

CABINET

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OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN 3 MONTH UPDATE REPORT

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mike O'Brien, Children's Services

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Summary

An Ofsted inspection of the local authority arrangements for the protection of children in Medway took place between 7 and 16 January 2013. The Ofsted report was published on 15 February 2013. This report provides a summary of the actions in the first 3 months since the inspection.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 This report provides the Cabinet with the findings from the January 2013 Ofsted unannounced inspection into the arrangements for the protection of children in Medway.
- 1.2 All English Local Authorities which were previously rated as 'adequate' in their last Safeguarding and Looked after Children's Inspection, have been or will be, inspected under this single agency Ofsted framework by the end of May 2013.
- 1.3 The inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

2. Background

- 2.1 Ofsted revised the criteria for inspection in April 2012, with a significantly higher bar, more rigorous attention to individual case work, no notice and a focus on safeguarding.
- 2.2 The inspection in January 2013 considered key aspects of a child's journey through the child protection system, focusing on the experiences of the child or young person, and the effectiveness of the help and protection that they are offered. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the multi-agency arrangements for identifying children who are suffering, or likely to suffer

harm, from abuse or neglect; and for the provision of early help where it is needed. It also considered the effectiveness of the local authority and its partners in protecting these children if the risk remains or intensifies.

- 2.3 The Inspector scrutinised case files, observed practice, spoke with children, their families, social workers, managers and other professionals. They analysed performance data, management information and business plans such as the one for the Medway Safeguarding Children's Board.
- 2.4 The inspection found no child to be at immediate risk of harm. In the summary that accompanied the full inspection report, the inspector commented that:
- The new senior managers who run Medway children's services are very clear about the changes they need to make so that life is better for children and families in the area. The new senior managers know that the pace of improvement from different services has been too slow. They want to make changes rapidly and have made an early start. Some important changes include explaining their plan to workers to make sure they understand the new ways of working to help and protect children.
 - People and different services who work with children and families in Medway are passionate about their job. Any children who are at immediate risk of harm are protected by their social worker and other services.
 - Children and families who find life difficult and ask for help are put in touch with services that make real differences to their lives. Children's centres and family support workers play a very important role in helping to identify children and families who need help and provide support quickly and early to stop the problems getting worse.
 - Most parents who met inspectors are highly appreciative of the support, help and guidance they receive from family social workers, children's centres and other services.
 - Meetings to discuss how best to protect children at risk of harm are well led. Parents are given the opportunity to take part and give their views when decisions are made about protecting their children.
 - There is strong political support from elected members and at a corporate level from the Chief Executive.
- 2.5 However, the current provision in Medway was judged to be inadequate across all four domains of the current inspection framework.
- 2.6 The Ofsted report sets out actions that needed immediate attention, those to be address in 3 months and those to be addressed in 6 months or longer. These can be best summarised in terms of leadership; staffing; systems and processes and quality of practice. Actions against these areas will be outlined below

3. Actions in the first 3 months: Leadership

- 3.1 A Children's Improvement Board has been established. This is chaired by an Independent External Chair, Jane Held. Jane Held has considerable experience and expertise in safeguarding and service improvement. The Improvement Board has a range of key statutory partners on this board from health, police and schools alongside strong elected member presence with the Leader of the Council, the Lead member for Children's Services, the

Cabinet Portfolio Holder for children's social care, the Chief Executive and the Director of Children and Adults Services. An external Director of Children's Services has been asked to join the Improvement Board to provide additional external challenge and build on the successful sector lead approach to service improvement. The external Director of Children's Services is Julian Wooster for Portsmouth Council.

- 3.2 An internal Children's Programme Board has been established to ensure that the Council is mobilising the necessary resource, maintaining focus on key activities to support the improvements that are required and that officers are held to account for delivering on these outcomes. The Chief Executive chairs the internal programme board.
- 3.3 Since the Ofsted inspection a revised version of 'Working Together' has been issued by the Department for Education. This has a section on Local Safeguarding Boards, strengthening further their role in the holding together and challenge to all partners working in children's safeguarding. It also makes the appointment of the Chair's of Local Safeguarding Boards the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Local Authority. The Chair of Medway's Safeguarding Children's Board resigned in January 2013. Medway has appointed a new Independent Chair for MSCB. The new Chair is Eleanor Brazil. She comes with considerable experience in statutory children's services and has been a Director of Children's Services in a number of large local authorities. Eleanor took up her role on the 1 May 2013.
- 3.4 Consideration was given by the Council to the management capacity within the Children and Adult's Directorate to support the improvement agenda. Full Council on 25 April 2013 agreed the establishment of a Deputy Director of Children and Adults Services and the appointment of David Quirke-Thornton to this role. The Child Protection and looked after children's reviewing service and the support to the Children's safeguarding support Safeguarding Board moves from Business Support to be under the line management of the Deputy Director. This move happened on the 1 May 2013.
- 3.5 A tendering process took place, using the Children's Improvement Board framework, to establish an external partner who could support the authority with some additional support over the two year improvement journey. The organisation that was successful through this process was Core Assets. They have, through this contract provided a Program Manager joined Medway in March 2013.

4. Actions in the first 3 months: Staffing

- 4.1 The Munro report into children's social work services emphasised the importance of relationships in children's social work, alongside competent and confident professional. It is through these relationships that change can be best affected and the wider partnership gains confidence in the networks that work together to keep children safe and enable them to thrive. In order to achieve this there need to be a strong and stable workforce.
- 4.2 A clear analysis of the base line of the number of social workers in post, the level of vacancies and turn over has now been established. Exit interviews have been re- established and are now to be a routine part of the leaving

process rather than an optional requirement. This should help over time establish a clear understanding of why staff leave.

- 4.3 Benchmarking of social workers salaries has taken place and a market supplement has been introduced for social workers that work in the referral and assessment and safeguarding teams. This was introduced from the 1 April 2013.
- 4.4 The hiring of agency workers has moved from the social care service and is now managed and overseen in one place through Human Resources Team. This relieves the managers in children's social care of a burdensome task as well as enabling a clearer oversight on cost and quality to be held in one place. This new arrangement was in place from 1 April 2013.
- 4.5 We have sought to use an agency to source some permanent qualified and experienced social workers. A request went to agencies to work with Medway on this. The specifications that have been received back to date were not satisfactory on cost, quality or the ability to deliver. We will continue to explore this as an option and conversations have happened with other authorities to learn from their experience.
- 4.6 Focus groups have been held with front line staff to engage them in the development of a strong recruitment and retention strategy and then to test out some initial ideas. This strategy should be ready by the end of May. Meanwhile recruitment continues to happen to social work posts and there is an 'open rolling' advert for qualified and experienced social workers and a ready panel to call on for interviewing.
- 4.7 A management development course has been running since February 2013 for all social work managers in child protection and safeguarding services. This has focused on reflective supervision, empowering the managers and to strengthen performance management within a child protection context. This course has been very well received by managers and has been supplemented by 1:1 confidential coaching sessions.
- 4.8 Some key senior posts have been filled by strong external candidates. A new permanent Assistant Director for Children's Social Care has been appointed, Phil Watson. Phil will join Medway on 8 July 2013. A new permanent manager for Looked After Children has been appointed, Jo Cross. Jo started in Medway on 1 April 2013. A new Assistant Director for Partnership Commissioning has been made a formal offer of employment and is due to be with us in Medway at the start of August 2013.

5. Actions in the first 3 months: Systems and Processes

- 5.1 The quality of the recording by children's social workers was reported in the Ofsted report as not consistently good enough. The poor recording did not enable the inspectors to see if work had been completed to a good enough standard. Much work has happened since the inspection to implement a new electronic recording system across children's social care. The new system is called Framework 1 and it is amongst the best systems that can be currently purchased. It is of considerable note that the 'go live' of this new system happened on 2 April 2013 – the date that it was scheduled to do so. In order to achieve this data had to be migrated, business process had to be reviewed

and all staff social workers, managers and administrators had to be trained to use the new system. Whilst there is still embedding and learning to take place this is a considerable achievement on behalf of all staff who were involved.

- 5.2 Consultation and engagement with staff in children's social care and partners has happened to consider the development of a triage approach to initial screening of referrals and to make better use of the CAF co-ordinator in this process, signposting families and referrers to appropriate service rather than into social care if an alternative route may be more applicable. A pilot went live on 29 April 2013. This will enable the model to be tested and to learn more about the patterns of referrals and re referrals. The pilot is to run for 6 weeks and will help inform a roll out of this approach.
- 5.3 The current social care service has two entry points for initial contacts, referrals and assessments and two safeguarding teams based on different sites. Through working with staff and listening to their views consideration was given to moving all the initial referral and assessment teams to one site and all the safeguarding teams to one site. This will enable a greater consistency of approach and a greater ability to manage more effectively and also to bring some economies of scale and mutual support for workers. Consultation has happened and it has been agreed that this move happen smoothly on the 14 May 2013.
- 5.4 Medway has called up the sector, that is, other social care departments to drawn down 'best practice' in relation to developing a workload management tool for social workers. This will enable stronger monitoring on the number of cases social workers are asked to work with and to ensure they had a number that is within professional boundaries, enabling the social worker to complete their work efficiently and effectively. The scheme that has the 'best fit' for Medway is one for Reading Local Authority and there is a team in Safeguarding that is 'testing' the application of the Reading model and an extension of this will happen in June with a consultation of a Medway scheme in July.
- 5.5 The performance and intelligence hub in children and adults directorate is now almost fully staffed and is responsible for collating performance data to support the business. The team has worked hard to develop some key data dashboards to enable the service to have much more accurate and timely data. Medway has now joined a SE Region benchmarking club that enables the authority to measure performance against other authorities in the region as well as nationally. This is the start of developing a performance culture where ownership of practice and practice quality sits with individual teams rather than remotely from the business.
- 5.6 An external review of the Medway Safeguarding Children's Board has been commissioned and will report in July. This will consider if the current MSCB arrangements fully meets the guidance in the revised 'Working Together' and to consider the data and quality assurance systems that are used by the MSCB to oversee the multi-agency partnership arrangements around safeguarding.

6 Actions after 3 months: Quality of Practice

- 6.1 A significant theme in the Ofsted inspection was around the inconsistency of practice and the effectiveness of analysis across the social work service. The move to single sites will support consistency as will the work that has taken place through the management development course. In addition to this there has been concentrated effort on a range of practice issues.
- 6.2 From the 1 April the social work service has moved to use a single integrated assessment. This moves away from the previous system of an initial assessment lasting up to 10 days followed by a core assessment lasting up to a further 35 days. The new single assessment is more understandable to families and helps social workers 'tell the child's story' which is a key principle in the Munro recommendations that all social work should be child focused. In order to achieve the move to this new way of working there has been much underpinning work that has happened and a new set of practice guidance developed. The new Medway practice guidance has made good use of work from 'Research in Practice' an external organisation that produces research and practice tools directly around social work services, as well as consultation with key stakeholders in Medway. The model is based on the '**5 Anchor Principles**'. These are:
- i. What is the assessment for?
 - ii. What is the story?
 - iii. What does this story mean?
 - iv. What needs to happen?
 - v. How will we know if we are making progress?
- 6.3 This approach is much less jargon ridden and therefore more understandable to families, children and partners. It has to be underpinned by 'critical thinking skills' from the social workers and there is still further work to be done to ensure all Medway social workers are confident professionals with high levels of professional curiosity.
- 6.4 A new quality assurance framework has been developed and is available in draft form. It has been consulted upon with staff and front line staff and managers have been able to shape this piece of work. A new audit tool has been developed so there will be 'independent' oversight on case work and opportunities to learn across the service what is going well, what needs to be a focus for further work and any thematic issues that are emerging across the service.
- 6.5 New guidance for strategy discussions has been developed. These too are based on the 5 Anchor Principles which will be the 'golden thread' running through the practice changes that are being embedded across the service. This new guidance was issued on 15 April 2013. A small audit took place to see how well practice had begun to change and compliance with the new guidance at the end of April and feedback to workers and managers will take place at the start of May. This process of sampling strategy discussions and feedback to workers and managers will become a new and regular approach to how the service seeks to drive through improvements and to close the inconsistency of practice.

- 6.6 The Principal Social Worker has visited all social work teams to talk through the new approach, the single integrated assessment guidance and the 5 Anchor Principles. This has been well received and social workers understand that there will be regular audits and sampling of case work in order to support the development of good practice. There are encouraging early signs of change and realistic recognition that it does take time to embed change into practice.
- 6.7 Work has been undertaken with the Child Protection reviewing service to further develop the revised approach to child protection reviews, which again makes use of the 5 Anchor Principles. Dip samples of child protection minutes are now undertaken by the manager and the findings are used in supervision with each reviewing officer. Further work is due to take place in May to further strengthen child protection reviewing conferences with the aim to make them shorter, more dynamic and with clear smart outcomes.
- 6.8 A new process map is being developed and will be completed and tested in May which looks to take in revising guidance around core group meetings and seeks to drive out any of the systems currently in place that may lead to unnecessary delays or duplication of effort.
- 6.9 The MSCB has undertaken a thematic audit in relation to children who's parents have mental health issues and are know to KMPT. The findings of this audit and the learning pints will be reported to the MSCB in May 2013.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 The Ofsted report highlighted the need to have a clear and coherent strategy around 'early help' that can then be used to support the commissioning and decommissioning of services. A good early help strategy will help the whole system that supports children in Medway understand how well we are all doing at supporting our children who need help and support. A piece of work has been commissioned via Core Assets to develop an early Help Strategy with Medway. This work has commenced and is due to be completed in June.
- 7.2 The Ofsted inspection in January focused only on the safeguarding services. We know that Ofsted are developing a new inspection framework that will inspect looked after children's services. In order to ensure that looked after children's services are serving children well a small diagnostic review has been commissioned by Core Assets. This has commenced and is due to report back early June.

8. Risk Assessment

- 8.1 The Council's primary aim is to urgently improve child protection and safeguarding services, directly addressing the findings contained in the Ofsted inspection report. In doing so, the impact of the improvement plan must be immediate to address the areas of urgent concern but also ensure that key service changes are sustained in the longer term.
- 8.2 Formal governance arrangements are now implemented to oversee the immediate and longer term service improvements, to ensure that they are delivered at the required pace of change and to the requisite standards.

Progress will be monitored very closely through the Improvement Board and will be subject to internal and external scrutiny and validation. There will be strong oversight from elected Members via the Lead Member for Children's Services.

9. Financial and legal implications

- 9.1 The Council has already agreed to invest an additional £1.1m in children's social care and specifically £350,000 to support the improvements that are needed to improve the safeguarding arrangements for children in Medway. This augments approximately £1.4m that was approved in July 2012 for the new children and adults electronic management system.
- 9.2 The Ofsted report acknowledges that there are no children at immediate risk. The Council is not in breach of any statutory duty. Legal Services will be supporting Children and Adults Services in pursuing their improvement aims, including provision of case progress statistics on a regular basis.

10. Recommendation

- 10.1 The Cabinet is recommended to note the 3 month update to the Ofsted inspection and the improvement arrangements that are being established in response to the Department for Education's improvement notice.

11. Suggested reasons for decision

- 11.1 To inform the Cabinet of the arrangements that are being implemented to secure urgent and sustainable service improvements.

Background Papers

Ofsted report:

http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/medway/051_Inspection%20of%20local%20authority%20arrangements%20for%20the%20protection%20of%20children%20as%20pdf.pdf

Working together to safeguard children - A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children

<http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00213160/working-together-to-safeguard-children>

Cabinet report/decisions 12 March 2013

<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ielIssueDetails.aspx?IId=10462&Opt=3>

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee report/decisions 26 March 2013

<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=378&MIId=2549&Ver=4>
(item 953)

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