

By: Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services
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To: Social Care and Public Health Committee – 12 June 2013

Subject: **CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report summarises the key improvement work in children's services since January 2013

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The last Children's Services Improvement Panel (CSIP) was in January 2013; the subsequent one was cancelled due to close proximity to election. This report summarises the key improvement work in children's services since that date.
- 1.2 Members will recall that Ofsted conducted an unannounced Safeguarding Inspection in November 2012. The report of that inspection was published in January 2013. The overall judgement was that services are now 'adequate' and the report commented positively on progress made since the last report as well as identifying further improvement work still required. It was of note that the inspectors did not find any children at risk of immediate significant harm and they also commented positively on the high level of self-awareness within the service.
- 1.3 The service also was subject to an inspection into its adoption function carried out by Ofsted in March. Unfortunately, the draft report has not yet been received by the Council so we are unable to comment more formally at this stage about either its judgements or our response to any recommendations. The verbal feedback given at the end of the inspection (22nd March) appeared to be satisfactory although we did write to the lead inspector seeking clarification of some of the evidence they quoted in that session and how it was being used to support their overall judgements.
- 1.4 As a consequence of the safeguarding inspection and what we expect to be a satisfactory adoption inspection judgement, Kent has now received the new revised Improvement Notice, appended to this report. Its contents have been arrived at through some helpful negotiation with the DfE and Board members will note the increased expectations set on partners, especially through the KSCB, and the decrease in the numbers of specific targets and focus on processes to a greater focus on outcomes for children. Set out below is how we will be responding to the various demands within the Notice.
- 1.5 There are two significant changes nationally which will potentially impact upon the way the service is judged in the future and in particular how services to children in

care are judged given that remains the one area from the 2010 inspection not yet subject to follow up scrutiny.

- 1.6 Firstly, the Children's Improvement Board had, rather unexpectedly, its funding withdrawn by the DfE so it will not exist post July 2013. There are discussions within the sector about the ability to maintain some of its work without the infrastructure or funding but it will impact on future functioning of peer reviews.
- 1.7 Secondly, there have been some substantial changes in Ofsted away from their proposed inspection regime for this and future years. They have dropped their commitment to generate a multi-inspectorate safeguarding inspection and their commitment to work with CQC to generate a Children in Care inspection regime. Instead we now know they will return to a joint safeguarding and children in care inspection run solely by themselves, not dissimilar therefore to the inspection we had in 2010 and which they intend to start delivering from September 2013. They have also announced that they intend to run some children in care only inspections through the summer until the new regime is agreed.
- 1.8 This is a confused and changeable picture and it is difficult to be clear about implications for Kent. Officers are proceeding on the basis that an inspection into our children in care services could still be conducted at any time (and will almost certainly be unannounced) and we remain focussed on continuing to improve services such that any inspection will be satisfactory and, most importantly, outcomes for children are improved.

2. Improvement Notice

- 2.1. Kent's response to the Notice will be captured in seven ways:
 - a. **Ofsted Inspection Follow-Up** – the safeguarding inspection made a number of recommendations all of which are due for completion by July.
 - b. **Quality and effectiveness of social work practice** – this work will be driven through our delivery of the 'Social Work Contract' and its constituent parts. This is a comprehensive and ambitious programme but one we are confident will deliver the quality of social work practice required in the County if we are to meet the needs of our service users. A more detailed implementation plan will be developed but it is important to clarify that the work described in it could never be said to be 'finished' and that there will always be developments in our supervision, learning and development offer, systems and IT etc. We are also in the early stages of developing a similar contract more specifically applicable for staff in our children's centres and early intervention teams.
 - c. **Workforce Development** – we are continuing to develop our place in what remains a very competitive market through a developing recruitment and retention strategy and we have developed a new and much improved recruitment micro-site:
http://www.kent.gov.uk/jobs_and_careers/draft/childrens_social_care.aspx

As the social work contract develops and its products become more evident to staff, so we anticipate it impacting positively on both our recruitment and our retention rates.

- d. **KSCB** – its Business Plan sets out what it will focus on in the coming year and the Chair will be providing regular updates to the Improvement Board.
- e. **CAMHS Service** – improvements to these services will be reported on by health colleagues and the Board may wish to set out more detail about what it would like to be informed about and its meeting schedule.
- f. **Adoption** – future developments in the Adoption Service will be set by both the continued partnership work with Coram and the following of the Ofsted report and its recommendations. The Adoption Sub Group will continue to scrutinise plans and progress actions as required.
- g. **Performance Information** – finally, whilst the new Improvement Notice helpfully excludes any specific data-driven targets, we will continue to table the County Scorecard. The Scorecard has been developed further for 2013-14 and a report setting out end of year outline and a rationale for the new scorecard is attached.

2.2. Specialist Children's Services has developed a new **Quality Assurance Framework**. This refreshes the previous policy and captures the comprehensive and holistic nature of the approach we are seeking to take. Members can have some confidence that the focus on performance that has been evident in the service since 2010 will not be lessened. The key points in the framework are that:

- a. It places the prime responsibility for practice improvement with the operational team and services.
- b. We have re-configured all our performance and quality assurance staff to better support and challenge operational teams and services.
- c. It retains the centrality of the "Deep Dive" methodology as our prime performance management process. Significant changes are detailed in the Framework, notably the expectation that areas generate their own self-evaluation to initiate each deep dive and that each sessions is informed by data analysis; IRO and Conference Chair feedback; file audits and service user feedback including complaints

2.3. Separately tabled to this meeting is the performance outturn for SCS for 2012-13 Overall the scorecard presents some very satisfactory evidence about progress within the service with 22 indicators rated on green, 13 on amber and 9 on red (two of those, placement stability and children subject to plans for 2+ years are arguably against ambitious targets.)

- a. Children subject to a second or subsequent child protection plan. This remains higher than target and the focus on the quality of risk assessment; of child

protection plan construction and delivery on “step down” arrangements will continue.

- b. Section 47 Investigations proceeding to Initial Child Protection Case Conference – 36% remain low and we will retain a focus on ensuring that initial risk assessments are proportionate and that formal investigation only convened as required.
- c. The timeliness of children moving through care proceedings and where appropriate, on to adoption will remain an area of major focus in the service. We are aware that there remain some “historical” cases in the systems which, although now being properly managed through the system, will continue to have a negative impact on our performance reporting.

2.4 Managers in the service have worked on the construction of a new scorecard, set against some new (or revised) targets. A detailed explanation for each KPI, the targets and the tolerance bandings for the RAG ratings is available if required. We also have developed or are finalising detailed and specific scorecards for some of our specialist service provision – early intervention, fostering, adoption, Catch 22 and disabled services all now have their own dedicated scorecards and the overall County scorecard captures the key data from each of them.

The key changes from last year are:

- a. The layout now better reflects the journey of the child through our system, from CAF-related measures through to children in care and adoption.
- b. Some of the activity measures no longer have targets attached to them. Number of referrals, number of initial and core assessments, number of children in need etc. are all rates we need to continually monitor and track any variation over time or across areas. However, they are activity levels only and setting targets implies a desired level to be attained and remedial action to be taken if those levels not attained. There is sufficient evidence now to suggest that the previously month-on-month variations in activity rates have now dissipated and all are now at steady levels.
- c. A number of targets that were not attained or are set at what remains a realistic and ambitious level in 2012-13 have been rolled forward, e.g. number of CAFs; length of CP plans.
- d. In advance of developing our response to the single assessment as set out in ‘Working Together’ (a Government document that sets out the inter-agency arrangements for the safeguarding of children, a revised version of which was published in March 2013 and set out some changes consistent with the recommendations of the report into child protection carried out by Professor Munro in May 2011), we will now be measuring initial assessments on a ten month rather than seven day timescale.

2.5 Finally, it is important to highlight our continuing focus on improving front line practice. In particular we are implementing two key changes in the service:

- a. Firstly, we are revising and re-providing the Practice Improvement Programme (PIP) carried out throughout the service during 2012. This was experienced as a successful intervention and worked well with front line staff to identify areas of vulnerability and work with them to address and improve those areas. The PIP moved across the entire County and all operational teams were covered. For 2013, the programme is being repeated as the Practice Development Programme (to build on previous improvements). A series of initial scoping meetings have been held with operational management teams to set out the specific areas to be addressed through this programme and a programme constructed in response. The PIP2 will be more inclusive than the PIP, integrating the skills and expertise already present in the teams and working with staff.
 - b. Secondly, in order to further develop the Social Work Contract (referenced in 2.1.b) and for the service to respond pro-actively to the new 'Working Together', a number of Expert Practitioner Reference Groups are being convened. They have been formed through management nominations and constitute some of our very best and most effective practitioners.
- 2.6 It is crucial that both these areas work for front-line staff and are developed in ways that enable them to practice in the way we and they want to. It is also a welcome opportunity to acknowledge the skills and expertise we have in our own workforce.
- 2.7 The Children's Services Improvement Panel will resume meetings shortly, giving Members who would like to join the Panel, an opportunity to be involved in regular in-depth scrutiny of the quality and availability of services for vulnerable children.

3. Recommendations

Members of the Cabinet are asked to NOTE and comment on the contents of this report.

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Background documents: *none*