

By: Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services
Andrew Ireland, Corporate Director of Families and Social Care

To: Cabinet – 9 July 2012

Subject: Children's Services Improvement Plan – Progress Update

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

This report provides Cabinet with an update on progress with the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

Members are also asked to **NOTE** the very significant progress that has been made since the last report

1. Introduction

This is the fourth regular report to Cabinet on progress made in implementing the Improvement Plan, and improving practice and performance in services provided to children and care leavers in Kent. The last report was in December 2011 and outlined progress to that date. This report lays out the progress made over the past six months.

2. Key Developments

A. Performance

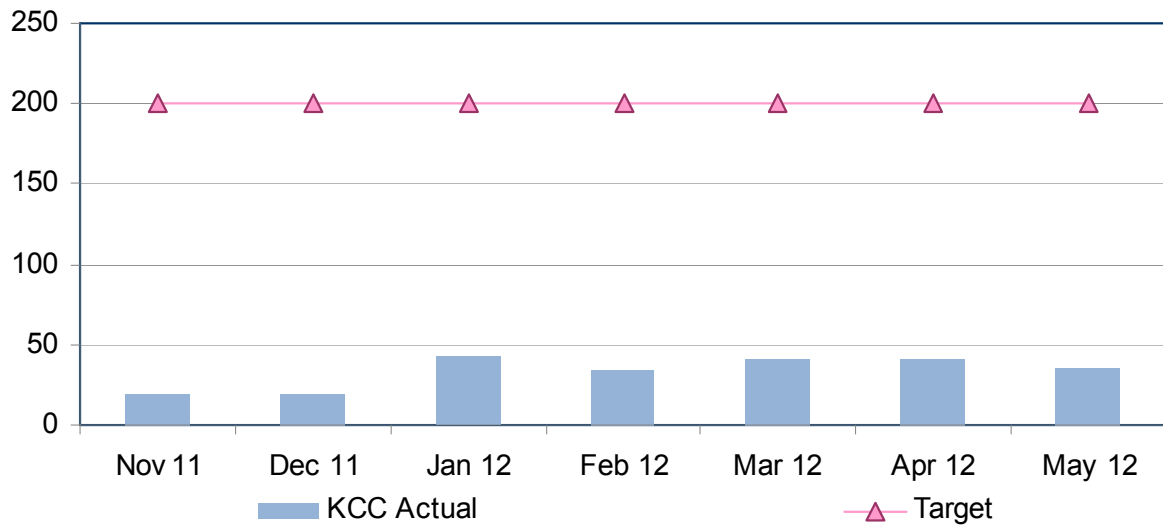
We have continued to sustain good progress across the key areas following the achievement of the November 2010 Improvement Notice targets

Initial Assessments

The targets for Initial Assessments carried out within 7 days of referral, and for Initial Assessments in progress outside of timescale, continue to be exceeded. This being the case, the emphasis in performance management terms has shifted from timeliness to the quality of casework. Managers are being encouraged to resist signing off poor quality assessments, even if this means that timescale completion dates may be missed as a consequence.

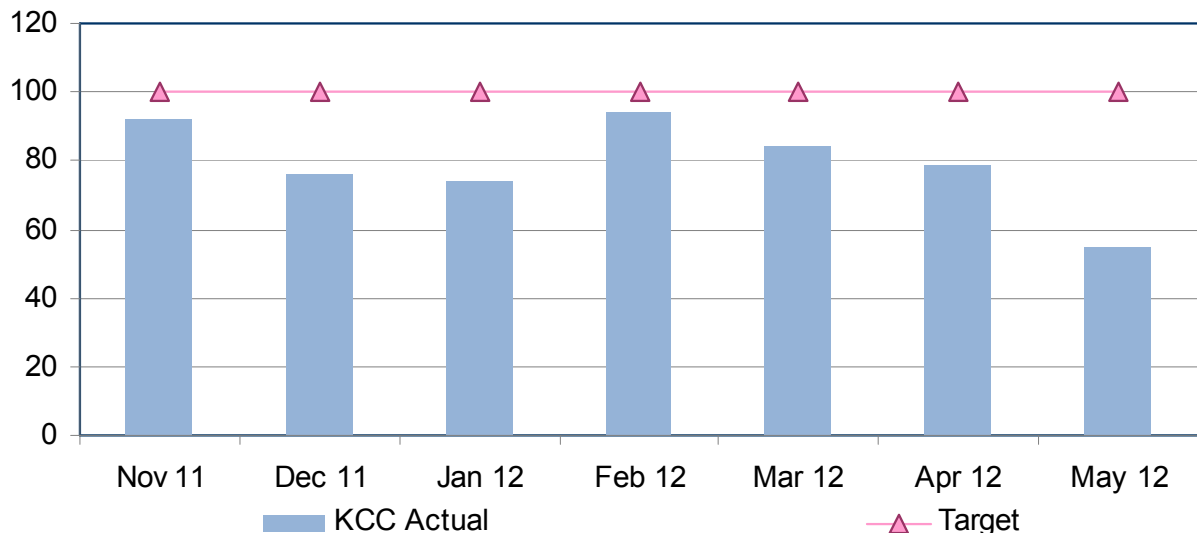
The graph below provides an indication of the number of Initial Assessments in progress but outside timescales over the last six months, against the revised target of 100 (previous target was 200, as set in the Improvement Notice). This shows that we are well within the target measure (processing 36 IAs outside of

timescale in May). Performance is also measured in terms of Initial Assessments completed within timescales. In May, 84.4% of Initials were carried out within timescales - well within the new stretched target measure of 78.8%.



Core Assessments

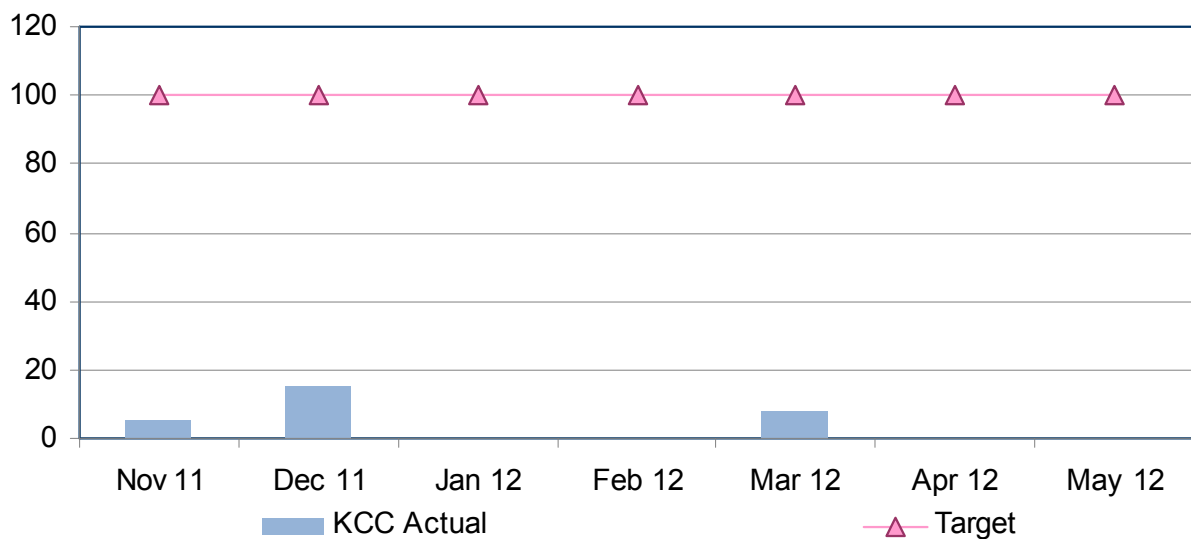
Although the targets for Initial Assessments carried out within 7 days of referral (and Initial Assessments in progress outside of timescale) have been met, similar measures for Core Assessments have proved more challenging. Nonetheless, the Improvement Notice Target of 100 Core Assessments in progress outside of timescales (again, revised from the 2011/12 target of 200) has been met, and the graph below shows performance over the last six months. The May 2012 figure was 55.



As with Initial Assessments, performance is also measured in terms of Core Assessments completed within timescales. In May 2012, 81.7% of Core Assessments for the year to date are shown to have been completed within timescales. However, it should be noted that rolling 12 month performance will continue to be impacted upon by the significant 'backlog' of Core Assessments during the first few months of the 2011 reporting year.

Unallocated Cases – Child in Need Cases not allocated to a qualified Social Worker for over 28 Days

The Improvement Plan Phase 1 target was to reduce the number of unallocated cases to 200 by August 2011; in Phase 2, this target was further reduced to 100, with a date for achievement of April 2012. The initial target was achieved by May 2011, and both targets have been consistently maintained since this time. The 2012/13 target is to ensure that 0 cases remain unallocated over 28 days – a target which has been maintained over April and May 2012. The numbers below refer to unallocated ‘children in need’ cases and, in the main, they have become unallocated due to transition arrangements i.e. between teams. Immediate action is consistently taken to address any cases that are reported as having been unallocated over 28 days, with the majority being subsequently allocated or closed as appropriate. It is to be noted that there have been no unallocated cases of any duration where children are subject to a child protection plan or where they are Looked After.



Further key performance achievements:

- The number of referrals accepted into social care continues to reduce. We are currently performing above the target figure of 543.7 per 10,000 (at 503.6). This shows an overall consistently positive trend and has been achieved by a more effective and consistent application of thresholds by the Central Duty Team which was introduced in May 2011.
- There have been significant reductions in the numbers of children subject to a protection plan. W/e 10.06.12 there were 811 children subject to a plan; this shows a continued reduction in numbers as was expected following the considerable work undertaken on dual plans and the reviews of longstanding cases. Since August 2011 (when the first inspection took place), Child Protection cases have reduced by 892 and is now sitting at a level more in keeping with statistical neighbours
- There have been sustained reductions in caseload levels. The county average caseload per caseholder is currently 19.9 (w/e 17/06/12), and continues to be below the 20 per caseholder target level.

- A review of Child in Need cases has been undertaken, and Child in Need numbers have fallen.
- Members are now provided with a monthly Performance Scorecard which highlights the qualitative outcomes of the Improvements (for example, the number of assessments produced over the period and the type and volume of casework). The scorecard does not only provide high level data, but also includes a detailed breakdown of targets measured at a local level (for example, placement stability and the number of children subject to Protection Plans, etc on a District-by-District basis). This information allows Members to effectively scrutinise performance, and to gauge progress holistically and in specificity across the service.

B. Practice

County Duty Team (CDT) and Central Referral Unit (CRU)

A key plank of the Phase One Plan was to “Fix the front-door” and we have now achieved this, through the introduction of the County Duty System. Building on this achievement, the CRU (multi-agency team managing the referral processes for public protection) became operational on 23 January 2012, with the Police and Health joining Specialist Children’s Services (CDT) and Adult Social Services. Qualitative & quantitative data shows it has improved the consistency of threshold applications between agencies, reduced duplication, promoted more effective information sharing and increased defensible decision making around thresholds. For instance, there has been a 76% reduction in Domestic Abuse Notifications from the Police since the CDT was launched.¹

Service Restructure

A major strand of the service restructure was the development of the dedicated Looked After Children Teams. While the creation of these teams in the districts predated the main thrust of the restructure, they will be further strengthened in the coming weeks and months by the creation of the Integrated Children’s Service Managers posts that will replace the current more generic District Manager role. The service manager posts will assume responsibility for the Looked After Children Teams and the fostering teams that provide support for local foster carers, effectively integrating them under one unifying management structure. The new workforce establishment has been predicated on a maximum allocation of 15 Looked after Children per qualified social worker, but actual numbers being determined by the complexity of cases, volume of care proceedings etc. This represents a significant reduction in caseloads for staff in these teams but is necessary in order to achieve the quality of work with children in care to which we aspire.

Fortnightly multi-disciplinary placement panels are being set up which will be chaired by the new Area Assistant Directors (ADs). These panels will monitor and track the use of high cost placements, ensuring that they are delivering value for money, meeting the needs of individual children and that move on plans or plans

¹ Weekly average over the period, comparing April-October 2011 data (pre-implementation of CDT) and October 2011-February 2012 data (post-implementation).

to achieve permanence are in place and being actioned as appropriate. These panels will also be the vehicle by which adoption tracking is kept under constant review. The panels and the seniority of the chairing arrangements will help to demonstrate the priority that is being given to our children and young people in care and will give the ADs the opportunity to model the grip and oversight which combined with attention to detail is what is required to achieve an outstanding looked after children's service.

Adoption

In 2011 Kent County Council commissioned Marin Narey (Ministerial Advisor on Adoption) to undertake a review of the local authority's adoption service. This occurred before an adoption inspection by Ofsted in October 2011. The conclusion from both of these evaluations was that adoption services in Kent were inadequate and needed a major overhaul in order to improve the delivery of the service and to ensure that children needing to be adopted were achieving permanence more speedily. In response, KCC have commissioned Coram to deliver the management of adoption services for the local authority.

Coram has been reviewing the child's journey to adoption. 93 children with adoption plans who had Placement Orders granted up to 31st December last were considered. In phase one of the review, the 38 under 2s in the cohort were considered. The second phase work is to review the progress of 55 children who are 3 and above has been completed. Permanency planning meetings have now taken place on 9 children in the younger range who need their plan for adoption to be reconsidered. This work is now continuing with the older group. Children who are placed for adoption but not yet adopted have also been considered, and tracking is in place for children matched or linked but not yet placed. Analysis of family finding for children waiting for an adoptive placement including reviewing profiles, and proactively contacting other adoption agencies including the voluntary sector is underway. The next phase of the work will be to consider children where a placement order was granted between January and March 2012.

Care Planning

In 2011/12 KCC's safeguarding unit undertook two audits in order to establish the quality of ICS care plans and permanency plans for looked after children. The key issues identified from these audits included poor and inconsistent recording, often not based on up-to-date assessments of the child's needs and where plans lacked clarity with regard to timescales and the tasks/actions needed to achieve the child/young person's plan. The audits also concluded that the child's independent reviewing officers (IROs) were not always demonstrating sufficiently their responsibility to oversee the cogency and achievability of care plans. Various actions have been put in place to improve the quality of care planning.

One of the approaches to strengthening care planning includes the roll-out of the Practice Improvement Programme (PIP). One of the key focuses of this Programme is on care planning, including writing care plans based on a (core) assessment that is purposeful, analytical and evidence based. So far, the PIP has been delivered to Shepway, Ashford, Folkestone, Dover, Canterbury and Maidstone. Dartford and Gravesend, Sevenoaks. Training on care planning is currently being commissioned with a view to delivery later in the year.

Virtual School Kent (VSK)

2011/12 has seen greatly improved multi-agency working, with the co-location of Looked after Children Specialist Nurses, as well as the co-location of Connexions Personal Advisers into VSK. VSK has also taken on the line management responsibility of the dedicated Educational Welfare Officers for looked after children from 1st April 2012.

The Virtual School is currently going through formal consultation for a restructure, which will increase service size and deployment flexibility as well as alignment with the new Families and Social Care structure. The VSK has also recently undergone informal inspection by Ofsted (7th and 8th June 2012). The findings from this inspection will be useful in identifying further ways in which VSK can deliver a more effective service for our looked after children and care leavers. Work is taking place to develop a separate governing body for the VSK. This includes the development of a TOR for the governing body, which is being developed with the support of the ELS directorate.

Our academic indicators show that we are currently on a trajectory to achieve a level of performance in relation to the National Indicators (NI) 99 (level 4+ English KS2) at 48% and PAF CF/C24 (25+ days absence) at 9.1%. This is in line with the stretched targets outlined in KCC's improvement notice from the Secretary of State. We remain slightly below achieving the required level of performance for NI100 (level 4 in Mathematics KS2); equivalent to 2 children. With respect to NI101 (5A*-C GCSEs including English and Mathematics KS4) we are on target to meet our internal target of 12.5%; an improvement of 2.1% from 2010/11 and 7.9% compared to 2009/10.

Further practice achievements:

- Numerous policies and procedures have been developed and reworked, including those around Child in Need, children subject to dual plans, thresholds, duty manual, pre-birth and assessment.
- The numbers of Looked After Children receiving health and dental checks has increased
- A new ICS system has been procured, and implementation planning is underway.
- The KSCB performance framework has been operationalised and performance workshops for partner agencies have been undertaken. The KSCB has also undertaken an audit of thresholds and has commenced an audit of CP planning.
- Practice standards for supervisors, practitioners and parents have been developed and distributed.
- A comprehensive programme of external supervision training for all managers has been procured following review and evaluation of practice in this area.
- The County Audit Programme has become fully operational and has been reviewed to ensure consistency and effectiveness of audit work.

- The Local Children's Trust Board has been reviewed. This review was conducted to ensure that local co-operative arrangements facilitate a greater degree of integrated working, with a focus on improving health, education and social care outcomes for children and young people. The review required active and effective leadership at the local level to drive partnership working that makes a difference at a time when resources are scarce, by influencing the allocation and use of local resources (e.g. pooled budgets and aligned resources) and local commissioning by schools, health, communities, social care.

2. Phase 3 Plan

The Phase 2 Improvement Plan is concluding at the end of July 2012. It will be superseded by the Phase 3 Improvement Plan, which continues to focus on quality and sustainability - building on the improvements achieved since the Programme began.

The aim of the Phase 3 Plan is to deliver a whole system approach to managing family pathways from early help to statutory intervention, and the themes for the next tranche of the Plan are as follows:

1. Realise our vision to ensure that all staff are dedicated to delivering the highest quality of practice which is responsive to service user need
2. Improve the quality of assessment and planning to ensure that decision making is timely and child-centred
3. Strengthen a range of preventative services to avoid unnecessary family breakdown
4. Improve care planning and outcomes for Looked after Children
5. Improve care planning and outcomes for children subject to Child Protection Plans
6. Implement an integrated structure with effective performance measures, ICT infrastructure and support

3. Financial Implications

£3.5m was allocated to support the improvement programme in the 2011/12 financial year, in addition to the costs of implementing the workforce strategy. £1m has been allocated to the programme in the 2012/13 financial year.

4. Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework

Improving Children's Services following the Ofsted Inspection in August 2010 has been identified as the Council's top priority.

5. Legal Implications

The Secretary of State has the power to issue a statutory intervention notice if he or

she deems this is required to secure the necessary improvements within a failing service.

6. Equality Impact Assessments

There are no issues to report on this.

7. Risk and Business Continuity Management

A risk register has been established and maintained, and is reported regularly to the external Improvement Board.

Key strategic risks we need to mitigate are:

- Numbers of Looked After Children may continue to increase with impacts on staffing resources and outcomes for children
- Recruiting and retaining experienced staff and managers
- That the capacity and skill set of the quality assurance and evaluation sub group is sufficient to meet the needs and demands of the KSCB
- Untoward safeguarding incidents

8. Consultation and Communication

The programme will continue to communicate with staff, managers, KCC Members, the Children's Service Improvement Panel, Children's Trust and the External Improvement Board on improvement achievements and challenges.

Conclusion

The Council has continued to progress over this period; good performance has been sustained we are attaining the majority of the targets set in Kent's Improvement Notice. Those areas which are proving challenging are being robustly addressed, with clear action plans in place to improve performance. With a clear sense of direction and continued close scrutiny and management oversight, we aim to continue to make significant improvements over the next year.

Recommendations

Members are asked to NOTE this report.

Contact officer:

Jennifer Maiden-Brooks, Programme Manager, Families & Social Care Improvement Team

✉ Jennifer.maiden-brooks@kent.gov.uk ☎ 01622 222744