

## **JOINT AREA REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN HEREFORDSHIRE**

**Report By: SUE FIENNES, DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S  
SERVICES**

### **Wards Affected**

County-wide

### **Purpose**

1. To advise Children's Services Scrutiny Committee of the recommendations for improvement, following the Joint Area Review (JAR) and to indicate progress so far.

### **Financial Implications**

2. The budget planning for 2006-07 does contain an allocation to support the Improvement Plan.

### **Considerations**

3. The JAR Improvement Plan has been sent to the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) to the Chief Inspector alongside the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). This was undertaken on the 9th February. We are still awaiting the outcome of their assessment of our capacity to improve given this plan.
4. If the response is available at the time of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee it will be tabled to indicate the next steps for Herefordshire. At this stage it is not possible to attach the Plan as it has not been approved as indicated above.
5. The Staying Safe judgement of inadequate is a serious concern to the Council and Partners. The improvement must deliver confidence in the area that children are properly referred and assessed against revised criteria.
6. The Strategic Monitoring Committee has indicated that they are keen to be engaged in the future monitoring of the Improvement Plan and it will be important for both Chairs of Committee to be properly briefed about the Plan as soon as the endorsement is forthcoming. The first four recommendations in the JAR report are the most critical for improving on Staying Safe.
7. The recommendations are:-
  - Recommendation 1 - ensure that appropriate criteria are set for the involvement of the LA's professionally qualified Social Care staff In child protection cases
  - Recommendation 2 - ensure that these criteria are clearly understood by all concerned and consistently applied in practice.

- Recommendation 3 - ensure that there is an effective workforce strategy to address the recruitment and retention problems within the local authority's Social Care Service.
  - Recommendation 4 - ensure that a written record is made of all contacts with the Social Care Duty Team.
8. Recommendations 1 and 2 are now developed for implementation in March. Recommendation 3 is progressing to the agreed timetable. Recommendation 4 has already been acted on.
9. There is an Annual Performance Assessment (APA) for Children's Services in Herefordshire. This is a routine assessment which happens for Herefordshire to follow on from the JAR Inspection last year. There is an opportunity for us to demonstrate and evidence the improvement for this assessment. The week of assessment for Herefordshire will be week commencing 12th June. This will be conducted by Brian Cartwright, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (Ofsted) and Lynette Ranson, CSCI.
10. Key questions for the Committee in examining the JAR report are:-
- How does the child protection system work?
  - What is the overall performance on "Staying Safe" in Herefordshire?
  - What are the revised criteria and how will they improve access into the child protection system?
  - What are the workforce implications?
11. Copies of the full JAR inspection report have been issued to Committee Members as a separate document. Copies can be made available to the public on request.
12. Further updates will be given at the time of the Committee on the 13th March.

## RECOMMENDATION

**THAT Committee note the JAR report and the progress so far and indicate their intention to undertake ongoing monitoring of progress.**

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

- JAR Report (December 2005)