

Kent Safeguarding Children Board

Overview update report (2011)

Introduction

An announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services took place in Kent between 11-22 October 2010. The inspection concluded that the overall effectiveness of safeguarding services in Kent was inadequate and that capacity for improvement was inadequate. It concluded that the overall effectiveness of services for looked after children were also inadequate, while the capacity for improvement in this area was considered adequate.

The inspection identified concerns regarding a lack of effective partnership working in Kent, including a *“serious lack of concerted action by the partnership to address the disjointed arrangements between child protection services and other key services”*.

The inspection report also identified concerns regarding the effectiveness of the Kent Safeguarding Children Board. The report identified the need for improvements in respect of non-compliance with statutory guidance with not all agencies represented on the Board, work needed to re-align missing children guidance to clarify thresholds and most importantly to develop an effective quality assurance framework.

Ofsted’s judgement that the overall effectiveness of safeguarding services in Kent was inadequate and that capacity for improvement was inadequate was a significant issue for the Safeguarding Board. The Board had identified concerns regarding multi-agency working and safeguarding practice across Kent prior to Ofsted’s inspection, but had not been effective in challenging this and effecting change in the partnership to improve outcomes in respect of child protection practice.

This was of concern for the KSCB and its partners. The Board was determined to address the failures identified in the inspection report, but most importantly to strengthen its scrutiny function in order to ensure that in future safeguarding activity undertaken by partner agencies is of a good standard and contributes towards improved outcomes for Kent’s vulnerable children.

Purpose of Report

This report aims to provide an overview of the work undertaken in the current reporting year subsequent to the inspection and not therefore reflected in the 2010-11 Annual Report. It also goes on to highlight the remaining challenges and risks for effective scrutiny of partnership safeguarding activity across Kent.

Actions taken in response to the inspection

In response to the inspection findings there was a significant and focussed response across the partnership. A Safeguarding Improvement Board was established to respond to an Improvement notice issued by the Minister of State for Children and Families, with an External Independent Chair (Liz Raillton), underpinned by a Multi-agency Improvement Plan. The Plan is scrutinised by the Board at a monthly meeting, attended by partners and also by the DfE to oversee progress, and to monitor improvements in-line with the Improvement Plan. The Improvement Board expects to see improvements taking place in line with the actions and timescales laid out in the improvement plan and monitors to see that consistent progress has been made. The Independent Chair of the KSCB, appointed in April 2011, Maggie Blyth, is a member of the Improvement Board to ensure that there is KSCB input into the scrutiny and development of the Safeguarding Improvement Programme at all points.

Securing more meaningful engagement from partners

The new Independent Chair, Maggie Blyth, has moved quickly to strengthen the Board and there has been progress in consolidating the safeguarding partnership. Following recommendations from an independent review completed by Alan Simpson on 30 June 2011, KSCB has clarified its membership across the partnership with due consideration given to the size and complexity of Kent.

On July 15 2011, the full Board of KSCB endorsed the independent review. It confirmed the membership of a streamlined Board, supported by a number of sub groups leading on key work streams. Oversight of KSCB is through a small strategic executive, with close alignment to membership of the Improvement Board. The new arrangements clarify statutory representation from the health and education sectors. They also include 2 lay persons and a representation from the voluntary sector through Kent Children's Fund Network.

The small Executive has representation at Director level from children's social services, education, health, police, probation and the lead member for children as participant observer.

New Subgroup chairs, have been appointed from the Executive and are now held responsible for delivery of KSCB work plans and implementing the strategic priorities of KSCB:

- Serious Case Review Sub Group - Director of Kent Probation
- Learning and Development Sub Group - Chief Executive Connexions Kent
- Policy and Practice Sub Group - Superintendent Kent Police
- Quality and Effectiveness Sub Group - Managing Director, West Kent CHT
- Health Safeguarding Group - Director of Nursing and Quality, NHS Kent & Medway
- Education Safeguarding Group - Director of Education

Revised eligibility criteria for universal, targeted and specialist services were agreed by KSCB in May 2011. The new guidance sets out clear thresholds and criteria for access to children's social care which ensure that children at risk of harm receive appropriate intervention to minimise risk and that these thresholds and criteria are implemented by all partners and agencies across the County.

All partners signed up to ensuring that their staff were conversant with eligibility criteria and to providing appropriate levels of referral information. Staff from all agencies engaged in the launch of the eligibility criteria to secure understanding of thresholds, eligibility and assessment processes (Including linkage with CAF) through over 30 multi-agency, localised workshops delivered between May and July 2011. Work is now underway to analyse whether this has led to fewer inappropriate referrals to Specialist Children's Services, including a multi-agency audit planned for November 2011.

The multi agency audit will be completed in November 2011 and findings taken to both the KSCB executive in December 2011 and the February 2012 full Board.

Review the child protection process to ensure that professionals are properly prepared and service user confidence is restored

The OFSTED inspection set Kent the challenge of dramatically improving its child protection conference system to improve outcomes for children within tight timescales for change. In response to the findings, significant work has been undertaken (from within Specialist Children's Services and the KSCB) to review and make improvements to the child protection process.

Work to date has included:

- Focus groups have been held with partners regarding the current child protection conference process.
- Child protection processes have been changed and procedures amended, including templates for reports, agendas, minutes and plans. An increase focus onto analysis and decisions making. Core group are now held immediately after the conference so that families, children and professionals all leave the meeting clear about what happens next and what their part is in that change process.
- Improved engagement of families to enable them to contribute to plans regarding their children and getting their views on how best to help them.
- Partners now have access to a secure email account in Children Specialist Services (CSS) to send copies of reports prior to conference.
- Training programme devised to support the amended processes as part of the multi-agency training programme

Strengthening the Board's scrutiny function

KSCB has strengthened its approach to performance management by developing a shared dataset (with the support of an external consultant through C4EO), placing clearer demands on agencies for more effective performance analysis and by introducing a new multi-agency performance framework and operational framework. Work has also been undertaken to strengthen the Quality and Effectiveness Sub Group and training has been provided to this group. This focus is also reflected in the Kent Improvement Plan.

A focus of much activity over recent months has been the development of the audit plan, to include an audit of thresholds in November 2011, led by an external consultant, linked to the work being undertaken by the C4EO consultant through the Improvement Board. A new audit programme has been developed, including audit tools, and work is underway to train the audit team to ensure the multi-agency group is able to provide a robust scrutiny function. Further work planned includes an audit of child protection planning in Spring 2012.

In order to support the more rigorous performance and scrutiny function of the Board, a decision was reached to increase capacity for this task and recruitment of a performance analyst is under way and this person will be in post by January 2012.

Issues or risks

The Independent Chair of KSCB reported to the August 2011 Improvement Board and highlighted two key remaining areas of risk for KSCB.

Performance management and quality assurance

Although the Board has undertaken significant work to strengthen its performance management and scrutiny function, there has been insufficient capacity within the Business Unit to ensure effective analysis of the information. Additional support has been provided from within the Council's Safeguarding Unit and Management Information Unit, but there remains a need to increase capacity within the Business Unit's own resources to ensure the new approach to performance management is embedded and driven forward. This exposes the strategic partnership across the county to some risks until the performance analyst is in post, and will require the ongoing commitment of resources from within the Council to ensure momentum is maintained.

Project Management and Business Planning

The configuration of the KSCB Business Unit was determined in line with the development of other LSCBs across the country in 2006 and is arguably now outdated. In order to become a credible and forceful scrutiny body in Kent, it is vital that the support structures have sufficient project management and business planning expertise. Work has now been completed to secure project management capacity within the Unit to address this deficit.

A financial review of the KSCB infrastructure is currently underway with a plan for the recommendations to be reported to the KSCB Executive by December 2011, for implementation in early 2012.

With new changes to Working Together expected by the end of 2011, the establishment of the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board and the need to provide scrutiny of the delivery of the Kent Improvement Plan it is imperative that KSCB has robust support structures in place.

Conclusion

There has been substantial activity to improve the safeguarding service, and improvements to safeguarding services have been noted across the partnership, although it is recognised that sustained action will continue to be needed to ensure that the improvement journey continues.

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19th October 2011