

PROGRESS ON IMPROVEMENT FOLLOWING THE JOINT AREA REVIEW IN HEREFORDSHIRE

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES

CABINET

13TH JULY, 2006

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To advise Cabinet on the latest improvement position and the response to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) review report.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendation

THAT Cabinet notes the improvement and the arrangements for the regional oversight of the next stages.

Reasons

To ensure routine monitoring of the processes and actions which will deliver improved outcomes for children and young people.

Financial Implications

The allocation of a Joint Area Review (JAR) improvement budget for 2006-07 is being used to commission short-term support arrangements and will be monitored as part of routine budget/financial management.

Considerations

1. Since the last report to Cabinet on 25th May, the progress has been maintained (latest version attached at Appendix 1).
2. A service management team of permanent staff now is in place in Children's Social Care with the appointment of new Head of Service – Safeguarding and Assessment.
3. Significant progress has been made on the first 4 recommendations and DfES and the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are satisfied that this is the case. A survey is planned to assess level of understanding/acceptance of new guidance on thresholds.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Sue Fiennes, Director of Children's Services on 01432 260039

4. Recommendations 5 and 6 for development of new Common Assessment processes including pilot in South Wye is on track.
5. There are 14 areas of activity in the JAR Improvement Action Plan due by the end of June 2006. Of these 9 have been completed, 4 are on track and 1 is slightly delayed in progress but will still be completed by the end of June 2006.
6. However, steady and continuing progress is still required particularly in relation to:-
 - Permanent social work staffing.
 - Rising numbers of referrals and the trends, and capacity considerations.
 - Case allocation in the duty team.
 - Waiting list for occupational therapy developed again as a result of staff vacancies.
7. The improvement agenda for children's services is progressing well. The recent external consultancy report to DfES has been very positive about progress to date. In those areas where further progress is required – particularly in relation to performance management, information management and commissioning, additional external support is already being accessed to increase the pace and change of development.
8. The DfES response to the review report has been to confirm that the key message of this project is that the response to the JAR has been positive and services have improved as a result.
9. In order to continue the pace and progress outlined in paragraph 7, the following way forward has been agreed by the Minister:

“a small scale external support programme to ensure the project and performance management outcomes”.
10. This programme will be delivered by oversight of a challenge and support board. The board will be chaired by the Deputy Director of Children & Learners, Government Office – West Midlands (GOWM). It will include the Children's Services Advisor for GOWM and the Business Relationship Manager for CSCI. It will be linked to routine business meetings with CSCI.
11. The setting up of this board will follow the meeting with the Minister on 11th July and it is to work on the basis of the already commissioned support by the Council on project and performance management as outlined in paragraph 7.
12. It is a shared ambition between the Council, DfES and GOWM that the Board would have a stock-take at the end of December 2006 in order to decide on progress and any need/requirement for the Board to continue.

Alternative Options

There are no alternative options

Risk Management

The project document for the next stages of the improvement includes a risk log which will be considered routinely. The items in paragraph 6 are contained in the on-going risk assessment.

Consultees

Children & Young People Partnership Board
Key staff involved in the JAR Improvement Plan

Background Papers

None identified.