

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 23 JUNE 2004 at 10.00 AM

Agenda Item No.

1

RESPONDING TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SSI INSPECTION OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Report of the Director of Children, Schools & Families

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1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The Cabinet discussed the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) Report on Child Protection Services in Hertfordshire at its meeting on 1st April 2004. As part of its response to the report Cabinet invited the Children, Schools and Families (CSF) Scrutiny Committee to:
- (a) consider the inspection report and make any recommendations for service improvement;
 - (b) evaluate progress in responding to the findings from the inspection.
- 1.2 This report and its accompanying appendices provide an assessment of progress in responding to the findings and recommendations from the inspection report over the period January – June 2004. **Appendix 1, 'Responding to the recommendations of the SSI Inspection of Child Protection Services in Hertfordshire Progress Report January – June 2004'**, considers the action and progress in response to the SSI recommendation and sets out the action to be taken in the next phase of the Action Plan. **Appendix 2** provides background statistical information about the Child Protection Service.
- 1.3 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to: -
- (a) consider, in the light of the main findings and recommendations from the inspection report, the progress being made following the inspection and identify any further scrutiny that may be required;
 - (b) request a further report on progress at its meeting on 19th January 2005.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The progress report at Appendix 1 shows that the first phase of the Action Plan has laid the groundwork for system-wide change. A full revision of the casework framework has been completed. The self – evaluation and audit of all child protection cases have confirmed that variability in the quality of casework practice is the key issue for the service. This will be the main focus of Phase 2 of the Action Plan through a learning and development programme for all staff, with work-based coaching to support an intervention in practice.
- 2.2 There has been a very positive commitment from staff at all levels, and from partner agencies, to improve the quality of the service. CSF staff have worked extremely hard to support the developments in the Action Plan at a time when the high level of vacancies has meant that they have carried a heavy workload to maintain the core service. (See Appendix 2) It has been a difficult balance to spearhead development at the same time as maintaining service provision which, because of the backlog in assessment and unallocated cases, continues to be at the margins of capacity.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Overall, a robust and systematic response to the inspection has been made. It is expected that the effectiveness of our response will be reflected in the annual performance assessment of Social Services made by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) in July.
- 3.2 It is proposed that a further report is submitted to Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 19th January 2005 so that Members have a further opportunity to hear evidence from relevant parties and to question officers and the Executive Member.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) conducted an inspection of Hertfordshire's Child Protection Services between 24th November and 3rd December 2003. The inspection concentrated on East and West Quadrants. SSI Inspectors provided initial feedback to the Director CSF and senior colleagues on 10th December 2003 and provided a draft report on 9th January 2004 for comments on matters of fact.
- 1.2 The final report "Inspection of Child Protection Services, Hertfordshire County Council, December 2003" was published on 1st April 2004 and presented to Cabinet on the same day. The main findings are summarised in the box below.

SSI INSPECTION: MAIN FINDINGS

- Sound infrastructure, with well – established systems and procedures
- Positive management culture and clear accountability
- Integration of services in CSF have not yet delivered full benefits for child protection
- Inconsistency in quality of professional practice and casework management
- Concerns regarding unallocated child protection cases
- Severe recruitment and retention issues
- Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) to strengthen its audit arrangements and secure more effective multi – agency contribution
- Clear capacity to improve the service

The inspection team concluded that: ***'the council needed to transfer its focus from structural and organisational issues to addressing problems concerning the quality and consistency of direct services to families...Inspectors were confident that Hertfordshire had the capacity, determination and proven track record to tackle the range of challenges that lay ahead.'*** (SSI Report Page 4, paragraph 1.17)

- 1.3 Cabinet members were informed how CSF was responding to the recommendations via a project managed approach which had previously been agreed by CSF Board, Chief Executive HCC and the Executive Member. The project management arrangements were as follows:
- **Project Management Board**, chaired by the Chief Executive of HCC, whose membership included the Link Inspector from SSI.
 - **Performance Action Team (PAT)**, chaired by the Director of CSF. The role of PAT was to consider the policy, managerial, operational, training, development and resource implications of the areas of development identified by SSI, and recommend changes in practice, management, policies and procedures. The membership of PAT was drawn from across CSF and at all levels of staff involved in statutory child protection work.
 - **Triangle Group**, chaired by Deputy Director, Social Care and Prevention. The role of the Triangle Group was to implement the recommendations that arose from the workings of the Performance Action Team, and to undertake specific pieces of work in response to the SSI inspection. Membership included the

Assistant Director (Local Services), 4 Quadrant Managers, Head of Childcare Practice and the Head of Child Protection.

- **Project Manager** 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.

1.4 It was agreed during Cabinet meeting of 1st April 2004, that Cabinet

- i. Notes and accepts in full the report by the Social Services Inspectorate on Child Protection Services in Hertfordshire;
- ii. Approves the Action Plan in response to the inspection report as set out at Appendix 2;
- iii. Welcomes the progress to date in responding to the recommendations in the inspection report;
- iv. Invites the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee to: (a) consider the inspection report and make any recommendations for service improvement; (b) evaluate progress in responding to the findings from the inspection.

1.5 It is recommended that Members of the Scrutiny Committee may wish to focus attention on a number of key areas which are detailed in the paragraph below. It is also proposed that nominated officers give a presentation on a key area and time is given for members to ask questions of their presentation and allied issues contained within the attached report.

1.6 The key areas and presenting officers are as follows: -

- i. Overview of the project managed response – *John Harris & Seona Gordon*
- ii. The volume and variety of child protection work - *David Ring*
- iii. The self evaluation audit – *Cheryl Hopkins*
- iv. The ACPC response and action plan – *Carol Taylor*
- v. Increasing capacity in the Quadrants – *Mike Benaim*
- vi. Child Protection delivery and management framework – *Jacki Rothwell*
- vii. Learning and Development strategy – *Jean Farrer*

2. Financial Implications

2.1 The financial implications of responding to the SSI report and recommendations were set out in the report to Cabinet 1st April 2004 and in the project plan. In brief a contingency of £100k was made available to cover the following: -

- Cover for team members working on the Performance Action Team
- Baseline assessment using the self evaluation audit
- Learning and development strategy
- Team consultancy
- Contingency arrangements

2.2 In addition, given the recommendations around the ACPC the spend on the Committee is likely to grow from £52.5k to £234k, subject to partner contributions. This will improve the delivery of policy and development, training support and quality assurance/monitoring, via the establishment of 4 new posts.

2.3 Cabinet have also approved a recruitment and retention package for CSF staff which includes :

- Career progression to senior practitioner grade (£204k)
- Workforce remodelling of administrative support (£450k)
- Market supplement payments for staff in posts with statutory responsibility for child protection work (£728k)
- Improved training and development opportunities (£333k)

The full year's costs of the package assuming full staff establishment is £1.715m.

3. Background Material

1. SSI Report Inspection of Child Protection Services, Hertfordshire County Council, December 2003
2. Report to Cabinet 1st April 2004 SSI Report of Child Protection Services & CSF Response