

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

To: Cabinet Committee – 11 January 2013

Subject: Children's Services Improvement Programme: Progress Update

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

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

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

1. Introduction

This is the fifth regular report to Cabinet Committee on progress made in implementing the Improvement Plan, and on improving practice and performance in services provided to children and care leavers in Kent. The last report was in July 2012, and outlined progress to that date. This report sets out the progress made over the past four months.

Please note this report was produced prior to the completion of the Ofsted Inspection of safeguarding. The first draft of the Ofsted inspection report will be sent to KCC for a factual accuracy check on 17 December 2012. The pre-publication report will be sent to KCC on 2 January, and the final report will be published by Ofsted on 4 January 2013.

2. Key Developments

A. Performance

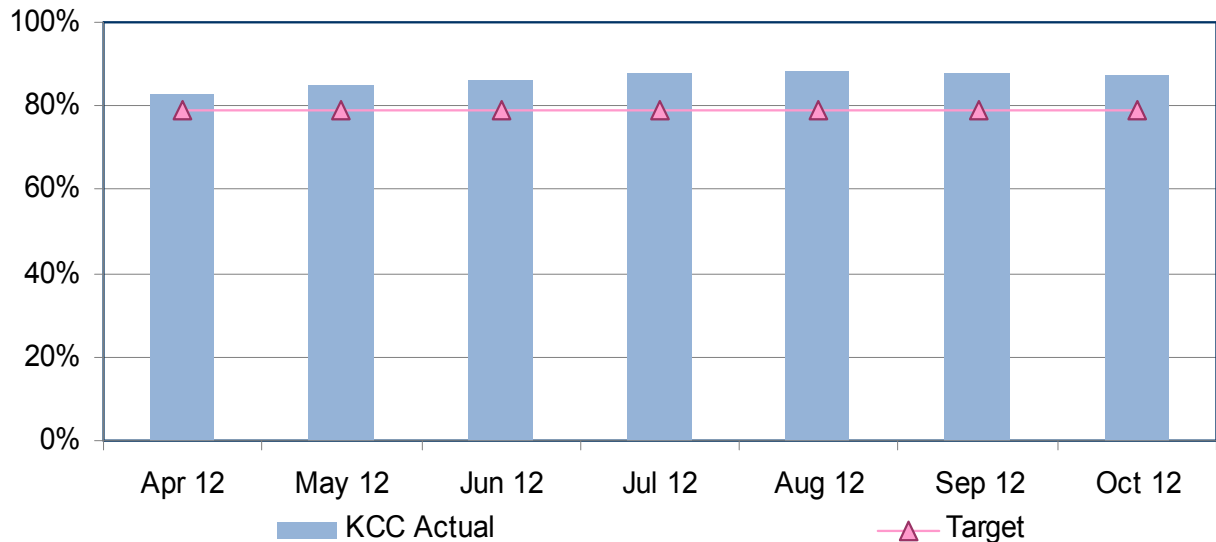
We have continued to sustain good progress across the key areas following the achievement of the August 2010 Improvement Notice targets.

Initial Assessments

The targets for Initial Assessments carried out within 7 days of referral, and targets for Initial Assessments in progress outside of timescale, continue to be exceeded – though there has been a month-on-month rise in the number of cases being progressed outside of timescale since June 2012. Performance over this period has been affected by the restructuring of the service - which has impacted on staffing levels, changed team dynamics and seen staff move to new roles. This reduction has been raised with managers for action – a message reinforced at the

quarterly Deep Dive performance surgeries. We also continue to build on the quality of casework undertaken whilst maintaining high levels of performance.

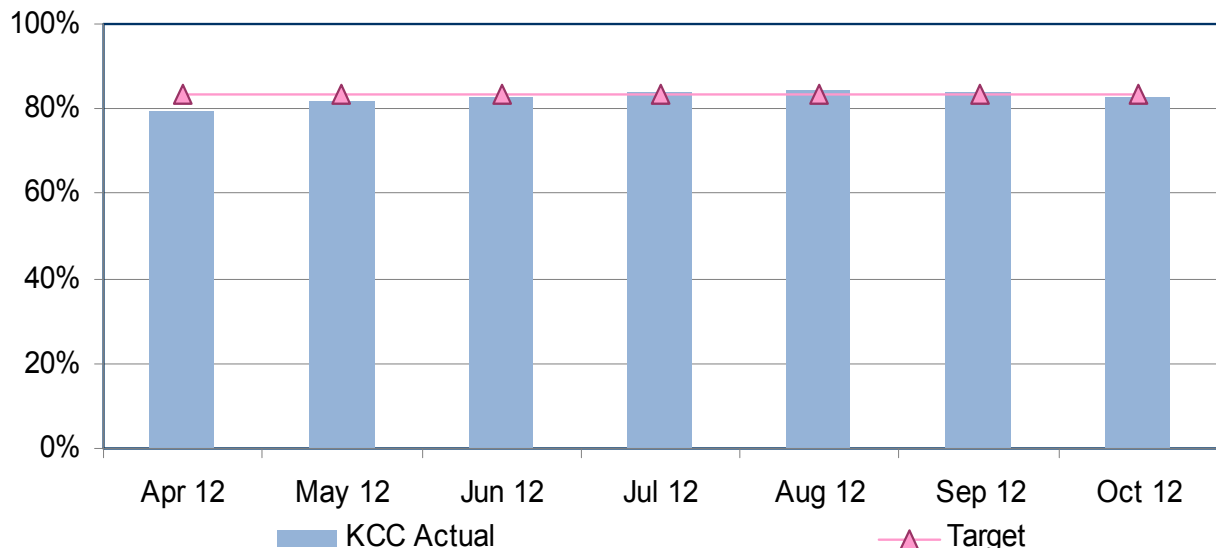
The graph below shows that the number of Initial Assessments completed within timescale over the last six months remains extremely high, with 87.5% of IAs being completed within 7 days of referral in October 2012:



Only 63 IAs were in progress outside of timescale in October – well below the Improvement Notice target of 200, and our more challenging internal target of 100.

Core Assessments

As with Initial Assessments, the number of Core Assessments being completed within timescale is high - with 83.1% being completed within timescale in October 2012, as shown in the graph below:



Though the target for the number of CAs in progress outside of timescale has proved challenging (with levels increasing between July and October 2012), figures have remained fairly level between September and October 2012, with 78 assessments remaining incomplete beyond 35 days in October – well within the Improvement Notice Target of 100.

Unallocated Cases

We continue to perform extremely well in terms of unallocated cases, with no cases of Child in Need remaining unallocated over 28 days since July 2012. No Child Protection or Children in Care cases have remained unallocated over 28 days since the Improvements took effect, and KCC continues to operate a zero tolerance policy on any such cases remaining unallocated over timescale. On the rare occasions that Children in Need cases remain unallocated over period, immediate action is consistently taken to address this, with the majority of the cases being allocated or closed as appropriate.

Further key performance achievements:

- The numbers of children on a child protection plan for two years or more has fallen consistently since June 2012, reaching 7.3% by October 2012 – our lowest level since April. Though we have not yet met the target for this indicator, the service are taking active steps to ensure timely decision making and the progression of all child protection cases through the management chain. Furthermore, the service is tracking the planned case conferences of children who have been subject to a child protection plan for 18 months to ensure that timely decision making and progression is occurring.
- In October 2012, the percentage of caseholding posts filled by permanent qualified social workers remained just below the target rate of 90% (at 88.4%), with the numbers of permanent filled positions increasing significantly between August and September 2012 - when the new structure was implemented. The service ensures it employs agency staff to fill any shortfall in permanent establishment figures.
- There have been sustained reductions in caseload levels since July. The county average caseload per caseholder is currently 17.6, well within the target level of 20 per caseholder.

B. Practice & Service Improvement

A number of developments have taken place since the last report was produced, including:

Service Restructure

The restructure of Specialist Children's Service has now been completed, and the new structure was fully implemented on 1 September 2012 (as was the new structure for Early Intervention and Prevention). The service is currently recruiting managers and staff to the remaining few posts, and it is aimed to have these vacancies filled by the end of the year/early in the new year. The recent Peer Review of the service commended the new structure as fit for purpose and as being popular with social care staff. The structure is still relatively new, and it is therefore too early to evidence outcomes or to quantify benefits at this time.

Practice Improvement Programme (PIP)

The PIP has been a key response to the practice failings identified by Ofsted. A small team of experienced and expert practitioners was assembled in January 2012, and deployed to each District in the county. PIP practitioners were tasked to work alongside practitioners, to audit their casework and to provide mentoring, coaching and training. This 'hands-on' approach was welcomed by staff and local managers, and the PIP findings been used to drive forward sustained

improvements in the teams and to further strengthen care planning. The PIP reports have also been used in the Deep Dive performance surgeries to add a qualitative/QA perspective to the quantitative data available in the performance scorecards. The PIP completed its programme of work in November 2012. There are now plans to launch a PIP 2, to consolidate the work of the first programme, in early 2013.

Commissioned Services

A range of early intervention services have been commissioned with robust performance and contract monitoring systems in place. The Intensive Family Support and Family Advice Service contracts were commissioned in July 2012, and the Emotional Health & Wellbeing; Adolescent Support Workers; Domestic Abuse; and Positive Relationships contracts were commissioned in September 2012. The Crisis Intervention contract was commissioned in October 2012. Training has been given to the newly commissioned providers to ensure there is a clear understanding of the CAF process, and of the role of these services to support families.

The Children's Commissioning Unit has further developed a Community Chest grant process aimed at providing support to vulnerable young people and families across Kent. The ambition for this grant is to provide short, one-off funding to local projects, based on the knowledge and evidence that locality teams are best placed to identify services that are responsive to local need. The grant process began in summer 2012.

Auditing

The County Audit Programme is ongoing, with all operational social work managers within Specialist Children's Services auditing at least one case per month. The findings - and any recommendations from these audits - are placed on the child's file, and have in some instances led some renewed manager attention and refocused work. The Safeguarding Unit is currently working to strengthen the consistency and quality of all audits undertaken.

The audit programme for 2013 has been developed and agreed. Safeguarding have incorporated/responded to the findings of the Peer Review in their development of the audit programme and audit tool. A programme of internal peer reviewing has also been agreed.

Virtual School Kent (VSK)

The VSK continues to provide an effective service for our Children in Care and care leavers. Having completed its restructure, the Virtual School has recruited 5 apprentice Participation Workers and 1 apprentice Administration Worker. These roles were ringfenced for care leavers, and the staff started in their posts in September 2012. This forms part of the work the VSK is undertaking to promote opportunities for Children in Care entering into employment. The VSK has also recently received the results of the information Ofsted inspection which took place in June. The 'thematic inspection' was extremely positive about VSK service

provision, and the full results are published in 'The impact of Virtual Schools on the Educational Progress of Looked After Children.'¹

Academic indicators show that Kent's Children in Care have made further improvements in terms of educational attainment, with targets for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 5 A*-C passes, including English and Maths, being exceeded. There also continues to be an increase in the percentage of health care assessments for Children in Care, with 92.2% of children receiving assessments within timescale in October 2012. There has been a dip in dental checks within timescale over the same period (88.1% against the target 90%), though performance data shows there is evidence of an improving trend.

The electronic Personal Education Plan (ePEP) was launched on 1 September 2012. The VSK is on track to ensure that 95%+ of CIC of statutory school age to have a current PEP that has been quality assured by the locality assistant heads by the Improvement Plan delivery deadlines.

Further key practice and service achievements:

- Access to Resource Panels (placement panels) are now functioning in all four Areas. The Panels regulate the decision making processes regarding the need for children to become Looked After. This should ensure that decision making is consistent, timely and is based on sound assessment.
- The Peer Review of the service took place between 24 and 28 September 2012. Feedback from this assessment was generally positive, and areas that were highlighted as requiring further attention are now being addressed e.g. additional capacity in the Central Duty Team. Staff Briefings took place in October to inform the service about the feedback KCC received, and to encourage staff to take personal responsibility for improving the service - building on the strengths and areas of weakness identified by the Review, responding on an individual/team/Area basis.
- The Recruitment Campaign was launched in September 2012. The campaign included a KCC sponsored recruitment event took place in London on 12 November 2012. The event was well received, and applications/data are being monitored to see whether the event has an impact on recruitment figures.
- The Coram Adoption Improvement Action Plan was signed off by the Adoption Board in October 2012.
- Integrated Adolescent Teams, including in-house provision of 16+ services, are being piloted in 4 Districts from September 2012.
- All children subject to a CP Plan for 2yrs+ are in the process of being reviewed by a new CP Chair. Recommendations will be made to the service to ensure effective progression.
- The TRP (ICT upgrade programme) has now been completed for Specialist Children's Service staff. All managers, practitioners and support staff now have the appropriate up-to-date equipment in order to meet their business needs.

¹ The impact of Virtual Schools on the Educational Progress of Looked After Children.' Ofsted, 11 October 2012. < <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/impact-of-virtual-schools-educational-progress-of-looked-after-children>>

3. Phase 3 Plan

The Phase 3 Improvement Plan was launched on 1 August 2012, and will take the service through until August 2013. The aim of the Phase 3 Plan is to deliver a whole system approach to managing family pathways from early help to statutory intervention. This tranche of the Improvement Programme will continue to focus on quality and sustainability (as did the Phase 2 Plan), whilst embedding the efficiency and effectiveness of improved service provision into everyday working practice, and laying the foundations for cultural change.

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

Phase 3 is designed to build on the new structure, to ensure reduced and managed workloads, and to provide increased stability in the workforce. This tranche is focused more and more on practice standards and on building a long term quality service. This period is understood as moving from 'improvement to transformation'.

4. Vision

Senior officers from ELS, FCS and Communities and Customers have been working together to construct a transformational vision and strategic plan for all children and for all services in the County. This will cover the whole range of provision from universal to the very specialist, and will seek to set out a set of fundamental changes that will improve outcomes for all.

To underpin this, a social work contract is currently being developed; this contract will set out a programme of change that will enable - and expect - practitioners to become more effective in their work with children and families; it will also ensure that the necessary organisational and infrastructure changes are in place to support staff in doing this. It is anticipated that this contract will provide improved stability in relation to staffing, reinforce the major investments that are being made in ICS/ICT changes, and reinforce the substantial management and supervision training inputs - consistent with Professor Munro's recommendations. This contract will also set out more explicit roles for the Principle Social Workers (which will be recruited to in early 2013), and will form the basis of our response to the new flexibilities expected in the revised version of 'Working Together'.

5. Financial Implications

£1M has been allocated to support the improvement programme in the 2012/13 financial year. However, £251K has been deducted at source to offset the pressures

brought about by the improvements to staff office accommodation and parking (Core Task 10 project), originally to be covered by P&IS.

An additional grant is being sought from the Children's Improvement Board, to pay for further improvement works (such as the Phase 2 Practice Improvement Programme).

6. Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework

Improving Children's Services continues to be one of the Council's top priorities, following the Ofsted Inspection in August 2010.

7. 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.

8. Equality Impact Assessments

There are no issues to report on this.

9. 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 against are:

- A failure to recruit and retain experienced social care staff and managers to KCC
- Numbers of Looked After Children may continue to increase with impacts on staffing resources and outcomes for children
- 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
- Delay to the implementation of the new ICS system to the revised timescales
- Untoward safeguarding incidents

10. Consultation and Communication

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

11. Inspection

The service has been inspected between 26th November and 6th December 2012. This inspection was conducted under the new regime, which has been changed to reflect the recommendations of Professor Munro's report into child protection provision. This new regime focuses solely on safeguarding (inspections into Children in Care are also being re-constructed but will now be delivered separately from those into Safeguarding) and in particular is now much more focussed on the quality of

front-line practice. As such, inspectors will track the child's journey from referral into early intervention services and through social care provision (whether through Children in Need or Child Protection systems) and back out to lower level or universal services. They are likely to look at around 200 randomly selected cases.

It is anticipated that the results of the inspection will be published in January 2013 after the Cabinet Committee's meeting. It is very much hoped that the findings will reflect the significant progress which has been made over the past 27 months.

12. Conclusion

The Council has continued to make progress over this period. Good performance has been sustained, and SCS are attaining the vast majority of the targets set out in Kent's Improvement Notice. Those areas which are proving challenging are being robustly addressed, through a combination of performance and quality assurance measures. It is felt that the new service vision, and the development of an emergent culture of aspiration rather than acceptance, very much establish us on the right path to achieving our objectives in the near future.

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

Background Documents: None