

From: **Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services**

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To: **Cabinet, 16 September 2013**

Subject: **Specialist Children's Services - Update**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Electoral Division: All

Summary: The report sets out the successful progress in the delivery of safeguarding services to children in Kent by KCC and its partners, giving an overview of progress since the highly critical Ofsted inspection report in 2010 and the subsequent imposition of an Improvement Notice. It summarises the positive outcomes from all four subsequent Ofsted inspections and the further steps that are being taken to build on this progress.

Recommendation: Cabinet is asked to note and comment on:

1. The progress made in improving outcomes of vulnerable children in the county as detailed in the four Ofsted inspection reports.
2. The areas where continued improvement is needed to further raise standards.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The council has delivered on its commitment to improve its services to vulnerable children in the last 3 years. This report provides Cabinet with an overview of that progress as confirmed by Ofsted in its last four inspections of the county wide services. It also informs Cabinet of the key areas that will be focused on as part of the progression from "adequate" to good and outstanding.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 There are no direct financial implications from this report although, as noted in the budget monitoring reports, there have been and continue to be financial implications to the council in improving these services to children.

3. Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework

- 3.1 As set out in *Bold Steps for Kent*, the successful improvement of these services is a fundamental part of the council's commitment to delivering Bold Steps for the vulnerable.

4. The Report

Background

- 4.1 Members will recall that the 2010 inspection by Ofsted into children's services highlighted a considerable number of concerns not least the extent to which children in Kent were being appropriately safeguarded. It concluded that

services to safeguard children and to those in the Council's care were 'inadequate'. This judgment resulted in the issuing of an Improvement Notice from the Government which set out a range of targets and areas for improvement. Progress against the Notice was to be monitored by an independently chaired Improvement Board.

- 4.2 Since the 2010 Ofsted Inspection, Kent's improvement journey can be understood as having three distinct phases. These are not, in reality, completely separate stages; instead they represent tranches of work which have built on each other to establish, maintain and develop the changes necessary to improve the service. As a result, the activities described below were present in all three phases. As a natural part of our progression, the Improvement Programme has shifted focus over time.
- 4.3 **Phase 1** – immediately following the Ofsted inspection and running to October 2011, culminating in an Unannounced Inspection into Referral and Assessment. Work focussed on clearing over 2000 unallocated cases, reducing individual caseloads and addressing cases of most concern. This phase can be understood as *'remedial and responding to a service in crisis'*
- 4.4 **Phase 2** – from October 2011 to July 2012. Building on the success of Phase 1, the Council moved to construct a new service fit for future delivery; that responded to the expectations set out in the Munro report (especially in relation to the offer of early help); ensured there were local senior management teams capable of understanding and improving on practice standards and that allowed for the development of quality of service provision to children in need, those in need of protection and children in care. This phase was about *'stabilising, consolidating and building the new service'*
- 4.5 **Phase 3** – from July 2012 and continuing. This phase is designed to build on the new structure, reduced and managed workloads and the increased stability in the workforce and the focus is more and more on practice standards and building a long term quality service. This period is understood as moving from *'improvement to transformation'*
- 4.6 There has therefore been a considerable amount of work undertaken since 2010 and a substantial change in personnel especially at the senior levels. Members have maintained a substantial involvement in the improvement journey through the work of the 'Children Services Improvement Panel' as well as by individual Cabinet and backbench members. The need to improve the safeguarding of our most vulnerable children has always benefited from cross-Party support and that continues to be true now.
- 4.7 Key Improvements since 2010 include:
- **Service restructure** – There has been a complete restructure to a service that is better equipped to meet the needs of children needing safeguarding and children in the care system. Of particular note is the creation of more coherent early intervention service with a seamless journey for children in and out of social care; the creation of a dedicated service for children in care and a complete change in middle and senior management roles (and in some instances, personnel).
 - **Central Referral Unit** – A new multi-agency Central Referral Unit has been set up with full contribution from all key partners. It is now established as a

model of good practice that attracts a lot interest from other local authorities as something they wish to emulate

- **Performance Management** –Progress since 2010 has been driven by a very robust, detailed and now embedded culture of performance management and quality assurance. A new QA Framework has been agreed within the service (and tabled at the Improvement Board) which updates that work and sets out a programme of work to be routinely carried out across the service. At the heart of the framework is the quarterly ‘Deep Dive’ process which 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.
- **Performance** – As measured through KPIs, performance is now comparable with other LAs and compares well nationally, for example the 2012-2013 scorecard showed the completion of initial assessments on time up from 73% in 2011 to 91%, core assessments timeliness up from 49% to 87%, children see during initial assessments up from 61% to 92% and the re-referral rate dropped from 31% to 23%.
- **Adoption** – The service has significantly increased the number of children placed for adoption, with 143 being placed in 12/13. This is a more than 50% increase over the 68 placed in 11/12. Similarly the number of children adopted in 12/13 has increased to 105, a 50% increase from the 70 children adopted in 11/12.
- **Staff morale and confidence** – Staff report they feel more supported and are working in a safer organisation than hitherto – in a recent survey, 94% of staff reported they received supervision on a regular basis and that it was outcome focussed with clear remit and focus on child/ young person.
- **IT system** – In 2010 the IT system used by Children’s Services was subject to much criticism and whilst some improvements have been made to aide functionality, a new system has been procured and a major migration programme is underway with a ‘go-live’ date of 9th December. The new system reduces the bureaucratic burden on practitioners and will free up more of their time for working with children and families

Ofsted Judgements

4.8 Since 2010, Ofsted have undertaken four inspections of county wide services and made the following key findings:

4.9 **July 2012 Fostering – ‘Adequate’ overall with ‘good’ for outcomes and leadership and management**

- The fostering service is effective. Children and young people are benefiting from holistic care packages which are derived from a multidisciplinary approach. Improved communication between professionals has resulted in changing needs being recognised at an earlier stage.
- Great emphasis is placed upon keeping young people safe alongside providing them with opportunities for personal growth and development.

- The service benefits from strong leadership and management. Strategic monitoring and planning recognises the strengths and weaknesses of the service. Necessary changes are being implemented in a timely manner. A number of changes remain in their infancy, with the full impact yet to be fully realised.
- The entire service is working tirelessly to support the progress made, with the well-being of Kent's children as its driving force."

4.9 **January 2013 Safeguarding – ‘Adequate’**

- Senior leaders within the council, supported by strong and well-informed political leadership, have delivered a significantly improved response at the point of referral to children's social care services from an earlier low baseline. In consequence, children who are at risk of harm are protected by effective initial screening and prompt subsequent action by the council and police services.
- Children are almost always seen and seen alone in child protection investigations and both initial and core assessments.
- A workforce development strategy has reduced vacancy rates through a range of initiatives including overseas recruitment and a 'grow our own' policy. While there remain significant difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced staff to some posts and some areas, the council has adopted an appropriately determined stance, preferring to employ good locum staff rather than appointing weak candidates to permanent posts. It has also taken a robust stance on poorly performing staff, a number of whom have now moved on from their posts.
- Children requiring protection receive a more assured initial response than previously, with risk identified in a timely and effective way.
- The council has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. It has used the improvement plan that followed the notice to improve issued in 2010 to prioritise and focus improvement activities.
- It has a comprehensive approach to gathering and analysing performance data and has used this to drive improvements, for example in the timeliness of assessments.

4.10 **June 2013 Adoption – ‘Adequate’ overall and ‘good’ for outcomes and leadership and management**

- The service formed a very positive and productive partnership with Coram, whose involvement is described by staff as 'inspirational and incredibly energising'.
- Major restructuring has resulted in significant improvements in many areas. The service is now much more effective and there are some elements of sound and consolidated good practice; for example, in management monitoring, developments in education policy and the virtual school.
- Elected members, managers and staff are fully committed to adoption and demonstrate a high level of understanding, skills, experience and qualifications to enable them to provide an effective service.
- Leaders and managers are ambitious for the service and have a good and realistic understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Since the last inspection they can demonstrate a number of improvements which have resulted in positive outcomes for most children.

4.11 **August 2013 Children in Care – ‘Adequate’ with ‘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.

4.12 In addition, the service was subject to a Peer Review in November 2012 and key headlines from that process included:

- A summary of the overall key conclusions of the peer team was that Kent County Council and its partners are working together well through a period of significant change and previous poor safeguarding performance.
- There is acknowledgement that this is a transitional period for the local authority with an improvement plan looking at better ways of working whilst maintaining a focus on partnership working throughout these changes
- The peer review team acknowledge the fundamental issues that needed addressing and the hard work undertaken over the past two years by the authority in terms of the scale of improvement required.

5. **Conclusions**

5.1 The summative effect of the Ofsted judgements is that all the requirements of the Improvement Notice(s) have been met. That said, there remains much to do if the service is to progress beyond ‘adequate’ to become good and outstanding. In particular, continued improvements are needed in the following areas:

- **Consistency of practice** - Raising the quality of social work practice up to a more consistent level across the County remains an area of further work. Practice audits identify some very good practice taking place but there remains a level of inconsistency across the service as a whole which remains the subject of continued management attention. A new ‘Social Work Contract’ has been developed which is designed to focus on quality and effectiveness of practice and this contract forms the body of the current improvement plan
- **Services to care leavers** – The most recent Ofsted inspection was critical of the services to care leavers, a service currently outsourced to Catch 22 and there are on-going discussions with that organisation about the improvements needed for this group of vulnerable young people
- **Staff Recruitment** – Recruitment of staff, especially of experienced social workers and first line managers remains a challenge especially in some parts of the County. Recruitment activity is driven by a new micro-site and rebranding work and the positive Ofsted outcomes will help but it remains a competitive market at this level and we are competing with the south London boroughs and other neighbours and recruitment into the east of the County will always be difficult.

- **Mental Health Services** – Partnerships are increasingly effective but there remains a challenge in the delivery of a consistent, timely and effective Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) across the County and work is underway with health colleagues
- **Early intervention & Prevention** – There has been a substantial investment in early intervention and whilst there is growing evidence that it is offering a good service to vulnerable families, there has not yet been the anticipated reduction on the children in care population. These services need to be closer aligned to the work of the children’s centres and pulling together the current consultation underway with the development of the 0-11 service development is a major change programme for SCS to lead on over the coming months
- **Financial management** – Delivering the services within the agreed cash limits and identifying future savings is one of the key challenges for the service. A diagnostic has been commissioned and is currently underway and the senior management team will be working with the consultants on the outcome of that work

6. Recommendation

Recommendation: Cabinet is asked to note and comment on:

1. The progress made in improving outcomes of vulnerable children in the county as detailed in the four Ofsted inspection reports.
2. The areas where continued improvement is needed to further raise standards.

7. Background Documents

7.1 None

8. Contact details

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