

By: Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services
Andrew Ireland, Corporate Director, Families and Social Care
Maggie Blyth, Independent Chair of Kent Safeguarding Children Board

To: County Council – 18 July 2013

Subject: Kent Safeguarding Children Board – 2012/13 Annual Report

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This attached annual report from Kent Safeguarding Children Board describes the progress made in improving the safeguarding services provided to Kent's children and young people over 2012/13, and outlines the challenges ahead over the next year.

Recommendation: County Council is asked to COMMENT on the progress made and NOTE the 2012/13 Annual Report attached.

1. Introduction

(1) This report presents the 2012/13 Annual Report produced by the Independent Chair of Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) and endorsed by members of that Board. Current Government guidance captured in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013) sets out the requirement introduced through The Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2006 for Local Safeguarding Children Boards to produce and publish an annual report. This report provides a rigorous and transparent assessment of the effectiveness of local child protection arrangements and has been designed for circulation to all front line staff working with children across Kent.

(2) This report identifies progress across Kent in improving the child protection system and also identifies areas of vulnerabilities and what action is being taken to address challenges where they remain.

(3) The Annual Report includes lessons from management reviews, serious case reviews and child deaths within the reporting period.

(4) In Working Together 2013, (recently issued by the Department for Education), it is recommended that once the report is published it should be submitted to the Chief Executive (where one is in situ) and Leader of the Council, the local Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

(5) KSCB is forceful in carrying out its scrutiny role in overseeing child protection arrangements in Kent and findings from its multi agency audits, Section 11 audits and all SCRs can be found on the KSCB website.

2. The 2012/13 Annual Report

(1) The report details the continued progress made by agencies to ensure that children in Kent are safe. Progress has continued this reporting year with caseloads

and inappropriate referrals to Specialist Children's Services reducing. They remain below average compared to Kent's statistical neighbours.

(2) As the report indicates, the number of children with a Child Protection Plan (CPP) has risen slightly from 959 in March 2012 to 994 in March 2013. This is still below half the numbers of two years ago. KSCB is satisfied that the numbers have stabilised and are in line with those of our statistical neighbours. KSCB has noted that the numbers of children on a CPP for a second or subsequent time remains high and that a focus must remain on ensuring that all agencies have a common understanding of thresholds for child protection intervention.

(3) Kent agencies have invested in a new early intervention strategy during 2012-2013 which aims to provide swift support to children before a referral to Specialist Children's Services is required. Ofsted found this service to be working well. During the year KSCB has noted the improved use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) but identified continued barriers to its use across some sections of the health economy.

(4) Ofsted identified that interventions for children in need (CIN) across Kent were inconsistent which reinforces the need for KSCB scrutiny across the partnership about support given to this group of children.

(5) There has been significant progress over the last 12 months in how Kent is responding to the risks highlighted by the Children's Commissioner and more recently, the HO Select Committee, to children at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE). KSCB has developed training for front line staff and a toolkit for assisting in identifying and assessing risk of CSE and publicity material has been distributed, drawing attention to the signs that may indicate that young people are at risk of CSE. KSCB has published a report on unaccompanied asylum seeking children called 'Staying in Kent'.

(6) To ensure that the spotlight is retained on those young people at risk of going missing, trafficking and CSE the focus of the KSCB conference in 2013 will be on these areas. During this reporting year 18 UASC went missing and did not return. KSCB is requiring statutory agencies to understand more clearly the trends relating to children missing in Kent to ensure that the most vulnerable young people are supported at the right time.

(7) Specific challenges are highlighted around action taken to learn lessons from cases when things go wrong and where children are the subject of neglect, harm or abuse from their carers or other adults around them.

(8) KSCB is committed to publishing the findings from all SCRs and has placed the overview reports from two SCRs and one management review into the public domain during this reporting year. Although there were no new SCRs commissioned during the last year, there was one SCR that concluded. Other non SCR case reviews have been undertaken and the lessons from all of these cases have influenced the focus of KSCB's multi-agency learning and development strategy and training programme. KSCB obtains assurance from all Kent agencies that actions following these reviews are properly monitored and progress evidenced.

(9) During this reporting period KSCB has undertaken a number of multi agency audits to understand what is happening across different front line settings in protecting children. A Section 11 audit was undertaken with statutory agencies across Kent which asked each partner agency to provide evidence to the Board on how they are meeting the many aspects of their safeguarding responsibilities. Where specific action has been required by certain agencies to improve their contributions, KSCB is closely monitoring this to ensure all agencies are discharging their safeguarding duties.

(10) The work of supporting Kent's 1831 Children in Care (including 190 unaccompanied asylum seeking children), as well as the 1194 looked after children placed by other local authorities in the county, continues to place massive pressures on public agencies responsible for supporting vulnerable children in Kent, including children's social services, schools, police, and health services. KSCB will continue to seek evidence that Kent agencies are adequately able to care for all children placed in the County and supports more rigorous risk assessments for children placed in Kent by other authorities.

(11) The Annual Report states that while dental and health checks for Children in Care have improved significantly there remain concerns about assessment and treatment of vulnerable groups of children with emotional wellbeing and mental health needs. Waiting times in the West of Kent have reduced significantly in recent weeks but KSCB will continue to require NHS representatives to report on progress in this area.

3. Conclusions

(1) Kent agencies have worked hard to ensure that the failings identified in 2010 by Ofsted have been addressed. Overall, the Independent Chair of KSCB is satisfied that progress has been made and that the child protection system in Kent has improved. However, challenges remain to ensure that there is a common understanding of thresholds in Kent; that partnership agencies in Kent are suitably equipped to support the most vulnerable children and young people; and that those children identified as children in need are supported by all partner interventions.

(2) The revised Improvement Notice places specific expectations on KSCB during 2013/14 KSCB in requiring all agencies in Kent to demonstrate improved outcomes for children in relation to safeguarding and will be reporting on this to the Improvement Board. Through its new Quality Assurance Framework intelligence will be shared across agencies and members of KSCB are expected to provide single agency reports on progress and participate in Executive walk-about of front line settings.

(3) Furthermore, there are specific challenges for Kent agencies in supporting those children and young people at risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation and understanding why certain groups of children, including some unaccompanied asylum seeking children, go missing.

4. Recommendations

(1) County Council is asked to:

- (a) COMMENT on the progress and improvements made during 2012/13, as detailed in the Annual Report from Kent Safeguarding Children Board
- (b) NOTE the 2012/13 Annual Report attached. Following this meeting, this document will be available for download at the KSCB website.

5. Background Documents

None

6. Contact details

Mark Janaway

Programme and Performance Manager

Kent Safeguarding Children Board

01622 694856

mark.janaway@kent.gov.uk