26 staff from the Parenting Capacity Assessment Team have been diverted to tackle the backlog since early April. The combination of this, the DIAT improvement programme, and a focus across the service on closing unallocated cases (where appropriate to do so) and improving throughput is beginning to deliver results in terms of timeliness of initial assessments, and improving the number of cases ended relative to the number started each month. Average caseloads have already reduced substantially and now stand at 23.5 per caseholder.
- 3.6 From early May, four additional principal social workers plus a team leader will be placed within the Kent Contact and Assessment Service (KCAS), ensuring that only those contacts that need to be referred to specialist children's services go through to the Duty Teams.
- 3.7 Options are being developed for a structure which facilitates better management of referrals and handling of initial assessments, introduces specialist looked after children teams, and ensures we have the right amount of staff in the right locations.
- 3.8 The supervision training programme has been rolled out to all managers. Information on management capacity and spans of control (e.g. number of staff supervised, scope of experience of staff) has been gathered and is being analysed to inform the development of the quality assurance monitoring process for supervision and management grip. A simple tool for supervisors, to enable district managers, team leaders and supervisors to ensure supervision has occurred and is evidenced on children's files, has been designed and will be piloted in Dover district in May.
- 3.9 A suite of management reports have been developed which now provide weekly information on performance down to team level.
- 3.10 A Performance Management Framework, Quality Assurance Framework and Operational Framework have all been consulted upon and are being finalised ready for formal sign-off and launch.
- 3.11 Weekly and monthly performance monitoring reports have been re-designed and refined and are being used more effectively by staff at all levels to drive service improvements.

- 3.12 Changes are being made to business processes to address key issues. For example, the sign-off process for exemplars (forms) on the Integrated Children's System has been made more robust.
- 3.13 An analysis of current staffing levels, a recruitment plan for the next three years, and an update on actions taken so far in achieving an effective recruitment and compelling workforce strategy has been undertaken. Recommendations will be put to Cabinet for the components needed to ensure a compelling offer is made to attract new and retain existing high quality social care staff.
- 3.14 A Preventative and Early Intervention Strategy has been drafted and will be formally sent out for consultation in early May and the overall Early Intervention and Prevention Commissioning Framework is in development.
- 3.15 A Placement Support Service (PSS) became operational in April. This provides a single point of access for social workers looking to make placements with independent fostering providers seeking to inform KCC of vacancies. Feedback from both social workers and providers has been very positive so far and in the first two weeks of operation, placements were sought and found for all 15 children referred to the service.
- 3.16 A review of the Kent Safeguarding Children Board is underway, led by the new Independent Chair, Maggie Blyth, with the support of an external consultant.
- 3.17 The review of the Kent Children's Trust (KCT) is also underway – specification, project plan and timeline are in place and the desk top review has started. Interviews are now taking place, and in addition a consultation questionnaire on current arrangements is on the KCT website and KCT members and chairs of associated groups have been encouraged to input.
- 3.18 The Ofsted report identified that the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process in Kent is not working well, so a CAF review and action plan has been developed and discussed with key partners. This includes learning from other authorities. Agreements are in place with partners for renewed CAF training and for this to be part of practitioner induction. The size and scale of the current CAF process is to be reviewed as part of the action plan. Work has also been undertaken to improve the regular reporting of CAF data on a district basis and to specify the improved ICS system requirements for CAF.
- 3.19 Work has commenced on improving the Integrated Children's System (ICS) in Kent, to develop the future strategy for ICS as well as implement the immediate changes in systems use which are required to make it fit for purpose.
- 3.20 The accommodation and needs of staff (including ICT, car parking and reception facilities) have been reviewed, site reports developed, a project register (tracker) established, and prioritisation of action is being undertaken.

All site reports and actions for high priority sites have been agreed with District Managers. A project team to support this priority is now up and running and examples of achievements to date include opening of Thistley Hill reception; a programme of RAM upgrades across Kent during April and May resulting in much quicker operation of laptops and computers; parking alternatives identified for local offices where parking was a particular issue; and some issues of filing and storage being resolved.

#### **4. Impact on Performance**

4.1 Between February and April we have:

- Reduced unallocated cases from 2269 to 973
- Reduced outstanding initial assessments from 1926 to 856
- Reduced outstanding core assessments from 2019 to 1641

4.2 A wealth of performance information is gathered on a weekly and monthly basis. From this, a Member Dashboard has been distilled which sets out current performance and targets for each of 6 key indicators for children's services. This is attached at Appendix 2 (to follow) and will be reported to the Children's Services Improvement Panel every month. The April Scorecard is attached as Appendix 3 (to follow).

#### **5. Next Steps**

5.1 Although staff have worked hard to deliver the progress and improvement set out above, the challenges facing the service are very significant, as are the targets in the Improvement Notice from government. It is imperative that the whole County Council continues to recognise that bringing children's social services up to standard must continue to be the top priority for us all.

5.2 There are many ways in which Members can be kept informed about progress. This is the first of a series of quarterly reports to Cabinet. The Children's Services Improvement Panel will continue to meet monthly and will report regularly to the Families & Social Care Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee. A briefing for all Members on the Improvement Plan has been arranged for 18 May. The Children's Services Improvement Plan hub is now live on KNet and can be accessed on <http://knet2/directorates/children-families-and-education/csjp>.

## **6. Recommendations**

Further to the endorsement of the Kent Safeguarding and Looked After Children Improvement Plan by County Council, Cabinet is asked to NOTE the progress that has been made.

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