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To: Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee
5 December 2013

Subject: Children's Services Improvement Programme Update

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

This report provides Cabinet Committee 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 seventh 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 March 2013, and outlined progress to that date. This report acts as a broad position statement - setting out where we believe the Service to be, the progress made since March 2013, and the direction of travel looking forward to 2014.

2. Key Developments

2.1. The Improvement Notice

By recommendation of the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Improvement Board (herein Improvement Board) - Liz Railton, and evidence submitted by the Council, the future of a continued Improvement Notice is currently under review.

The Ministerial letter received by Councillor Paul Carter, agreed the turnaround in Kent County Council's children's services, and not least the outcome of the most recent Ofsted inspection of looked after children (Point 11).

The letter requested reassurance against three points:

- The Council's plans to address continuing recruitment issues- particularly front line managers,
- Plans to carry on improvements within the adoption service with the Coram partnership,
- Plans to ensure continued scrutiny of the Council's performance.

The response highlighted the investment in the new recruitment website. The refreshed site (which has been live since July 2013) emphasises the voice and opinions of current members of staff, and makes a feature of and why Kent is [A great place to live](#)- not just for facilities and family life, but for career progression.

Kent has recruited 48 Newly Qualified Social Workers, who started with Kent in September- October 2013. The recruitment drive continues with 6 experienced social workers recruited in October and at least 9 further appointments anticipated in November 2013.

Kent and Coram have a strong partnership. The contract with Coram has been extended and will taper downwards as the service embeds and strengthens. We have agreed flexible arrangements with Coram about the pace and degree of their continuing input.

There will also be no let-up in the detailed scrutiny of the performance of children's services in Kent. The Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) Executive Group will become Kent's primary scrutiny function for all areas of the Council's performance. There is regular and consistent attendance at Board, Executive and Sub Group meetings by senior managers across the partnership.

2.2. Phase 3 Plan

The Phase 3 Improvement Plan was launched on 1 August 2012, and took the service through until August 2013. The tranche of the Improvement Plan continued to focus on quality and sustainability, integrating and embedding the Improvement Programme actions into 'Business as Usual' practice; dedicated to service user need.

Since 2010 there have been three iterations of the Improvement Plan, each has been successfully delivered and monitored via the Improvement Board. There will now be a fourth phase.

Phase 4 has been agreed, built around the Social Work Contract. It necessarily lacks some of the earlier, more prescriptive elements of previous plans and is focussed more on the delivery of quality and effective interventions. It pulls together a number of key work-streams (ICT replacement, learning and development, recruitment and retention).

2.3. The Social Work Contract

A Social Work Contract has been developed, in partnership with colleagues from Education Learning and Skills, Customer and Communities, and Business and Strategy and Support. It was launched at a number of 'Talk To The Top' Staff Briefings held across the County throughout 2013 (August 2013 saw attendance of over 230 members of staff).

The Social Work Contract is a set of practice standards that covers the core social work activities. It sets out against each activity the standards that are required and that our best practitioners are routinely attaining.

This contract sets out both what is expected of our practitioners and what support and provision the organisation will put in place to support them. It builds on the outcome of Munro's review into child protection and in particular echoes the central importance of building relationships as the key vehicle to helping families change.

The Social Work Contract, in line with Bold Steps for Kent is our vision for Specialist Children's Services.

http://www.kent.gov.uk/jobs_and_careers/careers_in_social_care/childrens_social_care/the_social_work_contract.aspx

2.4. Liberi- Protocol version 8

The dysfunctionality of the then I.C.T system for holding children's files was subject to critical comment in 2010. Significant improvements have been in our existing system but perhaps more importantly a major procurement process was completed and a new provider and programme identified.

This new programme, Protocol version 8 (provided by LiquidLogic) will go-live 9th December. A competition was held for staff to name the new system; over 80 names were submitted, with the final choice being made by Andrew Ireland, Corporate Director for Families and Social Care.

The name chosen was Liberi, Latin for 'children'.

We have worked hard to ensure that the new system is as stream-lined as possible, reducing mandatory steps in business processes and minimising the 'tick box' template designs (in line with Bold Steps for Kent¹).

Training for the new system is being rolled out to all staff with access to the current Capita system. Staff are also being kept up to date of developments via monthly newsletters.

2.5. Children and Families Assessment

All Local authorities with their partner agencies must develop and publish local frameworks for assessment, which must be based on good analysis, timeliness and transparency and be proportionate to the needs of the child and their family.

SCS are in the process of implementing a new Children and Families Assessment. The Children and Families Assessment replaces the separate 'Core' and 'Initial' assessments, creating one single assessment. The timeliness of the new assessment should be determined by the risks and concerns identified within the referral information.

The assessment makes a focus of the fact that children should to be seen and listened to and included throughout the assessment process. Their ways of

¹ Bold Steps for Kent- The Medium Term Plan to 2014/15; 'Supporting the Vulnerable' p. 38

communicating should be understood in the context of their family and community as well as their behaviour and developmental stage.

Guidance and Practice Standards regarding the assessment have been published on the Kent's intranet for ease of access by front-line staff.

3. Current Position

3.1. Practice Development Programme

A key component of the Social Work Contract Learning and Development offer, the Practice Development Programme builds on the earlier work of the Practice Improvement Programme (PIP), introduced in 2011.

The PDP differs from the PIP in a number of ways. Primarily, the PIP was very centrally driven and imposed, whereas the PDP is led by the Districts and the challenges they would most like to address. This in turn supports and builds on the strength of staff in the areas.

Funded through core budget and a Children's Improvement Board grant, the PDP is led by two experienced practice consultants. It works with area management teams and local Senior Practitioners to identify and respond to practice challenges and support continuing improvements. As part of our commitment to becoming a learning organisation (in line with Professor Munro's recommendations), the PDP focusses on sharing best practice across the County. Delivery is via workshops, surgeries, 1:1 coaching and mentoring. The focus is very sharply on improving the quality of social work practice and management.

3.2. Learning and Development

We are substantially refreshing our learning and development offer to staff. Of particular note:

- Developing a much more substantial support package to Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) through their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) with the offer of individualised personal educators to work alongside team managers and supervisors
- Developing working relationships with both the University of Kent and Christ Church University to develop closer partnerships between our Higher Education Institutions and front line staff.
- Hosting a series of Masterclasses given by:
 - Professor David Shemmings
 - Professor Marian Brandon
 - Professor Sue White
 - Professor Eileen Munro
 - Isabelle Trowler; Chief Social Worker for Children

3.3. Supervision

We have invested heavily in a training and development programme for all our team managers and supervisors. A detailed report was provided to the July 2013

Improvement Board, which included the results of a supervision survey carried out earlier this year, key findings of which include:

- 93% received supervision on a regular basis
- 69% rated their supervision as good or adequate
- 94% of the respondents stated that supervision was outcome focussed with clear remit and focus on child/ young person.
- 84% of the respondents stated that supervision enabled them to reflect on their practice.
- 84% stated that supervision provided a safe and supportive place and acknowledged challenges in the work they undertake.
- 88% reported that supervision helped in finding solutions and a way forward.
- 85% reported that supervision provided them with the space to consider personal development, support and training needs.

3.4. Deep Dives

At the heart of the Quality Assurance Framework (presented to the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Improvement Board, May 2013) is the quarterly 'Deep Dive' process. This brings the Corporate Director and Director of SCS to each Area management team across the County and ensures there is an appropriate link being made between performance data and child-based information. This level of senior management scrutiny on the day to day practice of districts and areas has ensured that those managers have a very detailed knowledge about the strengths and vulnerabilities across the council. It has meant that operational managers have needed to relate their performance data with the services to individual children and it has provided a useful channel of communication between the centre and the districts/areas. District variation within areas will be highlighted and the Safeguarding Unit will lead on the preparation for each session ensuring there is available statistical analysis, a collation of information from IROs, CP chairs, relevant service user feedback and area-based file analysis to ensure a rounded picture is accessible- with an appropriate balance between qualitative and quantitative information.

Deep Dives have helped generate a sense of ownership about and pride in the performance of each district and area for the managers concerned which has contributed to improved and improving performance.

3.5. Practitioner Engagement

There has been a major shift since 2010, demonstrated in our current Social Work Contract efforts, and previous Improvement work, to more actively engage our practitioners in the development of the Service.

We have made 'Right People, Right Service' at the centre of the Social Work Contract. This commitment is particularly reflected in the Practice Development

Programme, and in changes to the Deep Dive process but also in two other key developments:

Firstly, we have appointed two Principal Practitioners (as set out by Munro). One is a longstanding KCC employee and the other recruited externally. Their central role will be to engage front line staff in our practice improvement (Social Work Contract) work. Secondly, we have formed an 'Expert Practitioner Reference Group'. As described, it brings together staff from across the County to work with senior managers on practice development. The Expert Practitioner Reference Group have, for example, been having a significant contribution to the new ICT system; Liberi, and the implementation of the Children and Families Assessment.

The Social Work Contract will also sets out the role of the Principal Practitioners and will form the basis of our response to the new flexibilities expected in the revised version of 'Working Together'.

4. Financial Implications

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

An additional grant of £70K has been awarded to Kent from the Children's Improvement Board, to pay for further improvement works (i.e. the Practice Development Programme).

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. Equality Impact Assessments

There are no issues to report on this.

8. Risk and Business Continuity Management

A risk register has been established and maintained.

Key strategic risks we need to mitigate against are:

- There will be a period of adjustment and transition during the implementation of the new ICT system, Liberi. Practice guidance has been issued to all staff for 'downtime', and floor walkers will be on hand to ensure business continuity.
- 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

9. Consultation and Communication

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

10. Inspection

The Children in Care service has been inspected between 15th and 19th July 2013. The overall Service reached the benchmark of 'Adequate' with a 'Good' capacity to improve.

"The senior leadership team has risen to the task and demonstrates a firm resolve to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people. The recent restructuring of services for looked after children into four localities has been carefully considered. This has helped establish a strong foundation on which to build and move the service forward. There are areas of continued improvement with better practice across the service and the local authority partnership. The scale and scope of the improvements required are recognised by the council. There is cross party political support and members demonstrate confidence in the newly established senior management team to move the improvement agenda forward.....The strengths of the looked after service are known and understood across the council and by partner agencies."

All recommendations are being robustly addressed via an Ofsted Action Plan.

11. 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 and performance indicators as agreed by Cabinet. Those areas which are proving challenging are being robustly addressed, through a combination of performance and quality assurance measures, and routine scrutiny.

It is felt that the new service vision, and the development of an emergent culture of aspiration rather than acceptance, very much establishes us on the right path to achieving our objective of an 'Outstanding' service in the future.

12. Recommendations

Members are asked to NOTE this report.

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Background Documents

None