

By: Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services  
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To: County Council – 25 October 2012

Subject: Peer Review of Children's Services

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: This report presents the initial findings of the recent Peer Review of Children's Services. The Peer Review was conducted under arrangements sponsored by the national Children's Improvement Board.

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## FOR INFORMATION

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### **Introduction**

1. (1) This paper informs Kent County Council Members of the outcome of the Peer Review of Children's Services. The review exercise took place between Monday 24 September 2012 and Friday 28 September 2012.

(2) The Peer Review process is endorsed by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and Local Government Association (LGA) and it forms part of the nationally established sector-led improvement programme by local authorities.

(3) Kent County Council invited the Peer Review Team to examine Children's services for two principal reasons, (a) to undertake an independent assessment of our progress to date and, (b) test our understanding of opportunities for growth/challenge; corroborate our knowledge, and highlight any further areas for consideration.

(4) The Peer Review identified a number of key strengths. The review findings noted that significant improvements have been made since Kent started the journey of improving the quality of services following the Ofsted Inspection of 2010. The review team also identified a number of areas which need additional development in going forward.

(5) The written report by the Peer Review Team was not available at the time of publishing council papers. However, the initial presentation material that was provided by the Review Team has been reproduced and is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. A copy of the written report will be made available to Members at the earliest opportunity.

### **The Peer Review Process**

2. (1) The process started with the completion of a self-evaluation questionnaire by KCC before the visit of the Review Team. The Review Team then had the opportunity to study information provided by the Kent including policy and performance information as well as the self-evaluation questionnaire.

(2) The Review Team spent five days in the Kent during the onsite phase of their review. The process begun with a meeting with senior managers, elected members, a cross-section of service managers, frontline staff and partner agencies. The process, in a nutshell, is as follows:

- Self-evaluation questionnaire
- Close scrutiny of casework
- Analysis of documents and data review
- Initial thoughts presentation
- Interviews and locality visits
- Feedback and prioritisation conference.

(3) The Peer Review Team consisted of the following members:

- Marion Davis – Independent Associate (Formerly Director of Children’s Services, Warwickshire County Council)
- Cath McEvoy – Safeguarding Operations Manager, North Tyneside Council
- Nicola Curley – Head of Safeguarding Locality and Family Support East, Hertfordshire County Council
- Councillor David Simmonds – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education & Children’s Services, LB of Hillingdon
- Nicki Walker-Hall – Independent Health Consultant
- Kevin Maidment – Independent Consultant (Formerly Superintendent, Wiltshire Constabulary)
- Kathryn Houghton – Independent Consultant
- Peter Rentell - Review Manager, Local Government Association
- Cassandra Harrison – Senior Adviser (Policy & Development), LGA Shadow

### **Conclusion**

3. (1) The Peer Review process is a key aspect of the sector –led improvement programme approved by the Children’s Improvement Board. KCC’s Children’s Services was subject to the peer challenge which was undertaken on the invitation of the Count Council.

(2) The authority has yet to receive the formal report by the Peer Review team. In the mean time, the presentation material produced by Review Team is presented as Appendix 1 to this covering report for Members. As stated above, the formal report will be made available to Members in due course.

### **Recommendation**

4. (1) The County Council note that contents of this report

### **Appendix**

Appendix 1: LGA Safeguarding Children Peer Review: Presentation of Findings

### **Contact details**

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Background documents: None

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## **LGA Safeguarding Children Peer Review: Kent County Council Findings**

### **1. Remit**

Kent asked the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review Team to:

- Undertake an independent assessment of our progress to date; and
- Test our understanding of opportunities for growth/challenge; corroborate our knowledge, and highlight any further areas for consideration

### **2. Summary**

A summary of their findings is that the Peer Review:

- Identified number key strengths; significant improvements made since started journey; and
- Identified number areas for in need of additional development as we move forwards

### **3. Peer Review Team members**

- **Marion Davis** – Independent Associate (Formerly DCS, Warwickshire County Council)
- **Cath McEvoy** – Safeguarding Operations Manager, North Tyneside Council
- **Nicola Curley** – Head of Safeguarding Locality and Family Support East, Hertfordshire County Council
- **Councillor David Simmonds** – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services, LB of Hillingdon
- **Nicki Walker-Hall** – Independent Health Consultant
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- **Peter Rentell** - Review Manager, Local Government Association
- **Cassandra Harrison** – Senior Adviser (Policy & Development), LGA Shadow

### **4. Process**

(1) The process the Peer Team used included:

- A self-evaluation questionnaire
- Close scrutiny of casework
- Analysis of documents and data review
- Initial thoughts presentation
- Interviews and locality visits
- Feedback and prioritisation conference

- (2) The themes the Peer Team reviewed included:
1. Effective practice, service delivery and the voice of the child
  2. Outcomes, impact and performance management
  3. Working together (including Health and Wellbeing Board)
  4. Capacity and managing resources
  5. Vision, strategy and leadership

## **5. Theme 1: Effective practice, service delivery and the voice of the child**

### (1) Strengths

- New structure bringing together Early Intervention and Safeguarding teams
- Caseloads are much more manageable and allocation of cases to qualified social workers is extremely high
- Improvements in the recording of work undertaken
- Some areas where children and young people's participation is very good
- Staff and other professionals report Kent is a 'safer place' to work
- Significant improvement in the number of Children in Care having health assessments
- The Virtual School is well regarded
- Quality assurance processes are good e.g. Practice Improvement Programme

### (2) Areas for Consideration

- Case recording
- Consistent quality of practice e.g. application of thresholds
- Central Referral Unit needs to be further developed to function fully effectively
- Data says too few children being seen during assessments
- Common Assessment Framework is not understood or applied consistently
- Serious Case Review actions and embedding of lessons learned
- Transitional arrangements for 16-19 year olds
- Development of Child Protection chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers
- Munro implementation

## **6. Theme 2: Outcomes, impact and performance management**

### (1) Strengths

- Robust collection and presentation of performance data
- Extensive evidence of audit activity
- Some evidence of outcomes-based specifications (commissioning)
- Demonstrable outcomes in early intervention in certain locations
- Good progress against targets in Phases 1 & 2
- Lead member provides effective challenge

### (2) Areas for Consideration

- Focus and pace to improve outcomes for children and young people
- Make more use of audit information
- Greater co-ordination of area priorities and targets
- KSCB to drive a consistent and coherent approach to achieving outcomes

- Need to ensure new Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services provision leads to improved outcomes for service users

## **7. Theme 3: Working together (including Health and Wellbeing Board)**

### (1) Strengths

- Frontline staff work well together across partner agencies
- Multi-agency training is positively regarded
- The Kent Safeguarding Children's Board (KSCB) is extremely well resourced
- The KSCB creates networking opportunities for partners
- Significant investment of Health time and resource
- Some good examples of schools' contribution to services for children

### (2) Areas for Consideration

- Efficiencies to be made in the KSCB support structures
- The KSCB needs to provide evidence of effective challenge, increase pace and impact
- The KSCB also needs to ensure that the views of children and young people influence all it does and that the focus is on improving outcomes for them
- Engagement with health and police is not consistent at all levels
- Interface and governance arrangements between statutory boards, including Health and Wellbeing Board, need establishing
- Quality and Effectiveness framework and Section 11 audits should be undertaken immediately by KSCB

## **8. Theme 4: Capacity and managing resources**

### (1) Strengths

- Significant investment in children's services – financial, staff and ICT
- Successful examples of securing external funding to increase range of services
- Developing a mixed economy of service provision
- Partner commitment of resources to Central Referral Unit
- Increased engagement of voluntary and community sector in commissioning process
- High morale and 'can-do' attitude of frontline staff

### (2) Areas for Consideration

- Central functions including HR, IT, Policy, Finance and Communications to be more proactive in providing effective support to safeguarding
- Recruitment and retention of key staff and succession planning
- A stronger awareness of costs and value for money to inform commissioning and de-commissioning
- Budget holders need to be accountable for financial forecasting
- Articulate a coherent joint commissioning strategy as a priority
- Ineffective consultation with stakeholders around commissioning arrangements
- Ensure new ICT system meets service user requirements and is implemented promptly

## 9. Theme 5: Vision, strategy and leadership

### (1) Strengths

- Lead member provides consistent, effective and visible leadership
- Visible leadership provided by Director and senior managers
- Increased confidence in management following recent re-structure
- Improvement of frontline management is a priority
- Strategic decision to devote substantial resources to the safeguarding agenda
- Growing recognition of just how much change and culture shift is required to realise aspirations
- Improvement Board has overseen good progress against the Improvement Notice

### (2) Areas for Consideration

- Need for a longer term vision of high quality children's services across Kent
- Systematic exploration and adaptation of best practice from the sector
- Culture of only telling members the good news is taking time to disperse
- Parts of the children's agenda are located across three directorates which need to ensure consistent delivery of the shared objectives
- Governance is unusually complex which creates risks and imposes barriers to efficient service delivery
- Is there too much activity driven by initiatives that is doing valuable work but outside of a coherent strategic plan?
- Low level of consensus and understanding of Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy with limited vision for potential of new ways of commissioning

## 10. Summary

### (1) Strengths:

- Managerial and political commitment
- Substantial recent progress
- Positive improvement in performance
- Improving partnership working
- Committed and passionate staff

### (2) Areas for Consideration:

- Outcome focus
- *Quality of practice and thresholds*
- Challenge from KSCB and governance
- Recruitment and succession planning
- Coherent approach to Early Intervention and Prevention

### (3) Key messages of the Peer Review

- Urgency
- Concentrate on the child's journey
- Vision for post-intervention
- Making quality systematic