

Minutes of the Children's Services Improvement Panel
Meeting held: 7 June 2012, 09:30, Cabinet Room

Present:

Mrs Whittle (Chair)
Mr Cubitt
Mrs Dean
Mr Ferrin
Mr Lake
Mrs Waters

Officers:

Andrew Ireland
Jennifer Maiden-Brooks
Yashi Shah
Sarah SKinner
Sam Carlton
Donna Marriott
Fiona Maycock (clerk)

Apologies:

Mr Christie
Jean Imray
Karen Ray

1. Previous Minutes

1.1 Mrs Whittle confirmed that the Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) will be carrying out an investigative piece of work around referrals into social care (item 2.5 in the previous minutes). A report will come to this board following discussion at the September meeting of KSCB.

1.2 Additional information about children going into and coming out of the care system should be presented at the next meeting (item 2.6 in the previous minutes).

1.3 Mrs Whittle confirmed that the Bold Steps Statement on Specialist Children's Services discussed at the last meeting is being developed. (item 4.12 in the previous minutes).

1.4 CAMHS waiting times are a growing concern when looking at the length of time between referral and treatment. Information about screening for urgent assessment is required at this board (item 7.1 in the previous minutes).

1.5 The minutes were agreed as an accurate reflection of the last meeting.

2. Adoption Inspection Progress Report & Presentation

2.1 A presentation was given with updated slides tabled.

2.2 Coram outlined that the first challenge is ensuring the data on adoption is accurate, as initially they were told that there were 93 children with a plan for adoption. However, investigations showed there were actually 110 at 31 December 2011.

2.3 Mr Ferrin asked why the number of potential children for adoption is low. Yashi Shah, Project Manager, Coram/Kent County Council replied that the number of adoptions nationally is reducing; this is due to a number of factors including the introduction of Special Guardianship Orders by government which

is more favourable for families, and the lower number of young children coming into care. In light of this, Kent seems to have a similar number of children planned for adoption as fits with the national picture. The expertise and focus brought about through the service restructure will foster an increased sense of purpose for the teams in getting children adopted speedily. Sarah Skinner, County Adoption Manager stated that the peak in the number of adoptions in 2003/2004 coincided with the Public Sector Agreement and Staying Together project which moved a lot of children through the system and it was essential that this sense of focus was again in place.

2.4 Concern was raised over capacity within the Courts to process cases in a timely and efficient manner. Mrs Whittle confirmed that a working party has been set up to address this. Huge strides have already been made in increasing the available time for such work, but this is an ongoing process with room for further improvement. The quality of the dialogue between the authority and the courts has improved, which is recognised in the expressed willingness for change.

2.5 Emperor, as the external marketing agency is developing a website as part of a wider marketing campaign to recruit adopters and foster carers. The campaign will be launched at the Kent County Show in July 2012. Members felt strongly about the importance of communication and customer service at the 'front door'.

2.6 Members requested some additional information about Special Guardianship Orders and where this fits into the process of Adoption.

3. KCC Progress Report

3.1 Mr Ireland gave confirmation that Mairead MacNeil has given input into the service restructure. She has also been involved in the shortlisting and interviews for the remaining two Assistant Area Director posts. The new structure will give more clarity around the role of the Team Manager, and the responsibilities and accountabilities of this role in relation to the team and supervision.

3.2 Mr Ireland reported that case file audits are being used as a quality check and are being scrutinised alongside performance data, to ensure that timeliness and quality are being examined in conjunction at the Deep Dives. The Practice Improvement Programme is delivering a further in-depth analysis of a variety of factors influencing the quality of casework, not just assessments.

3.3 Members requested that information should be given in context and future reports should reference past performance as a comparison to better understand changes over the period.

3.4 Mrs Whittle stated that part of the reason why agency staff have been employed in one District following their dismissal from another District was because termination of employment forms provided to KTT by District Managers did not contain sufficient information about the reasons for the termination of contracts. Work is now underway to embed two new forms – the Engagement

of Staff and Feedback Following Termination of Contract to remedy this problem.

3.5 The issue about recruitment and retention needs to be raised again at a future meeting. Members felt that, given the low conversion of qualified social worker appointments from high volumes of interest, there is a need for a more aggressive marketing approach to the recruitment of social workers.

3.6 It was emphasised that social work is a profession where there is no shortage of jobs available nationally. Members asked: what are the benefits of being a permanent member of staff compared to an agency worker. This is to be addressed in a future report as part of an effort to encourage more agency workers to apply for permanent posts.

3.7 In addition, Members felt the council should be looking to appoint newly qualified social workers from Canterbury Christ Church University and through “grow your own” routes such as the OU course. KCC’s reputation in this instance is crucial, as the newly qualified social workers want to be managed and supervised by experienced and competent managers.

3.8 Members requested detailed data about the demographics of social workers and trainees.

4. OfSTED Inspection Framework

4.1 Members were informed the Fostering Inspection will take place the week commencing 11 June 2012. They were also informed the informal Virtual School Kent (VSK) Inspection started today, with some focus groups having already taken place. The VSK Inspection is a pilot and will not be judged formally, but there will be a general report on the nine Virtual Schools that were visited as part of the pilot including Kent.

4.2 Members felt strongly that the culture of SCS needed to shift towards doing the right things all the time in the expectation of an inspection, and not to worry about when the inspection does take place as the work will have been done to demonstrate the expected outcomes. Currently, KCC is very dependent on where the Inspectors choose to go because there remains some variation in the approach to practice across the Districts – though this is being addressed. For example, the supervision training programme, Deep Dives, Practice Improvement Programme and other initiatives are putting in place the necessary steps to ensure consistency.

5. Data Reports

5.1 The data was covered comprehensively throughout item 3.

6. Any Other Business

6.1 Mr Ireland has asked the DfE whether two inspections will be needed for the Improvement Notice to be fulfilled, given the new framework for inspections.

6.2 There is also a question about KTT staff receive the appropriate level of training regarding their work in the council in advance of them starting with the authority. Mrs Dean also questioned whether the quality of KTT staff is inherently greater than that provided by other agencies, as the feeling is that staff who come through KTT do so because they have failed to meet the required quality standards enforced by other agencies.

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 Hse
19 March	3:30pm	11 April	3pm	Cabinet Room
29 May	10am	7 June	9.30am	Cabinet Room
11 July	2pm	2 August	9.30am	Swale 1
18 September	10.30am	3 October	2pm	Cabinet Room
15 November	10.30am	29 November	9.30am	Cabinet Room
17 January 2013	11am	31 January	9.30am	Cabinet Room