

Minutes of the Children's Service Improvement Panel
Meeting Held: 11 April 2012 15:00 Cabinet Room

Present:

Mrs Whittle (Chair)
Mrs Allen
Mr Ferrin
Mr Lake
Mr Smith
Mrs Waters
Mr Wells

Officers:

Andrew Ireland
Jean Imray
Jennifer Maiden-Brooks
Fiona Maycock (Clerk)
Helen Jones
Liz Williams (Observer)

Apologies:

Mr Christie
Mr Cubitt
Mrs Dean
Miss Hohler

1. Previous Minutes

1.1 The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the last meeting.

1.2 With respect to the OfSTED Inspection of Adoption Services, Mr Ireland confirmed that further action will be taken by Kent to express concerns over the conduct of the Inspection. However Members agreed that the focus should remain on the improvements required to ensure children are adopted in a more timely manner.

1.3 The report on the Adoption Service from Coram will be presented at the next Corporate Parenting Panel. Mrs Whittle requested that it be included on the next agenda for this Panel.

1.4 Mr Wells asked whether there would be a follow up to suggestions about future information regarding recruitment of Social Workers. Mrs Whittle requested that a report come to the next meeting of this Panel (action: Karen Ray).

1.5 Concerns were raised about agency staff identified as not performing then being deployed in other areas. Karen Ray has begun discussions with KTT about standardising contracts for agency social workers; Mrs Whittle also has a meeting with KTT planned in mid-April. It was agreed that Mr Ireland would meet with the Director of Commercial Services to ensure the service received meets requirements.

2. Progress Report

2.1 Mr Ireland stated that the restructure proposals were received positively at the recent staff events. In addition, staff appeared to be engaged

in the process, however concerns are being shared that staff feel worn down by continuous restructures and want some measure of stability.

2.2 Changes in the OfSTED Inspection Framework were also discussed at the Staff Briefings; Members asked for more information to be brought to a future meeting of this Panel. Additional briefing sessions for staff to gain more information have been set up.

2.3 Ms Imray briefly outlined the changes including the move from a two day announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children to a 10 day unannounced inspection of safeguarding.

2.4 Explanations for the very small number of cases unallocated for more than 28 days include staff absence and prioritisation of incoming work. Members received assurance that CP and LAC cases are allocated as a priority. It was suggested that this good news story be included in the text of future progress reports.

2.5 The number of referrals coming into social care may continue to fall as a result of the full implementation of the Central Referral Unit. Members felt it would be beneficial to have more information relating to the nature of the referrals and the outcomes of the contacts received which do not become referrals. It would also be important to know the impact the reduction of referrals is having on the preventative services. It is anticipated that when services currently under commissioning within the Early Intervention and Prevention tier are in place, an impact will be seen in many areas being monitored.

2.6 There is a pattern in the age profile of the looked after children population; the majority of children are aged below 5 or in their teens. Members requested additional information about the number of children and young people going in and out of the care system.

2.7 Mr Ireland commented on the sustained reduction in child protection cases and indicated that this is being monitored to ensure that the figure does not drop too low.

2.8 The Member Induction scheme was discussed, as recently it has included Corporate Parenting training. Members requested that all new Members be required to enrol on the 'Shadow a Social Worker' scheme in the first two years following their election as a part of their induction process. The self-assessment tool is also being developed for staff, and will also include a section on Member involvement.

2.9 Andrew Ireland confirmed that the new Director of Specialist Children's Services, Mairead MacNeil will start on 9 July 2012.

3. Early Intervention and Prevention Commissioning Report

3.1 Due to potential conflicts of interest, Mr Lake left the room for the duration of Item 3.

3.2 Helen Jones outlined the background for requiring universal commissioned services. Whilst anecdotally many services are reported to have made a positive contribution to their local areas, the distribution of these services has been piecemeal and inconsistent.

3.3 The Multiple Supplier Framework Agreement approach was reported to reduce the risk of the market collapsing during the transition between services. Grants have been extended for some services to ensure there is no gap in the provision of services.

3.5 The Procurement Plan shows the ways the services will be managed and scrutinised on their performance.

3.6 In the case that unsuccessful providers contact local Members about their unsuccessful bids, Members should contact Helen Jones for more information.

4. Restructure Report

4.1 Work on the restructure started informally in November with the Staff Briefings including comprehensive focus groups to determine how staff wanted the new structure to look. These views informed the development of the new structure.

4.2 Ms Imray explained how the new structure relates to and differs from the current structure; the Head of Early Years post has been deleted, with staff being split between the Education, Learning and Skills directorate and the Commissioning unit in Families and Social Care.

4.3 The combination of Tier 2 and 3 services is expected to integrate provision and ensure smooth pathways between Social Care and the Preventative Services.

4.4 One level of management has been deleted in the new structure, the Principal Social Workers (PSW) level. This will add rigour to the process of managing risk which is carried out through supervision, since supervision and performance management responsibilities are currently split between the Team Leaders and PSW positions. In response to concerns expressed regarding the future of current PSWs, Ms Imray gave these individuals the opportunity to apply for both promotion to Team Manager positions and for Senior Practitioner posts. The latter have proven hard to fill to date.

4.5 The number of workers in each team has been standardised to six to ensure consistent and robust management grip of all of the cases held by the

team. The number of cases in the district will determine the number of teams required; some districts will find they only need part of a team whereas others will need multiple teams to meet demand.

4.6 The new structure is designed to ensure that the right people are in the right job, to increase accountability and to increase consistency across the county.

4.7 There are a number of current Preventative Services Managers who may be restricted in their future roles given they do not have a social work qualification.

4.8 Ms Imray indicated that the restructure proposals are based on current caseloads and have been costed within the current resource budget. However, with many of the interventions expected to reduce the overall volume of work not having yet taken effect, there is a possibility that in future the level of establishment could be reduced.

4.9 Ms Imray reported having spoken to Mairead MacNeil about the restructure and she fully supports the proposals.

4.10 Mr Smith emphasised the importance of keeping the child as the focus through the changes.

4.11 Diagrams which show a greater level of detail regarding the restructure, including the placement of social work assistants, are available in each district. The pod system, which is currently in place in some DIAT teams, is not included in the restructure as it is a team decision around the allocation of work.

4.12 Mr Ferrin asked whether staff had lost sight of the vision relevant to Children's Social Care. Outcomes that the service wish to achieve are laid out in a number of places, including the Improvement Plan and Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy. A vision statement is to be drafted for discussion at a future Panel meeting.

4.13 Ms Imray stated that the work completed in November around Bold Steps should be revisited and included in the vision statement work.

5. Data Report

5.1 This item was not discussed.

6. Any Other Business

6.1 Nothing to discuss.

7. For Information Reports

7.1 Concerns were raised about the decline in Health's performance regarding waiting times for looked after children to CAMHS services. Mrs Whittle indicated that the DfE are aware of this, and will be scrutinising all performance data at the Improvement Board meetings.

Dates of future meetings

Agenda Setting*	Time	Meeting	Time	Venue
12 April	4 pm	26 April 2011	12.30	Waterton Lee
3 May	11 am	17 May	4 pm	Swale 3
7 June	4 pm	22 June	9 am	Medway
6 July	3.30 pm	13 July	3 pm	Swale 3
27 July	10 am	25 August	11 am	Swale 3
31 August	2 pm	20 September	2 pm	Medway
12 October	10.30am	24 October	2.30 pm	Cabinet Room
15 November	11am	7 December	3pm	Cabinet Room
4 January 2012	3pm	17 January 2012	2pm	Cabinet Room
14 February	10am	7 March	3pm	3 rd Floor, Brenchley House
21 March	10am	11 April	3pm	Cabinet Room
29 May	10am	7 June	9.30 am	Cabinet Room
23 July	11.30am	2 August	9.30 am	Swale 1
24 September	4.30pm	3 October	2pm	Cabinet Room
20 November	12.30	29 November	9.30 am	Cabinet Room
22 January 2013	10am	31 January 2013	9.30 am	Cabinet Room