

By: Marilyn Hodges, Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance
To: CFE Policy Overview Committee – 28 September 2007
Subject: Joint Area Review of Children's Services
Classification: Unrestricted

Introduction

1. Kent is soon to be subject to a Joint Area Review (JAR) of Children's Services, with inspection fieldwork taking place in early 2008. The JAR aims to assess how effectively KCC and partners work together to improve outcomes for Children and Young People, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups. The outcome of the JAR is critical to Kent's CPA outcome, with a score of 3 or better required to maintain the excellent rating. This report provides information about this process, preparations being made and links to other inspections taking place at the same time.

Background

2. (1) All authorities are subject to inspection of children's services, usually every 4 years, although Kent has not had a full inspection since 2000 when Education and Social Services were subject to separate inspection processes. Since then the Inspection model has been subject to frequent changes, first of all combining these two separate processes and then various modifications which culminated in a new rationalised methodology applied to all authorities from April 2007. Post 2008 a completely different approach is to be introduced across all services (the Corporate Area Assessment) which is meant to further reduce the bureaucratic burden on Local Government.

(2) During this period a related process called the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) of Children's Services was introduced in 2005. Kent County Council scored well in the first two years scoring 3s (good) for service delivery and 4s (excellent) for capacity to improve. The result of the 2007 process will be published in November.

The New APA / JAR Methodology

3. (1) These two process are closely related with the **APA** acting as a risk assessment which is used to help target inspection fieldwork during the JAR. The APA process involves the:

- submission of a self-evaluation, which this year required a review of progress against the Children and Young Peoples Plan. The self evaluation has to include a clear statement of what is being done to improve outcomes for Children and Young People, why it is being done and what impact it is having.
- This is then moderated and challenged by the Inspectorates making use of intelligence held by regional and national government and the grade criteria and key judgements in the Inspection framework.

- The 2007 self-evaluation was submitted in the middle of June and there will be a follow up visit by Inspectors on October 4. We will then receive a letter containing the scores which is published in Mid November. This letter will also indicate areas that should be further investigated during the JAR fieldwork. The scores only apply to KCC, although partners are involved in producing the self-evaluation.

(2) The **JAR** methodology has been rationalised and it now focuses on specific service areas rather than all of Children's Services. It also makes judgements about performance across the partnership. Key features are:

- Five core areas are investigated in all inspections (Safeguarding, Looked After Children, Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities, Service Management and Capacity to Improve). These are all scored.
- Other areas are subject to investigation depending on the APA result and national influences. These are judged but not scored.
- We will know these for Kent after the set up meeting in November.
- An inspection of Youth Services is carried out at the same time and the Youth Offending Service is inspected two weeks beforehand. These impact on the JAR.
- Case tracking based on a sample of 10 cases taken from a list of 100 is a key part of the approach.
- Fieldwork includes visits and interviews with Cabinet Members, key staff, stakeholders and service users.
- There is an extensive dataset which is also used to inform both the JAR and APA and a small-scale pupil survey.

Experience of Recent JARs

4. Feedback has been obtained from a number of authorities that have been subject to the new model of JAR, key issues to note are:

- All LAs had only 2 or 3 discretionary areas identified in addition to the core areas identified above
- there are clear patterns emerging, with 14 – 19 and health issues (including CAMHS , Sexual Health and inequalities) figuring prominently
- these are not necessarily only identified based on perceived poor performance but also reflect national flavours, local context and perceived good practice
- while overall the new model is less onerous than previous methods the focus on Safeguarding, LAC and to an extent LDD is intensive and suggests a particularly challenging approach by former CSCI inspectors. This is reflected in close scrutiny of Social Services duty teams
- published reports are just starting to emerge and reveal APA grades are often reduced by the JAR assessment, with one Authority (Herts) in particular being graded inadequate on safeguarding and LAC, others have had difficult discussions with OfSTED
- inconsistency in approach between and within inspection teams and moderation can be an issue

- the workload burden of JAR is still considerable and adequate project management capacity, including key leads for each area of investigation are key.

Timeline

5. A projected timeline for the overall inspection process is attached at Appendix A. Kent's specific briefing pack will be received on the 25 September, until then some of the key dates are estimates based on experience elsewhere.

Preparations Underway

6. A number of activities are underway to prepare Kent for the JAR, these include:
- The submission of a review of progress against the CYPP for the APA process
 - Identification of the 100 cases required for case tracking
 - Continuing action to improve performance in specific areas
 - Briefing of those likely to be involved within and outside of KCC
 - Analysis of recent inspection experience and published reports
 - Analysis of the draft APA/JAR data set just received to identify key issues
 - Establishment of capacity to project manage the JAR process

Links to the Corporate Inspection

7. Detailed planning for this is gathering pace and links are established with the corporate team. Preparations need to be closely linked particularly in respect of service management and the involvement of partners.

Recommendations

8. Members are asked to note this report and to agree to receive further updates at future meetings.

Chris Carter
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Background Documents:

None

JAR – milestones

Week of:	What:
3 September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting People Inspection
10 September	
17 September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 19th CFE Managers briefing Updated APA Dataset Tell Us 2 survey results
24 September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive JAR Briefing Pack CPA Audit Commission Briefing Pack 28th – Report to POC
1 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4th – APA Inspectors meetings JAR - Multi-agency briefings
8 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9th – YOS set-up meeting JAR - Multi-agency briefings
15 October	Deadline (estimated) for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100 case files required documentation 15 th – CPA likely date to submit KCC Stakeholder list
22 October	
29 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft APA letter received – opportunity to respond
5 November	JAR Set-up meeting (estimated – may be later) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6th GOSE Priorities meeting
12 November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15th - publication of APA results
19 November	
26 November	
3 December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2nd – CPA self-assessment submitted to Audit Commission Option for CPA “practice tour” with Audit Commission
10 December	
17 December	
24 December	
31 December	
7 January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPA Inspection Team’s initial tour week
14 January	JAR Analysis Week (estimated – likely week earlier with CPA) YOS Inspection
21 January	
28 January	1st JAR/CPA Fieldwork Week Enhanced Youth Service Inspection YOS Inspection findings feeds into JAR
4 February	2nd JAR/CPA Fieldwork Week Enhanced Youth Service Inspection
11 February	
18 February	
25 February	
Early March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft report received from Ofsted (Estimated). 10 working days to make written comments Draft report discussion with Ofsted
Late April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre publication report received (CPA only?) (Estimated). 10 working days

	review period
Early May	Final date to request a review of the Joint Area Review report
Mid-May	CPA and JAR reports published on websites
End June	Within 30 working days the authority is required to send copies to partners, media and others as specified.
September	Within 70 working days of receiving report, the local authority is required to, when consulting its partners, make a written statement of proposed action, or action plan and make it available to all those in receipt of report and specified inspectorates.