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To: Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee -  
3 December 2014

Subject: Action Plans arising from Ofsted inspection

Classification: Unrestricted

Previous Pathway: Children's Services Improvement Programme

Electoral Division: All

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## Summary

This report provides Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee with an update on progress regarding the 'improvement journey' of Kent's services for children and young people, encompassing the collective efforts of both Specialist Children's Services, and Early Help and Preventative Services.

Members are asked to **NOTE** the progress that has been made since the last report.

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is the eighth regular report to Cabinet Committee on progress made in improving practice and performance in services provided to children and young people in Kent. The last report of this nature, was December 2013, and outlined progress to that date.
- 1.2 These reports previously had a specific focus on the Children's Services Improvement Programme (CSIP); a programme designed to manage, and drive forward work-streams to address the issues highlighted by the 2011 Improvement Notice.
- 1.3 As a result of mutual agreement between the Department for Education (herein DfE), Liz Railton, Chair of the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Improvement Board (herein Improvement Board), and KCC; the Improvement Notice was lifted in December 2013.
- 1.4 Children's Services remain committed to improving the quality of outcomes for children, young people and their families. One of the top 3 priorities for Specialist Children's Services remains "Continue to improve the quality of social work practice; keeping all children and young people safe." (Social Care Health and Wellbeing Directorate Strategic Priorities Statement 2014-15).

- 1.5 Since 2012, KCC Specialist Children's Services have undergone five further Ofsted inspections:
- Fostering Services – published report 31 July 2012 (adequate)
  - Children in need of help and protection (Safeguarding) – published report 15 January 2013 (adequate)
  - Adoption support services – published report 18 June 2013 (adequate)
  - Children in Care / Care Leavers – published report 23 August 2013 (adequate)
  - Thematic Inspection of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) – joint national report expected to be published November 2014
- 1.6 Action plans were put in place to respond to each of the priorities recommended by Ofsted for further development, after each inspection.
- 1.7 In order to robustly monitor and quality assure the improvements being made against these actions, regular updates on progress with the Ofsted Inspection Action Plans have been submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel, the Children's Services Improvement Panel, and Kent Integrated Children's Services Board.
- 1.8 It is clear Kent remains on an 'improvement journey', and there is work still to be done if we are to meet the collective aspiration to achieve a "good" Ofsted rating.
- 1.9 This report replaces the former CSIP update to Cabinet, but retains the focus on the Children's Services improvement journey as a whole. This report acts as a broad position statement - setting out where we believe the service to be, the progress made since December 2013, and the direction of travel looking forward to 2015.

## **2. Key Developments**

### **2.1. The Improvement Notice Assurance Review**

When the DfE lifted the Improvement Notice placed on KCC in 2011, it was agreed that the independent Chair of the Improvement Board, Liz Railton, would return in 2014 to review Kent's progress in relation to 'key enablers for practice improvement' and the achievement of better outcomes for children and young people. The review took place in July 2014, with the aim of affirming the work progressed since the Improvement Notice was lifted in December 2013.

As part of this process, Jonathan Pearce (previous Chair of the Adoption Sub-Group) also conducted a review of Kent Adoption Services' improvement journey.

The key enablers subject to review were:

1. Recruitment and retention of qualified social workers
2. Learning and development opportunities
3. Quality assurance and performance management
4. Implementation of a new information system for children's social care (Liberi)

5. Multi-agency contributions, particularly Early Help and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
6. Implementation of Kent Safeguarding Children Board's 2013\14 business plans, particularly quality assurance and performance management across agencies
7. Effective and timely planning for and achievement of permanent families for children in care (CiC)

This review set out to answer the question:

*“Has the work intended to improve the quality of Safeguarding and Children in Care Services across Kent continued according to plan and what evidence has KCC and KSCB been able to assemble about the impact so far of their plans for improvement?”*

Overall, Liz Railton felt there was a “positive picture of an improvement journey that remains largely on track albeit with the continuing challenge of delivering good services across the large county of Kent.”

Over 55 documents were submitted in total. The breadth of KCC's submitted evidence, demonstrated the strong focus by elected Members and officers on sustaining the level of progress made to date. It was clear from the interviews conducted with senior managers and focus groups of front-line staff that there has been any let-up in the pace of activity. Scrutiny and challenge of practice and performance is clearly embedded into business-as-usual activity.

One of Kent's primary strong points was the strength of our self-assessment, and that we 'know our own story'. Particularly positive progress was highlighted in the Adoption Service, recruitment and training of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs), the Virtual School Kent, and in the embedding of quality assurance measures.

Areas for further development were identified as:

- Ensuring supervision continues to develop as a reflective activity, and does not become overly task focused or lacking in analysis
- Recruitment and retention of experienced social work qualified staff, to complement the successful recruitment programmes for NQSWs.
- The timeliness, responsiveness and accessibility of CAMHS assessments and treatments.
- Further incorporation and integration of adoption processes into Liberi. It was also noted that more broadly, further adjustments are required in order for the service and front-line staff to utilise the full potential of the Liberi system.
- Further developing the range and volume of post adoption support services.

It was recognised by the Improvement Notice Assurance Review that KCC is taking appropriate steps to address these issues.

## 2.2. Annex A Peer Review

KCC joined a self-evaluation and Peer Review of Ofsted Annex A preparations in October 2014. Annex A is the documented performance information required to support the lead Inspector to understand the work of the local authority. Annex A comprises of some twenty two specific numerical data requests, and thirty written pieces of evidence.

The Peer Review was run by the South East Region Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP). This is a forum of local authorities from across the south east, with a work programme based on data bench-marking, action-learning, peer challenge, self-assessment and appraisal. SESLIP, alongside the Local Government Association (LGA) and Solace work to achieve a coherent and consistent self-improving system for Children's Services. West Sussex led Kent's review.

An 'Annex A' key findings self- assessment report was submitted to West Sussex's Peer Review team. The document provided a useful position statement. Any areas of Annex A which were under development were highlighted within this report, with an accompanying narrative of why this work was in the process of receiving further, targeted attention:

1. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is currently being refreshed; this work is due to be complete by December 2014. SCS, Children's Commissioning and Public Health are working together to ensure the update is child-focussed and covers all necessary areas of need.
2. The CAMHS strategy scope has been widened to focus on Emotional Health and Wellbeing. This strategy is currently out to consultation;
3. The Sufficiency Strategy is currently under review as a result of the Council's collaborative 0-25 Unified Programme work with Newton Europe
4. Multi-agency audits are due to be completed by the KSCB (Kent Safeguarding Children Board) by late 2014/ early 2015

The Peer Review was an extremely valuable activity for Kent, allowing the opportunity to benchmark our performance against that of other local authorities. The review raised a number of minor data quality and data reporting issues; as a result these have been amended and resolved.

### **3. Ofsted Thematic Inspection of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)**

- 3.1 Following on from the recent report by Alexis Jay OBE into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham between September and October 2014, Ofsted also conducted eight thematic inspections of how Local Authorities are tackling Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).
- 3.2 Rotherham, Rochdale, Bristol, Luton, Oldham, Camden and Brent as well as Kent, were all inspected.
- 3.3 Kent's CSE Thematic Inspection took place between 13 and-17 October. This was a targeted one week inspection, and not the full four week inspection under the Single Inspection Framework. As a result, there will not be a Kent-specific inspection report published.
- 3.4 Evidence collated from all eight enquires will form the basis of a single published report, highlighting best practice and areas which, nationally, local authorities need to improve upon in order to keep children safe.
- 3.5 Feedback was issued by Her Majesty's Inspectors verbally to senior managers, Friday 17 October. Key observations were:
  - In the 18 cases that were tracked, the interventions brought about improvements for the child.

- Ofsted Inspectors praised the quality of Kent and Medway Safeguarding Children Boards' [CSE Risk Assessment Toolkit](#), [Sexual Exploitation Procedures](#) and [CSE Strategy](#); although noted their utilisation in front-line practice was not always as evident as it could be.
- There continue to be variances in practice across the County. This echoes the findings of Liz Railton's Assurance Review, that there continue to be challenges in delivering consistent services across a county the size of Kent.
- Although return interviews are happening, this practice is not always routine and the quality of the interviews is inconsistent. At the moment there is also not a mechanism to analyse this activity across the county.
- Ofsted were pleased that Kent had a CSE and Trafficking sub-group in place; however felt that the progress of the group would be further assisted by a detailed work plan. The Ofsted Inspectors also felt a detailed self-assessment of the partnership's collective CSE activity; both preventative and reactive would be beneficial to ensure efforts are joined up on a strategic level.
- Ofsted were particularly impressed by the coordinated joint investigation with the Police that took place earlier on this year as part of Operation Lakeland. They have indicated an interest in using this work as a good practice template once criminal proceedings are concluded.

3.6 Issues identified which pertain to the Kent Safeguarding Children's Board (KSCB) will receive additional scrutiny from a further SESLIP Peer Challenge review due to be conducted in December 2014.

#### **4. Children's Services Improvement Plan April 2014-April 2016**

4.1 Outstanding recommendations from all five Ofsted inspections, learning from our own quality assurance processes, and actions arising from recent audit activity have been collated into a single Children's Services Improvement Plan. This plan was agreed by SCSDivMT in August 2014, and as a result, there has been a renewed cross-directorate focus on this work.

4.2 The plan is based around five key themes:

- (1) Quality of Practice
- (2) Effective Front Door
- (3) Effective Early Help
- (4) Improved Outcomes for Children in Need and those in need of protection
- (5) Improved Outcomes for Children in Care

4.3 In line with Kent's challenges around consistency of practice, different districts face different challenges. This is the result of a variety of factors: variances in demographic need, localised variances in process, staffing challenges, management changes, and relationships with partner agencies/ providers.

- 4.4 This Improvement plan has been shared internally. Individual districts have since begun to formulate their own localised plan to target areas which require further attention. This continues to be assisted by the increasing breadth of management information available from Liberi.
- 4.5 There is a strong focus throughout the Improvement Plan on quality, and consistency. There is excellent work happening within Specialist Children's Services, however challenge remains in ensuring local innovation and expertise is shared across Kent's considerable expanse..
- 4.6 The Children's Services Improvement Plan is closely aligned to the Transformation Agenda (0-25 Unified Programme), and the current partnership work with Newton Europe. In reducing back office processes, and streamlining service delivery, it is hoped this will create a more flexible service, enabling practitioners to have more contact time with children and families.

## **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 There are no financial implications.

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1 General progress has continued to be made since the lifting of the Improvement Notice and the majority of the targets and performance indicators as agreed by Cabinet are being met. However, there are some areas where progress is proving to be more challenging and identified shortfalls are being urgently addressed in expectation of Ofsted's return.
- 7.2 Experience from the recent thematic inspection has shown that the benchmark applied by Ofsted has been raised with any practice falling short of good viewed as requiring improvement. In line with this we are striving to develop a culture of aspiration that is intolerant of poor practice and entirely focused on the consistent attainment of good practice standards.

## **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1 Members are asked to **NOTE** the progress that has been made since the last report.

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## **Background Documents**

- Children's Services Improvement Plan April 2014-April 2016