

By Peter Gilroy, Chief Executive
To Children's Champions Board – 12 February 2009
Subject Protecting children in Kent
Classification Unrestricted
Ref

Summary This report introduces the Executive Summary of the first phase of a review of the protection and safeguarding of children in Kent

FOR DECISION

1. Attached to this report is the Executive Summary of the first phase of a review of child protection and safeguarding services in Kent. This review has been undertaken in response to two events in late 2008.
2. First, there was a request from the Secretary of State, following the publication on 1 December 2008, of the urgent Joint Area Review (usually referred to as the mini-JAR) into events surrounding the death of Baby P in Haringey in 2007 for all councils with statutory children's social care responsibilities to undertake their own internal quality-assurance reviews.
3. Secondly, County Council on 11 December 2008 resolved to seek its own urgent review of "high risk" cases in line with criteria suggested by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and examine the robustness of local child protection arrangements.
4. These two sets of requirements have been consolidated into the review plan attached to the Executive Summary. Additionally, Members will need to be aware that events, nationally and more locally, with regard to the Integrated Children's System (ICS) are rapidly evolving with both Chief Executives and Directors of Children's Services across the region publicly voicing serious reservations in recent days about the system and the new national Workforce Strategy Group being tasked by the Secretary of State to also re-assess its fitness for purpose as a first priority.

5. The full report of this, the first phase of a more comprehensive review, will be published on Friday 6 February. Members will appreciate the need for the review team to double-check the accuracy of the contents of the detailed report, which has not been achievable in time for publication by the 5 clear day deadline required under Access to Information rules.
6. The full report will set out a number of recommendations for action, focussing on building capacity and support for front-line staff, with an emphasis on strengthening competence through training, supervision and professional audit. These are reproduced here in full
 - Recommendation 1 - We recommend an extension of the case-audit work to a larger sample of comprehensive (ie electronic and hard-copy) case-files over the next 5-6 weeks so that a higher level of confidence can be attached to the case-audit findings and that a further quality-assurance report be submitted to Members at a time to be agreed.
 - Recommendation 2 – We recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the work already initiated to rationalise, simplify and streamline the use of ICS exemplars is expedited and that interim guidance is provided to all relevant staff to stabilise recording practices in respect of electronic and hard-copy records.
 - Recommendation 3 – We recommend the planned ending of the practice whereby only social work practitioner staff are permitted to undertake data-entry on ICS. This would be a significant change and the managers of CSS will need to satisfy themselves that sufficient administrative and support staff in local teams have been suitably trained prior to the change of practice being implemented. We would not discourage practitioners from using the system where is agreed with their supervisory staff to be an effective and productive use of their time.
 - Recommendation 4 – In increasing the practitioner establishment of local teams, we recommend that provision is made for strengthening professional supervision through the role of senior practitioners. We further recommend the re-instatement of Area Consultant Practitioner posts, managed within Areas but with a clear practice development and quality assurance accountability to the Policy & Performance Unit. We recommend that Area Consultant Practitioners are tasked with strengthening pre- and post-qualifying training by actively developing links with Kent's local universities.

- Recommendation 5 - We recommend the establishment of a senior consultant practitioner post, in a corporate 'head of profession' advisory role, reporting directly to the Chief Executive, as part of the necessary checks and balances. Details of this post will be subject to further deliberation.
- Recommendation 6 – We recommend that as part of the authority's own performance monitoring regimes, the Policy& Performance Unit are asked to devise an annual programme of practice audits, the results of which are to be publicly reported to CFE Policy Overview Committee and County Council and Cabinet as appropriate.
- Recommendation 7 – We recommend that that the Chief Executive leads on strategic discussions with the Vice Chancellors and Deans of Social Work Schools and the Director of Children Services to develop improved pre- and post-qualifying training specifically on child protection social work practice for the benefit of those practising in Kent.

Members of the Children's Champions Board are asked:-

- (i) to NOTE the contents of this report;
- (ii) to CONSIDER the findings of the Executive Summary (attached) and the full report to be published on 6 February;
- (iii) to DECIDE what further steps they wish to be taken in terms of reporting.

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