

# **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**26 SEPTEMBER 2013**

## **OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN - UPDATE REPORT**

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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 since the inspection.

### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1 This report provides the committee with the findings from the January 2013 Ofsted unannounced inspection into the arrangements for the protection of children in Medway and an update on actions since the inspection.
- 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 The Ofsted 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.
- 2.2 Ofsted returned to Medway in July 2013 to inspect services for looked after children. The detail of this inspection will be subject to its own report,

however, there are a number of 'actions' that will come to form a single action plan.

- 2.3 The Inspection of looked after children services in July 2013 rated Medway Council's capacity to improve as 'adequate'. They recognised the hard work of staff and the active way the local authority is addressing the service improvements. Ofsted recognised that 'focused action taken to provide a solid foundation for moving the service forward'. (sic)

### **3. Update on Actions**

- 3.1 Permanent appointments made to the senior team, Phil Watson – Assistant Director, Children's Social Care started on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2013 and Helen Jones – Assistant Director, Partnerships and Commissioning started on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013.
- 3.2 Recruiting qualified and experienced social workers remains a significant challenge for Medway. The Munro report into Children's social work services emphasises the importance of relationships in children's social work alongside competent and confident practitioners. It is through these relationships that change can be best affected.
- 3.3 Considerable effort and focus on recruiting staff has taken place. There is a dedicated web campaign, rolling open adverts, follow up on any contact via the web, engaging with agencies to recruit permanent staff on a payment by result basis and a new campaign via Community Care which started on 1<sup>st</sup> September. There has been a renewed commitment to take on newly qualified social workers with a clear package of support to enable them to become fully qualified after a supported year in employment.
- 3.4 Retaining social work staff is also important. Regular focus groups and staff engagement is now established. Exit interviews take place where possible and where appropriate we seek to find ways to support social workers to remain working with us.
- 3.5 Work is well underway in developing a core professional training offer for all social workers. Medway is using the National College of Social Works professional capability framework to develop clear standards of professional practice. All social workers at Medway have now become members of the National College of Social Work. This enables them to access additional professional support and to join communities of interest.
- 3.6 An external review of Medway Safeguarding Children's Board has been completed. The recommendations from this review will be reported to the next MSCB meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2013.
- 3.7 A review of Medway Children's Trust has been completed. The review identified a general consensus that the Medway Children's Trust Board, agreed by Cabinet in November 2008, was no longer fit for purpose and there was a need to move to a more streamlined action approach, which has become possible due to recent changes in government guidance providing greater flexibility as set out in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4 of this report. This matter is still to be formally considered at Cabinet. The plan is to replace this

partnership arrangement with a more action orientated approach. Medway Children's Action Network (Medway: CAN) will be launched in October 2013. This will provide the mechanism needed to embed a comprehensive and integrated early help offer.

- 3.8 The number of re-referrals into children's social care have dropped from 32% at March 2013 to 17% in June and 19% in July 2013. This is an indication that the triage work and the quality of the assessments are improving.
- 3.9 Work has been undertaken to encourage more children over 12 years to contribute to their child protection conference. This was highlighted as particularly poor by the Ofsted Inspection. In this year to date 69% of children contributed to their conference.

#### **4. Risk Assessment**

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 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.

#### **5. Financial and legal implications**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 Although the statutory guidance on Children's Trusts was withdrawn by the Department for Education with effect from 31 October 2010, there is still a legal requirement under the Children Act 2004 for each local authority to have a Children's Trust Board. However, the withdrawal of the statutory guidance means that there is now more flexibility in how local partners may implement the Children's Trust Board requirements to reflect and meet local needs. For example, there are no longer any guidelines setting out how often the Board should meet, or what it should be called. Government guidance states that "There is no prescription about the name of the Board or that it should have a

clear and separate identity within the wider cooperation arrangements. For example, it would be possible for the Board to be a subset of another board in the local area.”

- 5.4 There is no longer a requirement on the Children’s Trust Board to prepare a Children and Young People’s Plan. However, in those areas where a Children’s Trust Board prepared and published a CYPP before October 2010 then the Board is still required to monitor the plan until the end of the plan period. In this case the Children’s Trust Board will still have to prepare an annual report about the extent to which persons and bodies have acted in accordance with the plan that year - but Government guidance states that how they undertake this activity is up to them
- 5.5 The legal duty in section 10 of the Children Act 2004 on local authorities to promote co-operation to improve the well-being of children in the authority’s area remains in force.

## **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 That the committee note the report and that any future reporting combines safeguarding and LAC inspection.

## **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](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?Ild=10462&Opt=3>

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

<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ielListDocuments.aspx?Cld=378&Mld=2549&Ver=4>  
(item 953)

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