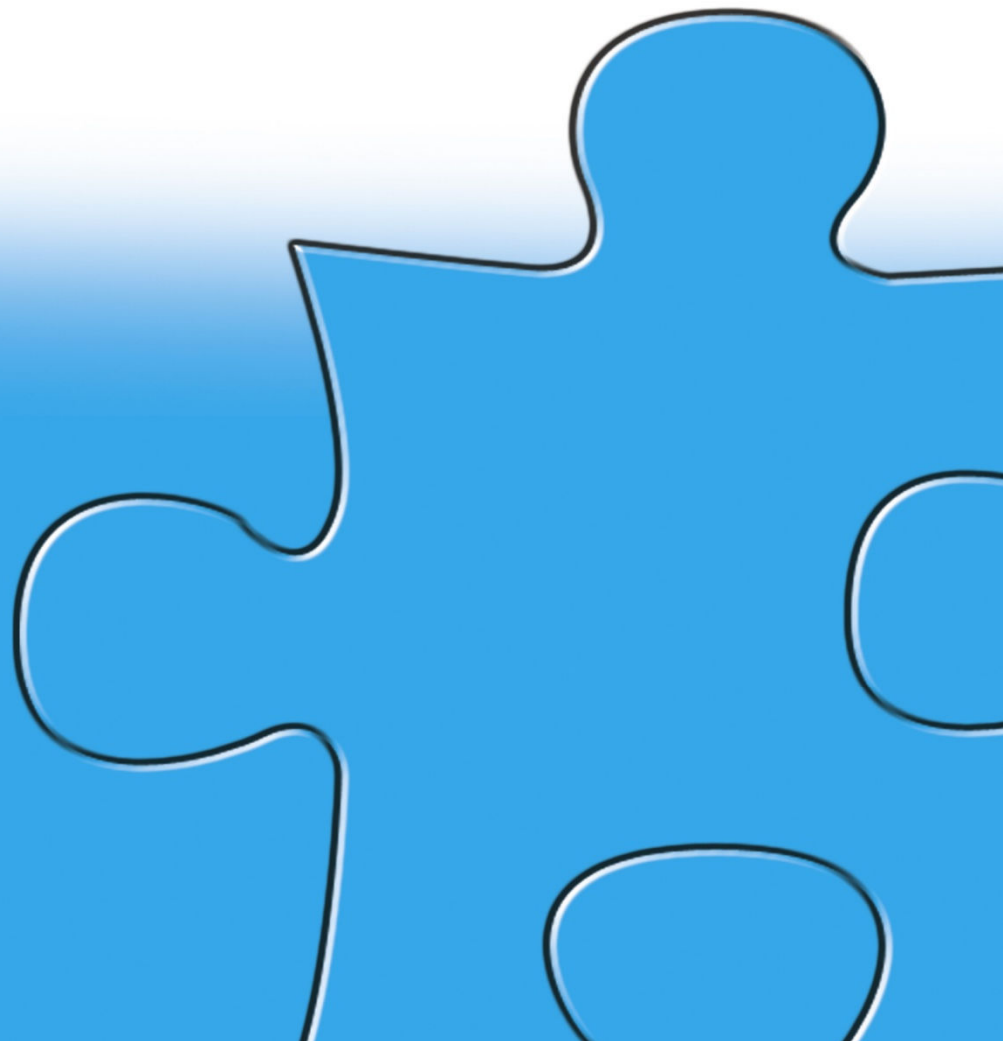




**Kent Safeguarding Children
Board**
Progress report (December 2011)



Introduction

An announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services took place in Kent between 11th and 22nd 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.

The most significant factor for the Kent Safeguarding Children Board was not identified by Ofsted in its inspection report, but subsequently identified by the Board partners who concluded that the Board had been ineffective in delivering its scrutiny function.

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 Ofsted inspections 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. Maggie Blyth, the new Independent Chair of the KSCB was appointed in April 2011, and 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

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 15th July 2011, the full Board of KSCB endorsed the independent review. It confirmed the membership of a streamlined Board, supported by a number of subgroups leading on key workstreams. 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 representative from the voluntary sector.

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 Board and are now held responsible for delivery of KSCB workplans and implementing the strategic priorities of KSCB:

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| • Serious Case Review Subgroup | Director of Kent Probation |
| • Learning and Development Subgroup | Chief Executive Connexions Kent |
| • Policy and Practice Subgroup | Superintendent Kent Police |
| • Quality and Effectiveness Subgroup
CHT | Managing Director, West Kent |
| • Health Safeguarding Group | Director of Nursing and Quality,
NHS Kent & Medway |
| • Education Safeguarding Group
Skills | Director of Education, Learning &
Skills |
| • Trafficking & Sexual Exploitations Subgroup | Superintendent Kent Police |

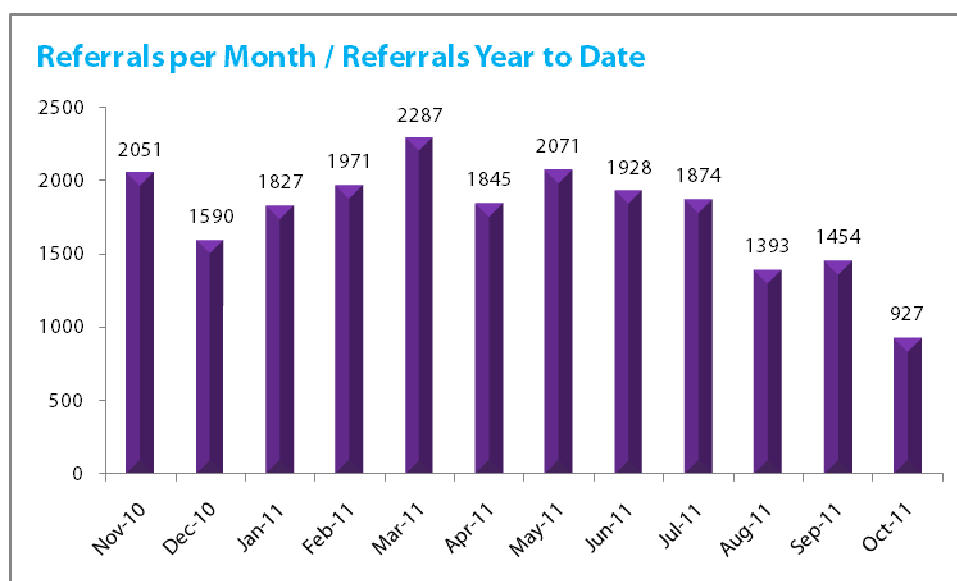
Revised eligibility criteria for universal, targeted and specialist services was agreed by KSCB in May 2011. The new guidance sets out clear thresholds and criteria for access to Specialist Children Services which ensure that children at risk of harm receive appropriate intervention to minimise risk 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 the delivery of 30 multi-agency, District workshops between May and July 2011 to over 1360 staff across the partnerships.

Thresholds/referral activity

In addition to the work undertaken by partners and KSCB, Specialist Children Services has undertaken work to develop more consistent referral decision making, putting in place a county practice programme for Duty and Initial Assessment Teams, as well as developing a Central Duty Service to ensure one central hub for processing all referrals into Specialist Children Services.

This concerted effort has led to progress during 2011 in respect of a steady reduction in the number of inappropriate referrals into Children's Social Services throughout the year since the improvement work took hold.



As well as moving forward in regards to referral thresholds, the provisional national statistical figures released on the 30th September 2011, shows Kent making encouraging progress in comparison to national and statistical neighbours and performing well in respect of assessment activity including:

- Timeliness of initial assessments
- Referrals progressing to assessment
- Number of initial assessments
- Number of core assessments

In order to analyse the effectiveness of the work undertaken to date and to establish whether thresholds are better understood and adhered to, KSCB has commissioned the support of an external consultant worked with the Board manager to deliver a multi-agency audit of referral decision making and thresholds. This audit was completed in December 2011 and the findings will be reported to the KSCB Executive in January 2012.

Thresholds were an issue examined during the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within children's services in Kent County Council conducted on 11th and 12th October 2011. KSCB is encouraged by Ofsted's findings which noted that thresholds for access to Specialist Children Services in Kent are now clear and that, "satisfactory action has been taken to ensure that partner agencies are familiar with these thresholds. This enables referrals to be appropriate and

clear and makes better use of early intervention through the common assessment framework”.

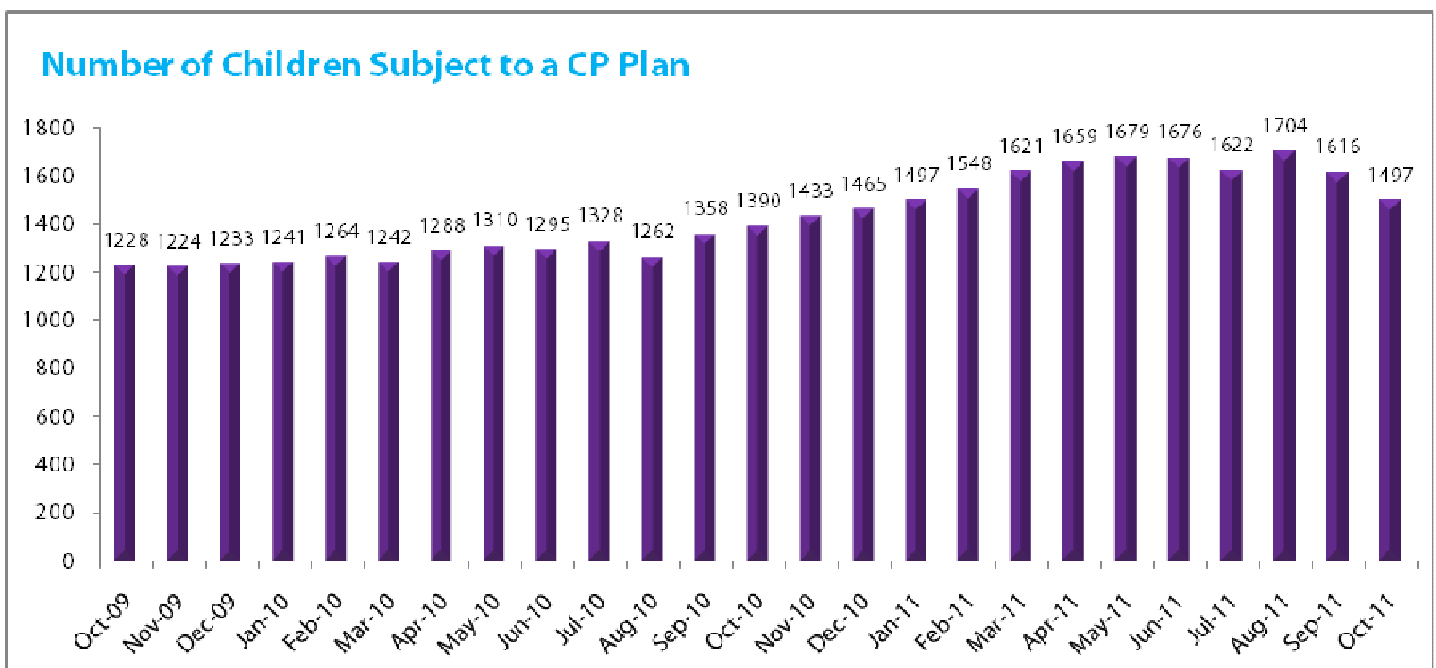
Review of the child protection process

The 2010 Ofsted inspection highlighted concern regarding the “*serious lack of concerted action by the partnership to address the disjointed arrangements between child protection services and other key services*”. In response to the findings, significant work has been undertaken (from within Specialist Children Services and the KSCB) to review and make improvements to the child protection process.

Work to date has included:

- Focus groups held with partners to review the child protection conference process.
- Child protection processes have been changed and procedures amended, including templates for reports, agendas, minutes and plans and increased focus on analysis and decision making. Core groups are now being held immediately after the conference so that families, children and professionals all leave the meeting clear about what happens next and what their role 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 Specialist Children Services to send copies of reports prior to conference.
- Training programme devised to support the amended processes as part of the multi-agency training programme.

Despite this positive work undertaken to improve multi-agency work across the partnership, Kent remains a considerable outlier in comparison to other Authorities in respect of its high number of children with a child protection plan, and particularly those children with a child protection plan lasting two years or more.



The number of children on child protection plans is very concerning and inconsistent with the volumes experienced by Kent's statistical neighbours or nationally. This reached its highest in August 2011 at over 1700, which suggests that the nature of partnership working in Kent is risk adverse and required robust action by independent conference chairs, all agencies and the KSCB. It is positive to note that a shared emphasis on this issue has resulted in progress over recent months with the numbers of children subject to a child protection plan reducing significantly to 1497 in October 2011.

This will be an area on which the KSCB will need to retain focus over the coming months in order to ensure progress, and will be subject to a further multi-agency audit in spring 2012.

Strengthening the Board's scrutiny function

KSCB has strengthened its approach to performance management by strengthening the Quality and Effectiveness subgroup (Q&E) and partners' engagement. It has developed a multi-agency performance framework, bringing together a cohesive and comprehensive system to ensure that performance management is well informed, actively utilised and as effective as possible in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and that performance monitoring is robust.

The Board has developed a shared dataset (with the support of an external consultant through C4EO), placing clearer demands on agencies for more effective performance analysis.

A selection of measures has been agreed to give KSCB an overview of safeguarding outcomes, service quality, thresholds, quality assurance and staffing, along with indicators giving contextual information about the area. Where appropriate, progress against key targets or Kent's benchmarked position with statistical neighbours and national comparators is considered.

Analysis is undertaken by the multi-agency Quality and Effectiveness subgroup of the KSCB, who interpret, seek further information and/or undertake drill-down where necessary to identify why any underperformance is happening, where it is concentrated and to suggest how improvements can be implemented. In line with the Munro Review, further work is being undertaken to ensure that the views of children, parents and professionals are fully embedded within the evidence base.

To maximise its usefulness, the information examined has to be accurate and timely, so each agency is responsible for making sure its data quality management arrangements are effective in validating the data and information contributions to the partnership.

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 that was undertaken by the C4EO consultant through the Improvement Board. A new audit programme has been developed, including audit tools, and work has been undertaken to train the auditors and members of the Quality and Effectiveness subgroup to ensure the multi-agency group is able to provide a robust scrutiny function. Further work planned includes an audit of child protection conferences 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, who will be in post on the 23rd January 2012, has been successful.

Areas of Risk

The Independent Chair of KSCB reported progress to the Improvement Board in August 2011 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 serious 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. It is also important that other agencies, namely health, education and criminal justice partners are able to support the Board and to effectively analyse their own safeguarding performance to the same standard that has been expected of Specialist Children Services.

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 for KSCB 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 has recently been undertaken, which has recommended that an Interim Programme Manager be appointed for three months. This appointment will look at the KSCB Business Unit function, structure, delivery (including a training review) and the funding arrangements.

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 establish a strong partnership framework for child protection in Kent to ensure overall scrutiny of performance during 2011/12. There has been a strong strategic commitment from all statutory partners to ensure that the new quality and effectiveness framework is implemented.

However, the continued commitment of partner agency to implement and drive forward the business plan including oversight of all KSCB workstreams is critical. The KSCB can only drive change and improvement where there is a shared commitment and collective responsibility amongst all its members. While responsibility for establishing and the effective working of the KSCB rests with KCC, a shared commitment to strong and effective leadership amongst the statutory partner organisations is essential or the KSCB ability to perform its scrutiny role will be undermined.

Penny Davies

Kent Safeguarding Children Board Manager 13th December 2011