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To: Social Care & Public Health Cabinet Committee - 21 March 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.

1. Introduction

1.1 This is the sixth report to Cabinet Committee, outlining progress made in improving Specialist Children's Services (SCS). This paper is constructed differently to previous reports, which focused primarily on performance issues and the Improvement Notice targets. Instead, this report acts as a broad position statement - setting out where we believe the Service to be, and the direction of travel throughout 2013 and beyond.

2. Key Developments

2.1 Peer Review & Safeguarding Inspection

In September 2012, SCS was subject to a Peer Review of its services. The Review was not an inspection – rather a supportive but challenging 'critical friend', assisting KCC and partner agencies to identify our strengths and areas requiring further development. The key purpose of the Review was to stimulate local discussion about how Children's Services can become more effective in delivering improved safe outcomes for children and young people. The Review was both properly challenging and appropriately helpful, corroborating our understanding of Kent's improvement journey i.e. where we are in the process of improvement, and where our strengths and weaknesses lie. Actions were put in place to address recognised areas of vulnerability, and a series of staff briefings were subsequently held to define how best to respond to the feedback received across business operations. See Appendix 1 for more details.

- 2.2 Between 26th November and 5th December 2012, Ofsted conducted an inspection of KCC's child protection arrangements; the inspection report was subsequently published on 17th January 2013 (see Appendix 2). The inspection was unannounced (as prescribed in the new inspection regime), and Ofsted made judgements in four key areas. Their findings were:
- Quality of Practice: Adequate.
 - Effectiveness of Help and Protection: Adequate.
 - Leadership and Governance: Adequate.
 - Overall Effectiveness: Adequate.
- 2.3 This is clearly a key milestone since we began our improvement process in October 2010, and reflects well on the substantial developments made since that time.
- 2.4 The Peer Review and Inspection reports, when taken together, give us a very comprehensive and detailed picture about the quality and effectiveness of current service provision. Both also offer useful and, in many ways, similar views and recommendations about the future developments needed to deliver the kind of quality provision that is expected by us and which local children and families need.
- 2.5 It is perhaps most pleasing that neither report highlighted any areas of development not already known to us. Ofsted in particular commented on the fact that SCS is a service that knows itself, that is proactively identifying areas of weakness and putting in place robust actions to improve upon them. It is perhaps this facility more than any other that can give some confidence about the next stage of the improvement journey.
- 2.6 Both the Peer Review Team and Ofsted commented positively on the improvement programme undertaken thus far and were able to see the reason for, and benefits of, the three phase approach we have adopted. The Peer Review was helpful in identifying the need for a further phase to this process - moving from improvement to transformation.
- 2.7 There is no complacency in the service. Children's Services do not aspire to be adequate and the Service is aware there is still much to do. However, we believe that the core building blocks needed to deliver a safe service are in place and increasingly the focus must be on the quality and effectiveness of our work.

3. Current Position

3.1 It is worth capturing the key headlines from the Peer Review, Ofsted and our continuing self assessment of the Service.

3.2 Vision – From Improvement to Transformation

The need to shift the vision from a remedial response to the 2010 inspection to something more aspirational and far-reaching was a point particularly made by the Peer Review Team. The point is well made and has been embraced in the Council. This is described in more detail below (para 5.2).

Practice

There remains too much variability in the standards of practice across the County. We have some excellent practitioners doing excellent work, but equally some whose work is not yet at the required level. More generally, there is an evident need to engender a form of practice that makes more of a difference to children and their families. In too many instances, even where children are being regularly visited and cases supervised, there is insufficient impact to and change in the child's circumstances.

Children in Need

There is a need to make significant progress in our work with Children in Need (CIN). Again, this is an area that SCS is already sighted on, and a considerable amount of work is already underway to improve quality in this area. All the Areas (North, South, East and West) are in the process of reviewing and improving their work with CIN; however, there remains more to do and work with CIN will form a key focus of our second Practice Improvement Programme for 2013 - see 4.6, below.

Outcome Focus

A key point made explicitly by the Peer Review and implicitly in much of the Ofsted feedback was the fact that there has been considerable focus on 'process and rule-bound practice'. This was necessary and indeed inevitable in an organisation in intervention. It is important that we do not lose the internal discipline that this focus engenders, but we now need to move to ensure that all our work - whether a social work visit, a supervision session or a case conference - has a clear and explicit outcome-focus with a particular emphasis on bringing about change in each child's circumstances.

KSCB

Both the Peer Review and Inspection reports comment on the KSCB, and it is clear that the Board needs to develop so that it can at some point assume the responsibilities of the Improvement Board in the future.

The KSCB Chair has increased her time commitment to the County and has assumed the chairing of the Quality and Effectiveness Sub-group (which had not previously delivered what was required of it). The interim AD, Safeguarding has also joined the group and a new QA Framework and refreshed data set will be constructed to drive forward the work of the group. The first round of multi-agency audits has been completed and these will be used to help inform future inter-agency practice developments. The Chair called a Safeguarding Summit in early December 2012 to ensure the necessary senior manager commitment from across the agencies to the Board, and to its scrutiny and challenge responsibilities. A Section 11 Audit has been commissioned and will be used as the core part of a refreshed Business Plan for the Board. Finally, the KSCB Business Unit has been restructured and streamlined to ensure more focussed support to the Board and to maintain the drive of the Board's work outside of the formal meeting structure.

Early Help

Ofsted spoke positively about the new construction of early help services (redesigned as part of the new service structure) whilst rightly commenting on their relative newness. Both Ofsted and the Peer Review described continuing challenges in the embedding of CAF and its intended use. SCS has conducted its own evaluation of our early help offer and John Coughlan, DCS in Hampshire, is leading a Peer Review of this area in February 2013. We will therefore be in a position to comment in more detail about progress in this area in future reports.

- 3.3 SCS has constructed a more detailed Action Plan to respond to the Ofsted recommendations (see Appendix 3). This has been built alongside the Improvement Plan to preserve as far as possible its centrality as the Plan which drives our overall improvement. The Ofsted Action Plan relates to those areas not covered in the Improvement Plan and/or highlights where swifter action is required to meet the required timescales.

4. Current Position

- 4.1 Firstly, we are anticipating a further inspection visit from Ofsted – see point 11, p.8 for more details. Kent is one of only three local authorities judged inadequate in its work to safeguard children *and* in its' provision of services to Children in Care. Services to Children in Care were not inspected by the recent Ofsted inspection, nor were they a major line of enquiry for the Peer Review (although they did helpfully comment on some aspects of those services).
- 4.2 Secondly, there is, in our view, a need to review some of the specific contents of the Improvement Notice. The Notice is due to be “finally reviewed” in April 2013 and the contents of the Peer Review and the Ofsted Judgements will help inform that review.
- 4.3 The review of the Notice will take place between the Council, the DFE and the Board through the Chair. However, we believe we can now evidence:
- ✓ That work to develop preventative and early intervention has been completed.
 - ✓ That threshold documentation is agreed, disseminated and subject to regular multi-agency training.
 - ✓ There are now no unallocated cases within the social care service, although a small number of assessments remain out of timescale.
 - ✓ That we have a performance management and quality assurance framework in place and that specifically file auditing is regular and frequent (our file audit methodology and audit programme are both being updated as a consequence of the Inspection and will include the Peer Review feedback on our file auditing processes.)
 - ✓ The number of initial assessments has now increased in-line with statistical neighbours, and there is now a consistent conversion from referrals to initial assessments.
 - ✓ That a comprehensive Child in Care Strategy has been developed and is being implemented.

- ✓ Significant success has been achieved in improving education outcomes and health and dental checks for children in our care

4.4 We accept that some elements of the Improvement Notice are not fully delivered and this was echoed by either the Peer Review and/or Ofsted. Areas requiring further work include:

- The need to continue to reduce the number of children subject to repeat Child Protection Plans.
- Continue to implement our recruitment and retention strategy with an initial focus on the hard-to-recruit-to areas in the Service.
- Maintain and develop the training for practitioners and supervisors.
- Continue our work to ensure Children in Care can voice their views and contribute to the development of the Service.
- Continue the improvements in the numbers and rate at which children become adopted.

4.5 It is worthy of note that work on all of the above are now embedded in “business as usual” in the Service and are subject to regular and routine management and practitioner attention. The continuation and development of the Practice Improvement Programmes (PIPs) and the Deep Dive Programme will ensure they receive the necessary attention.

Practice Improvement Programme (PIP)

The PIP was a key response to the practice failings identified by Ofsted in 2010. A small team of experienced and expert practitioners was constructed and spent time in each district throughout 2012, working alongside practitioners, auditing and working with Social Workers on cases, providing mentoring and coaching and running training workshops. This very direct ‘hands-on’ approach was welcomed by staff and local managers and the reports produced after each PIP have been used to continue the drive to sustain improvements in the Districts. SCS managers have agreed that there is a need for a PIP 2 in 2013 and agreement has been reached with the Regional Adviser of the Children’s Improvement Board that some of the funding available through that source will be used to contribute to its future implementation.

The specific focus of PIP 2 will be negotiated between each Area and the Safeguarding Unit to ensure the Programme addresses their requirements; there will also be room for a ‘lighter touch’ in those Districts where there is an evidence base to show they are moving forward quickly and successfully. In all cases PIP 2 will have a focus on Children in Need work and on management and supervision since we recognise these are our two overarching areas of vulnerability.

Deep Dives

Deep dives will be maintained throughout 2013 and will be informed by a richer set of data, bringing together: the (revised) scorecard; feedback from Conference Chairs and IROs; outcomes from file and themed audits; and the results of PIP 2 as it is rolled out.

It is increasingly clear that local managers have a much greater grip on the work of their teams, and that they are demonstrating a much greater sense of ownership of the outcomes for children. There is also strong evidence that local managers are aware of performance at a child-by-child level. The last round of Deep Dives clearly showed both improvements in performance and - perhaps more importantly - showed management teams in the new structure driving through changes and being able to relate work with individual children to the higher level data on the scorecards.

Andrew Ireland continues to Chair these performance surgeries and they are prioritised by both the Director of SCS and AD for Safeguarding. The Deep Dives are also an important communication channel with Area-based managers. Each Deep Dive is an important 'testing ground' to explore the extent to which services are moving from 'improvement to transformation'

5. Service, KCC and Partner Changes

5.1 The service is now increasingly looking to the future, building on the successful improvement work undertaken over the last two years. In particular, Phase 3 of the Improvement Plan is building on, and developing, the whole system approach to managing family pathways. It continues to focus on quality and sustainability, whilst embedding the efficiency and effectiveness of improved service provision into everyday working practice. The Plan also lays the foundations for cultural change. Senior officers from KCC's Education, Learning & Skill (ELS) directorate, Families & Social Care (FCS) and Communities and Customers (C&C) directorates have been working together to construct a transformational vision and strategic plan for all children and all services in the County. The "Every Day Matters" Strategy covers the whole range of provision from universal to the very specialist, and seeks to set out a set of fundamental changes that will improve outcomes for all.

5.2 Underneath - but connected to - this work is a strategy to transform social care practice in-line with the model set out in the Munro report. A Social Work Contract is being developed which will build on:

- a. the recent structural changes
- b. the improved stability of staffing
- c. the major investments in ICS changes
- d. substantial management and supervision training inputs
- e. emerging improvements in practice

This Contract sets out a programme of change that will enable (and expect) practitioners to become more effective in their work with children and families, and to ensure that the necessary organisational and infrastructure changes are in place to support them in that work. This Contract will set out more explicit roles for the Principle Social Work posts (which will be recruited to in early 2013) and will form the basis for our response to the new flexibilities expected in the revised version of 'Working Together'.

5.3 This report has already described some of the emerging changes within the KSCB and it is clear that many of the improvements still needed in outcomes for children can only be delivered through improved partnership working - both at a strategic and operational level. "Every Day Matters" will ultimately require

multi-agency ownership if it is to deliver the transformational changes required. Equally, the improvements required for Children in Need will require the same kind of commitment and input from partner agencies as do those subject to a Child Protection Plan.

6. Financial Implications

£749K has been allocated to support the improvement programme in the 2013/14 financial year.

An additional grant of £70K has been sought from the Children's Improvement Board, to pay for further improvement works (e.g. the Phase 2 Practice Improvement Programme).

7. 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 Children in Care 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, and/or related issues arising following implementation
- 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. Children in Care Inspection

Ofsted are currently constructing a new inspection regime, which will look at all services to Children in Care. The service is anticipating a Children in Care inspection later in 2013. As with the Safeguarding inspection, this inspection will focus on the quality of front-line practice and as such, inspectors will track the child's journey through social care provision. Staff are being asked to prepare for the forthcoming inspection accordingly.

As a consequence of the delay in the new inspection regime being implemented, Ofsted are continuing the inspection of adoption services under the current regime. At the time of publication of this report, Ofsted have informed the Adoption Service that will inspect the service from 18 to 22 March.

It is very much hoped that the findings of both the Adoption and Children in Care inspections will reflect the significant progress which has been made over the past 29 months, as has the recent inspection of our Safeguarding services.

12. Conclusion

The Peer Review and the Ofsted Inspection have been important milestones in Kent's journey of improvement since the 2010 inspection. They have both described the considerable progress made – and the amount of improvement still required. This report has set out in headline terms how that future improvement work will be delivered and progress on this work will form the basis of future reporting.

Recommendations

Members are asked to NOTE this report.

Background Documents: None

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