

Minutes of the Children's Services Improvement Panel
Meeting held: 2 August 2012, 09:30, Swale 1, Sessions House

Present:

Mrs Whittle (Chair)
Mr K Smith
Mr Christie
Mr Koowaree (for Trudy Dean)
Mrs Allen
Mr Wells
Mrs Waters

Officers:

Andrew Ireland
Mairead MacNeil
Jennifer Maiden-Brooks
Karen Ray
MIU Officer
Michelle Pennellier (clerk)

Apologies:

Mr Lake, Mr Ferrin, Mr Cubitt

1. Previous Minutes

1.1 The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the last meeting and agreed for distribution to Cabinet.

2. Phase 3 Improvement Plan

2.1 Mr Ireland presented this item and outlined how the report showed focus on qualitative performances, including recruitment of staff, improving quality and assessment of care planning, improving preventative services, improving outcomes for children in care and robust performance monitoring.

2.2 Mr Ireland confirmed that good progress has been made from the previous plan and that the DfE are happy with the direction. We now need to be more consistently delivering the required progress. The green ratings show where some districts are already starting to make that leap.

2.3 Mr Christie questioned whether we are currently in a 'pampered position' because of the extra budget allocation and how this will be sustainable moving forward. Mr Christie also questioned what service user feedback we currently had in place and at what level. Mr Ireland confirmed that part of the Improvement Plan is to make sure that progress is sustainable and to look at how the financial side of this is working. In terms of user feedback there are currently ongoing varying models for capturing information from cohorts of staff. It can be difficult with service user feedback as you are dealing with clients that don't necessarily want to be in the position of having our involvement. However, a feedback form is currently available and it is important that we look at the context of process and whether service users are happy with this and the time in which things have happened.

2.4 Mr Ireland indicated that we may possibly be inspected by Ofsted around the turn of the year. It is important that we have a constant sense of where we are on the improvement journey and measuring ourselves against where we want to be rather than against Ofsted criteria solely. We need to deal with the difference between the Ofsted judgement and our sense of improvements, for example, if you were to speak to social workers directly it is likely that they would still highlight issues with supervision, trackers,

performance management and quality. Mr Ireland spoke about a recent Deep Dive session completed with staff and that the focus is now far more on getting it right than getting it done quickly. Managers need to leave the Deep Dive sessions with this message to trickle down to their teams, although there is still rather a mixed picture among the districts. One or two districts are already where they need to be, others are not. Managers do have a very good grasp of the task ahead and all are on the right road, but consistency does need to be addressed and this is an immediate task that Mairead MacNeil (the new Director of Specialist Children's Services) will be focusing on. The average case loads in districts is now well below 20 which is a very good achievement.

2.5 Mrs Waters raised the lack of detail around adoption in the action plan. More enquiries are being received and more people are being interviewed but we are still not meeting the targets for the number of children adopted. Mrs Waters suggested that a 'Member Champion' is needed. Mrs Whittle advised Members that Harrow are currently placing adopted children within 4 months and that we need to aim for a similar target. Mrs Whittle has already spoken to Coram regarding writing to Members in September to ask them to act as 'pushy' corporate parents and to take an interest in specific cases of individual children and push for them to be progressed. We need to be utilising our resource of 84 Members. Mrs Allen suggested that this is something which could be incorporated into the corporate parent training.

2.6 Mr Smith suggested that the word 'theme' should be changed to 'priorities' and that adoption needed to be included as a priority. Mr Smith commented that there were 23 outcomes but that none of them had any degree of SMARTness and that of 88 targets and measures only 12-15% have any reference to SMART. Mr Smith felt that for an action plan this was more of a wish list document for managers and that we were forgetting about the children and families this is for. The document is not worded on a Social Worker level. Mr Andrew responded by stating that this is a document that has to satisfy many audiences. There are district level plans that fill the gap for targets on a ground level and it was suggested that an example of a district plan could be brought to a future meeting for Members information.

2.7 There are plans to push the Shadow a Social Worker Scheme again in September and look at the opportunity to include this in the Member induction process for June/July 2013.

3. Fostering and Adoption Marketing Campaign Presentation

Mrs Whittle confirmed that the Kent Fostering and Adoption websites were successfully launched at the County Show on 13 July.

A draft report had been received from Ofsted following the Fostering Inspection and the final judgement will be due in 20 days. Ofsted have made some encouraging comments ahead of the final judgement.

3.1 Mrs Waters questioned why we do not have feedback from adopters and carers. There could be the opportunity to provide the CSIP

meetings with a snapshot of child cases and what the outcomes have been for them.

3.2 Mr Christie asked where we are with recruitment targets. Mrs Whittle agreed to come back on the actual figures to date.

3.3 Mr Ireland commented that the campaign to get more adopters through panels and approved more speedily is a critical aspect of bringing the flow of adopters in line with the needs of children so that the matching process could be more effectively delivered. Different tactics are needed for fostering and adoption and recognition that some are now looking upon fostering as a profession. We have upped the ante on recruiting a wider range of adopters and targeting the BME market.

3.4 Mrs Whittle confirmed that we are currently looking to fast track applications of people wishing to adopt siblings, older children (those over 2 years) where the need is greatest and second time adopters

4. Recruitment Campaign Report

4.1 Karen Ray distributed and presented a paper intended to update the board on progress with recruitment of Social Workers.

4.2 Karen Ray highlighted the need to look at the difference between the number of applications and the number of applicants meeting the shortlisting requirements and the actions needed to address the large gap between the two.

4.3 Six appointments of existing social work students have been made.

4.4 Mrs Whittle spoke about the need to reduce our dependency on agency workers. Vacancy rates for permanently qualified staff, which are filled by agency staff, are still high, although it is difficult to calculate the vacancy rate for management posts as the restructure is still under way. Karen Ray confirmed that we are talking to agency workers about the specific benefits of becoming substantive members of staff.

4.5 Considerable problems have been identified with the recruitment micro-site, including no clear list of benefits of working for Kent. A Google search for Social Work jobs in Kent also brings up a number of other sites before Kent and therefore our search ranking needs to be addressed. Our main website indicated that applications closed on 1 August 2012 which is incredibly misleading as we should be operating a rolling programme of recruitment to Social Work posts. Information about Principal Social Workers also needs to be revised as these positions no longer exist under the new structure. Mrs Whittle instructed that this be resolved with immediate effect.

4.6 Karen Ray spoke about the work being undertaken to develop a new Recruitment Strategy with an Action Plan. This is still at draft stage at the moment but it includes strong links with the Communication team. Karen offered to bring this document, coupled with analysis of staff retention to a future meeting for Members attention.

4.7 Mr Smith highlighted the fact that 100 permanent social workers were still required. Karen Ray confirmed that the action plan was in place to monitor how we achieve this.

4.8 Mrs Allen asked where we are with recruitment of overseas workers compared with around two years ago and whether this is looked at as part of the retention analysis. Mr Ireland commented that language and cultural differences of workers from overseas is an issue and many of them do return home in time and this may actually be a current contributory factor in our vacancy rates.

4.9 Mr Christie asked how we compare with our statistical neighbours in terms of recruiting experienced social workers. Are wages and the public sector pay freeze a problem? Karen Ray confirmed that this is part of the research conducted around pay and reward and that Essex currently have a vacancy rate of around 20%. Recruitment in two of our districts has gone down – Sevenoaks and Gravesend and therefore information is needed for the micro-site on what is good about working in specific districts so that our marketing can be more targeted. Word of mouth messages could also be used.

4.10 Mr Wells questioned whether we are now at the stage where we recognise we are not necessarily going to get to where we want to, and do we need a radical way of thinking or a plan b as to how we provide front-line services to children. Mr Ireland commented that this linked closely with our development of Early Intervention Services, where clearly a fully qualified social worker workforce is not required. Work is also underway to set up a specific Contact Service to free up the time and capacity of Social Work Assistants currently undertaking this work. Mr Wells suggested that we needed to be performing 'spot checks' to drive the service forward and that case studies for recruitment such as 'why I moved to Kent' and 'Why I love Kent' could be useful.

5. KCC Progress Report

5.1 Mr Ireland presented this report which was a copy of the one that went to the Kent Improvement Board on 30 July.

5.2 Mr Ireland commented on the inspection feedback which stated that the work of the Virtual School Kent was exceptional.

5.3 Mr Christie requested that updated structure charts for Children's Services following the start of restructuring would be helpful. Mr Ireland stated he would bring an update from that the Adoption sub-group of the Improvement Board, chaired by Jonathan Pearce (former Chief Executive of Adoption UK and new Chief Executive of the Cabrini Children's Society) to a future panel meeting.

6. Data Reports

6.1 An officer from the Management Information Unit attended the meeting to assist in answering any questions from Members in relation to the scorecard and data reports.

6.2 The Kent scorecard followed by the district reports were discussed by Members.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 Nothing to discuss.

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	3rd 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