

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET  
THURSDAY 1 APRIL 2004 AT 2.00 P.M.**

Agenda Item No.

**2**

**THE INSPECTION OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES HERTFORDSHIRE  
COUNTY COUNCIL DECEMBER 2003  
A PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND THE CSF RESPONSE**

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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**1. Purpose of the report**

Stephen Roe, Social Services Inspector and author of the report 'Inspection of Child Protection Services Hertfordshire County Council December 2003, will be presenting to Cabinet the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Inspection report. The report is circulated separately.

This report provides Cabinet with information about how CSF is responding to the Inspection Report.

**2. Summary**

This report outlines how CSF has set up a project managed process to respond to the areas for development and recommendations of the SSI Report on Child Protection Services in Hertfordshire. It also reports on progress against an action plan which has been previously agreed by CSF Board, Chief Executive HCC and the Executive Member.

**3. Conclusions**

CSF Board have accepted the findings and recommendations of the report and have put in place a project managed process to respond to the recommendations with an intent to improve practice in each part of the child protection system. Progress in meeting the recommendations is gathering pace as much of the preparatory work has now been undertaken. SSI will return to Hertfordshire in July 2004 to examine a portfolio of evidence to assess whether the recommendations are being, or have been responded to appropriately. The outcome of the

work proposed will be improved child protection services to children & families in Hertfordshire.

## **4. Background**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) conducted an inspection of Hertfordshire's Child Protection Services between 24<sup>th</sup> November and 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2003. The inspection concentrated on East and West Quadrants. SSI Inspectors provided initial feedback to the Director of CSF and senior colleagues on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2003 and provided a draft report on 9<sup>th</sup> January for comments on matters of fact. The Deputy Director (Social Care & Prevention) compiled a response to the draft report. SSI have taken a number of comments in the response into account in producing the final report "Inspection of Child Protection Services, Hertfordshire County Council, December 2003", which is published on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004. The SSI report is provided as Appendix 1 to this report.

### **4.2 Process of Inspection**

4.2.1 Prior to the inspection, SSI sent a self-assessment document to CSF for completion. This approach enables an authority to consider for itself, strengths and areas for development as well as providing a wide range of qualitative and quantitative information to SSI. The self-evaluation was completed by a group of senior officers under the chairship of the Deputy Director (Social Care & Prevention) and approved by the CSF Board.

4.2.2 Before the inspection visit, a list of names of children/families was sent to CSF, which indicated which case files and practice was to be examined. This provided an opportunity for Quadrant staff and managers to review the files and to prepare them for inspection. This was done with oversight from the Assistant Director (Local Services). SSI use this information to make judgements about practice and to shape discussions with staff and managers.

4.2.3 SSI inspect to a set of standards starting with an examination of practice, following which they move on to focused discussions with social workers, social work managers, senior staff, Director of CSF, Chief Executive Herts County Council, Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) Chair and staff and elected representatives. These activities, along with the self-evaluation and the

portfolio of evidence provided enables SSI to prepare their draft report.

#### **4.3 Response to the initial feedback and draft report**

4.3.1 Following the meeting between SSI and senior officers of CSF on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2003 at which initial feedback was given, it was clear that there were a number of areas for development which needed immediate attention. By the first week in January 2004, a project brief had been agreed by CSF Board and the Executive Member, for implementation. This project brief included a detailed action plan which considered the areas for development which had been outlined by SSI, identified what needed to change, what the success criteria might be, how the change would be achieved and the timescale. In addition, the action plan identified how the success criteria would be measured or monitored, by whom and at what frequency. This project brief is provided as Appendix 2 to this report.

4.3.2 A project management structure was set up which included a project management Board, chaired by the Chief Executive of HCC, whose membership includes the Link Inspector from SSI.

4.3.3 A Performance Action Team (PAT) was set up under the chairship of John Harris, Director of CSF, to consider the policy, managerial, operational, training, development and resource implications of the areas of development identified by SSI. The team are tasked with recommending changes in practice, management, policies and procedures, which will further reduce risks for children, improved support to families and enhance the potential for CSF to provide a seamless quality assured child protection service. The membership of the Performance Action Team consists of a diagonal slice of staff throughout the department. Members have been nominated by their line managers or others, in recognition of their high standards of practice, and in the knowledge that they could deliver the outcomes required. The expectation is that members of the Performance Action Team devote at least 1 day per week to fulfilling the terms of reference of the team.

4.3.4 A further group, named the Triangle Group was also set up. Its terms of reference is to implement the

recommendations that arise from the workings of the Performance Action Team, and to undertake specific pieces of work in response to the SSI inspection. This group is chaired by John Richards, Deputy Director CSF, and includes the Assistant Director (Local Services), 4 Quadrant Managers, Head of Childcare Practice and the Head of Child Protection.

4.3.5 In order to deliver the outcomes required, a Project Manager, Seona Gordon, was seconded from Adult Care Services to CSF to project manage the CSF response to the SSI Inspection.

4.3.6 SSI had identified a number of areas of development for the ACPC which is an inter-agency forum for agreeing how the different services and professional groups should co-operate to safeguard children in Hertfordshire and for making sure that arrangements work effectively to bring about good outcomes for children. The ACPC held an Extraordinary meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2004, to consider the findings and recommendations of the SSI Inspection, and to develop an action plan. The action plan, which ACPC have agreed, is attached to this report as Appendix 3. The Performance Action Team will receive updated reports from ACPC as to progress being made against the objectives within the action plan and PAT will ensure that actions being undertaken by different individuals or groups is co-ordinated.

4.3.7 Both the Performance Action Team and the Triangle Group meet on a fortnightly basis. Minutes and action notes of both are kept, to ensure that action which has been agreed, is undertaken and completed. Each of the members of the Performance Action Team has an individual action plan, along with targets and timescales for the work to be undertaken. This enables the Project Manager to have a clear overview of progress against targets. The Minutes of both of these groups will form an important part of the portfolio of evidence, which CSF is gathering to share with SSI on their return visit in July 2004.

#### 4.4 **Progress on the Action Plan**

4.4.1 In the paragraphs below, comment is made on the progress being made on some of the key areas for development included within the action plan.

i) *Definition of unallocated cases*

The SSI had found that there was confusion about the definition of an allocated or unallocated child protection case. The Triangle Group have drawn up a definitive definition of allocated/unallocated cases, which has been shared with and agreed by SSI. This new definition has been shared with staff both in writing, and in team meetings. It is also being discussed in supervision, to ensure that there is no confusion about what is or what isn't an unallocated case. The new definition is provided as Appendix 4 to this report.

ii) *Self Evaluation Audit of Child Protection Cases*

As stated above, the SSI inspection concentrated on East and West Quadrants, and within those quadrants only on a relatively small proportion of child protection cases. It was decided that a self-evaluation of child protection cases should be undertaken with all of the children/families on the child protection register. At the time that this decision was taken, there were 539 cases on the register. The self-evaluation used as its base the 13 quality standards to which social work in CSF is expected to adhere. The self-evaluation has been quality assured in 3 separate ways. Firstly, Group Managers have taken a 5% sample of the cases on the register to consider whether or not the assessment of performance by the social worker is an accurate one. Secondly, a further 10% random sample is being examined by an external consultant, who will verify whether or not the self-evaluation provides an accurate report of the current performance on that case. Thirdly, Team Managers in supervision with social workers, will consider the findings on all of the cases reported upon, and ensure that where necessary, performance is improved.

The Triangle Group has developed a practice note on actions to be taken against each of the standards if the self-evaluation has demonstrated that performance needs improving.

Action has been taken where the self-evaluation indicated possible concerns about safeguarding children. In each of the cases, specific additional monitoring, at Deputy Director level, has been established.

iii) *Children registered under the category of Emotional Abuse*

SSI have recommended that CSF along with the ACPC, should review decision making within child protection conferences to establish whether resource factors influence registration decisions, and whether the category of emotional abuse was used appropriately. During the past two months, all teams have been reviewing their emotional abuse cases, with a view to determining whether or not those children on the register still need to be registered. Where it is felt that the emotional abuse criteria for registration is not being met, a discussion takes place between Group Managers and the Principal Officer in the Child Protection Unit. This discussion reaches a decision on when a review should take place. All such children will have been reviewed by the end of March 2004.

iv) *The Operation of Core Groups*

Core Groups are the multi-agency team who know the family and works with them to develop the child protection plan in a detailed way, setting tasks and making sure it is implemented.

A new format and procedure for conducting Core Groups has been drawn up, and is currently being consulted upon. This format follows Department of Health guidelines. It is expected that PAT will sign off the new format and procedure during April, and that it will be implemented from May 2004. This will ensure consistency of practice and decision making.

v) *Complex Needs Assessment*

A complex needs assessment (referred to by DoH as the core assessment) is the essential planning tool which enables an in-depth assessment of the children's needs prior to developing the most appropriate response and intervention. It is therefore central to child protection work and work with other children whose needs are complex.

In response to the SSI inspection a new format and procedure for undertaking a complex needs assessment has been drawn up by members of PAT, and is currently being consulted upon. It is expected that this new format will also be implemented in May 2004. This will ensure best practice in this vital area of work.

vi) *Learning and Development*

It is clear that the actions reported on above have learning and development implications. A plan to enable learning and development to be rolled out to relevant staff has been drawn up for the PAT meeting to be held on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2004. The content of the Learning & Development programme will help to reinforce and embed the quality standards expected of all staff working within the child protection service. This will include exemplars of best practice, so that there will be no doubt what the expectations of CSF are of workers involved in this complex area of service delivery.

vii) *Information Provision*

Revisions have been made to the conference information sheet available at child protection conferences, the guidance for child protection conferences, the format of reports, a report writer checklist has been developed and the child protection registration letter has been updated. All of this information has been revised to ensure that it is provided in user-friendly language. All of these changes are expected to be operational during April 2004.

viii) *Suitability of Venues*

An audit of the suitability of the venues used for child protection conferences has been undertaken which is now being shared with multi-agency colleagues with a view to establishing whether other more suitable venues are available.

In summary, whilst there is much still to achieve, a lot of progress has been made since January 2004 which will improve the performance of all staff working within child protection. All of the work referred to as progress against the action plan, will be included in the portfolio of evidence to be provided to SSI later in the year.

## 4.5 Recruitment and Retention

- 4.5.1 Recruitment and Retention of qualified social workers is one of the key issues facing CSF at the current time. Staffing of the Quadrant teams is monitored by Quadrant managers & CSF Board on a weekly basis. The countywide position as of the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2004 is that out of a total establishment of 214 qualified social workers, there are 86 vacancies. This is a vacancy rate of 40.2%. Cover is being provided for 29 of the vacancies, leaving 57 posts completely uncovered (26.6% of establishment).
- 4.5.2 The level of vacancies means that the service remains on the margins of capacity to meet caseload requirements, even with a lower number of child protection cases on the register. Even in cases where children are de-registered, social workers are still faced with additional responsibilities as they continue to work with the family and children following de-registration for a time-limited period. This has a direct impact on the ability of the quadrants to allocate new cases of child protection.
- 4.5.3 Human Resources and Social work staff are currently in Australia recruiting up to 25 qualified social workers, who are expected to join CSF in July or August this year. In the meantime, a major campaign is being undertaken to ensure that we employ as many agency staff as possible in order to cover the vacancies. The up to date vacancy position on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004 will be provided by the Director of CSF in his presentation to Cabinet.
- 4.5.4 A report is currently being prepared which will propose a number of strategies for retaining front line social work staff. This will be submitted to the Executive Member for consideration in the next fortnight.

## 4.6 Unallocated Cases

- 4.6.1 Keeping the number of allocated cases under 5% of the register is a threshold hurdle for Social Services Performance Indicators. CSF are currently reporting on a monthly basis to SSI the number of unallocated child protection cases. At the end of January 2004, CSF reported a total of 30 cases unallocated which amounted to 5.4% of the register. At the end of February, the number of children on the register was 541, and the

number of unallocated cases totalled 24. That represented 4.4% of the registered cases. Unallocated cases are being managed through the CSF Duty System and the dedicated duty manager ensures that children are visited by a social worker, core groups are held, and reports are produced for child protection reviews. The position at the end of March will be provided to Cabinet Members by the Director of CSF in his presentation.

## **5. Implications of the response on the Performance Assessment Framework**

- 5.1 The Delivery & Improvement Statement is a key component of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) Performance Assessment Framework. The County Council's Spring Position statement will need to be completed by the end of June and will set out our baseline performance and improvement plans for the year ahead. The information which HCC provides will support the annual review that precedes performance rating decisions in the Autumn.
- 5.2 The work of the PAT in responding to the recommendations in the SSI report, and the portfolio of evidence that will be created will be considered by CSCI when determining the final assessment of performance awarded to Hertfordshire later in the year.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 A contingency of £100,000 has been made available by the Chief Executive to meet the costs of undertaking work associated with the Action Plan. Resources are only drawn down from this contingency when expenditure has been approved by the Performance Action Team. These resources cover the following items:
- Cover for team members
  - Baseline assessment using self evaluation audit
  - Team consultancy
  - Contingency
- 6.2 Proposals for providing a retention package for frontline social work staff are under consideration. These are being costed at present.
- 6.3 A review of administration tasks associated with case work has been concluded. In order to provide better support for front line staff, some workforce remodelling will be needed for which there

will be a financial cost. A report is being prepared which will identify these costs, and which will be submitted to the Executive Member for further consideration.

**Background information referred to by the author:**

1. Inspection of Child Protection Services Hertfordshire County Council December 2003.
2. A Project to respond to SSI feedback following their inspection of Hertfordshire's Child Protection Service Jan 2004.
3. ACPC Action Plan March 2003.