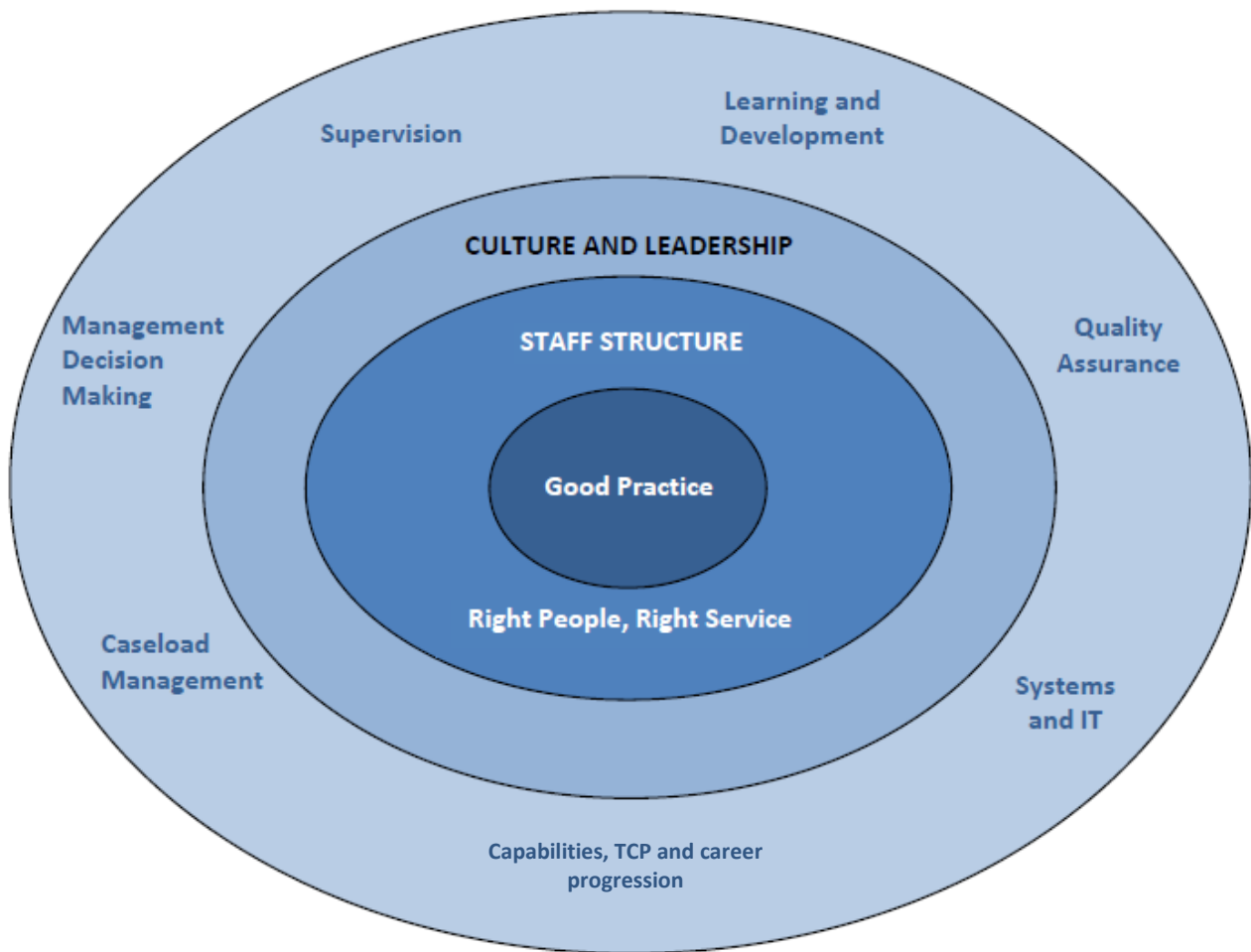


The Social Work Contract

Establishes the reciprocal arrangements between the local authority social work offer, and the standard of child-focussed practice which Kent expects and encourages

Updated December 2014





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1. The Social Work Contract in the organisational context

We have one vision, clearly articulated in 'Every Day Matters' the strategy for Children and Young People's Services 2013-2016.

One Vision

Every child and young person in Kent achieves their full potential in life, whatever their background

This section links the efforts of individuals and teams to organisational outcomes, enabling employees to have a clear idea of what is expected of them. We have high standards because we want to do our best for the most vulnerable children and young people in Kent. This starts with the bold ambition of 'Every Day Matters' and the one vision, and is reflected within the development plans of teams and individuals.

We believe that success is dependent on performance being linked to the authority's aims, and a supported, engaged and highly skilled workforce committed to the journey.

Our efforts to continually make improvements in service delivery will only happen if practitioners and teams feel:

- empowered to take decisions and use initiative,
- confident to evaluate and respond to risk,
- know what they should be doing,
- how they should be doing it and
- how what they are doing contributes to the achievement of corporate/organisational objectives

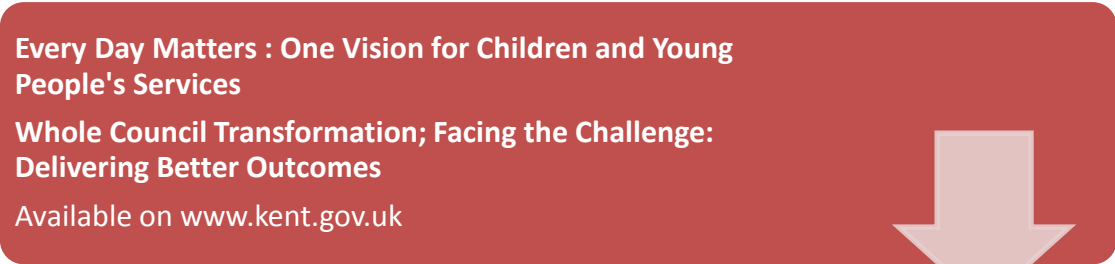
Kent's Social Work Contract brings together what we're looking for, and how we're making it happen. It is based on a two-way commitment: **the style of practice we advocate and encourage in order to achieve our objectives and our offer and support to practitioners in return for their efforts.**

In order to facilitate change, we expect a lot from our staff and it is down to their hard work and commitment that we have improved, and continue to improve, our children's services. This is a team effort.

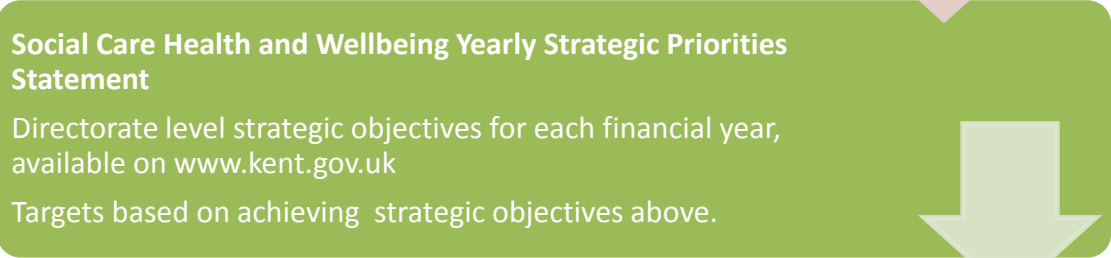
Performance is managed at the organisational level through strategic priorities, business planning, measurement and evaluation; and managed at the individual level through setting objectives, critical reflection, review, appraisal and focussed professional development.

The actions identified in this document are echoed in the plans to meet our strategic priorities e.g. Children's Services Improvement Plan and the activity of the 0-25 Unified Programme.

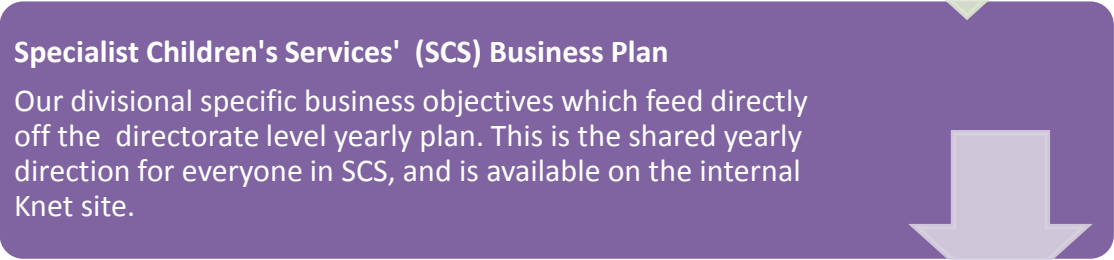
Every Day Matters : One Vision for Children and Young People's Services
Whole Council Transformation; Facing the Challenge: Delivering Better Outcomes
Available on www.kent.gov.uk



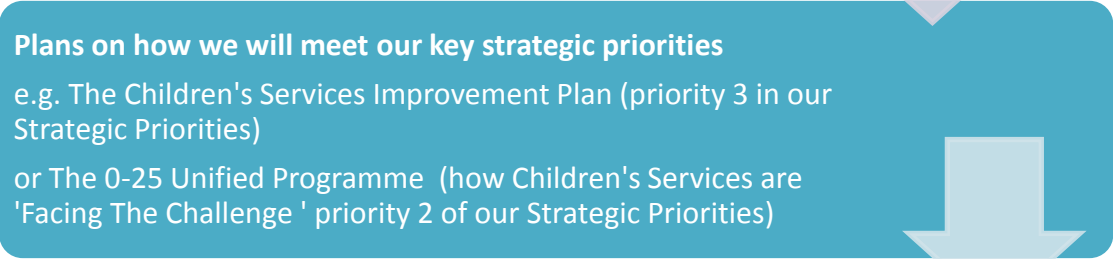
Social Care Health and Wellbeing Yearly Strategic Priorities Statement
Directorate level strategic objectives for each financial year, available on www.kent.gov.uk
Targets based on achieving strategic objectives above.



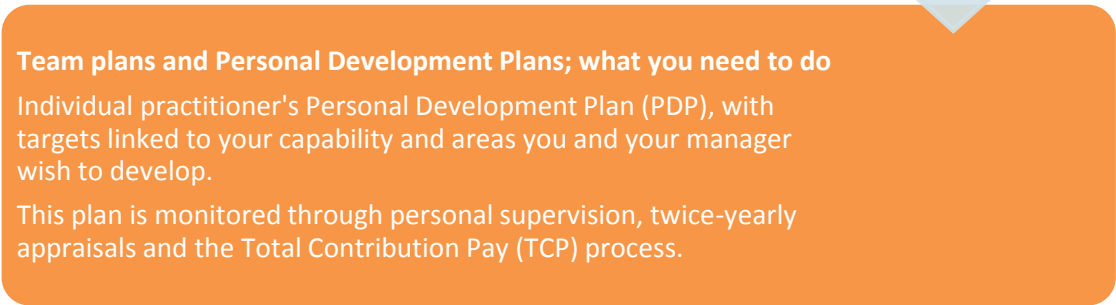
Specialist Children's Services' (SCS) Business Plan
Our divisional specific business objectives which feed directly off the directorate level yearly plan. This is the shared yearly direction for everyone in SCS, and is available on the internal Knet site.



Plans on how we will meet our key strategic priorities
e.g. The Children's Services Improvement Plan (priority 3 in our Strategic Priorities)
or The 0-25 Unified Programme (how Children's Services are 'Facing The Challenge ' priority 2 of our Strategic Priorities)



Team plans and Personal Development Plans; what you need to do
Individual practitioner's Personal Development Plan (PDP), with targets linked to your capability and areas you and your manager wish to develop.
This plan is monitored through personal supervision, twice-yearly appraisals and the Total Contribution Pay (TCP) process.



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2. Effective social work

2.1 This contract starts from a series of key assumptions:

- that children's social work is one of the hardest and most complex tasks carried out within the public sector
- that in order to carry out that task effectively it requires practitioners to give of themselves and to emotionally engage in the work
- that the work is demanding and to be done successfully it requires a high level of emotional intelligence, resilience and fortitude
- the work takes practitioners into the heart of the lives of children and their families – as such it is a privilege and a due and proper regard for the level of intimate knowledge about and involvement with those families should be evident
- that in order to carry out the task in a way which is consistent with the preceding assumptions, practitioners have a right to expect a high level of quality support, in all its forms, from the organisation within which they work.

2.2 Kent has produced [a set of practice standards](#) that covers the core social care activities and sets out against each of them the standards that are required and that our best practitioners are routinely attaining. The standards start from a definition of good practice based on a notion of 'authoritative practice'

Authoritative practice means that professionals are aware of their professional power, use it judiciously and that they also interact with clients and other professionals with sensitivity, empathy, willingness to listen and negotiate and to engage in partnerships. They respect client autonomy and dignity while recognising their primary responsibility is the protection of children from harm and the promotion of their well-being.

This is a complex definition – it is not intended as short sharp strap-line, the task is too challenging and too important for that. It does imply a style of practice that is based on:

- Increased use of professional judgement and expertise
- Increased levels of competence and self-confidence within the practitioner group who are knowledgeable and skilled in what they do
- Practice that is value-based, exhibiting care and compassion and respect
- Practice that is creative and disciplined
- Staff who can be comfortable with ambiguity, who evidence curiosity, ready to construct and test out hypotheses and generate considered and informed analyses and responses.
- Staff who demonstrate 'confident humility' – who are both confident and knowledgeable and able to learn, reflect and change
- And most importantly is focussed on helping and helping children and families change

- 2.3 This contract sets out both what is expected of our practitioners and what support and provision the organisation will put in place to support them. It builds on the outcome of Munro's review into child protection and in particular echoes the central importance of building relationships as the key vehicle to helping families change.
- 2.4 There is a need to form effective relationships with children and their families many of whom will be resistant to our involvement; many have mental health and substance misuse problems, maybe experiencing domestic violence and are parents who may have had poor experiences themselves as children. Successfully engaging with people in these circumstances is never easy but is essential, and practitioners are expected to work hard on their communication skills but, more importantly, will need to evidence and adhere to some core social work values if they are to be successful.
- 2.5 Social workers need to spend time to get next to people, to understand them and their perspective to know how they see the world and to use that contextual information to understand what happens in their families and how they parent their children. Practitioners need to be advocates for their families – many of their lives are not easy and we should do what we can to ease them including the need to advocate on their behalf with other agencies. Munro quite properly talked about helping families, seeking to make their lives better and easier is a perfectly proper aspiration. Helping families to change, to maintain safe(r) care of their children is our prime focus. This requires skilled intervention and the ability to harness a range of skills and knowledge to be effective.
- 2.6 The core task of children's social care is of course keeping children safe. This contract starts from the position that children can only be kept safe through effective working relationships with their parents and others. However, and this is the essence of the skilled practitioner, in building those relationships they are able to keep the safety of the child to the very forefront of their work. Seeking to help parents cannot be allowed to mean we lose sight of the child; wanting to build a relationship with adults cannot blind us to the fact they may keep things from us or lie to us.
- 2.7 The authority takes its' role as [Corporate Parents](#) and Champions for Kent children who are looked after, and those leaving care seriously. In order for this role to be done effectively relies upon a strong relationship between those involved in and working with or on behalf of Looked After Children, [Our Children and Young People Council](#) and the elected Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Social care staff need to develop strong professional relationships with families, Foster Carers and other user groups in order to encourage participation, ensuring voices are heard, and services are able to respond to changing needs.
- 2.8 This then captures the essence of the form of social work practice that is expected and encouraged in Kent.

- 2.9 Finally, this contract and associated supporting documents fully reflects relevant national and localised documentation, specifically:

National documentation

- The Munro Review of Child Protection: A Child-Centred System
- Health and Care Professional Council and Skills for Care expectations
- The College of Social Work - Development of Professional Capabilities
- 'High Expectations, high support and high challenge' Ofsted Report February 2012
- The Standards for employers of Social Workers in England

Kent County Council- local documentation

- KCC Children's social work practice standards
http://kentchildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_practice_standards.html
- KCC Social Care Capability Framework
- KCC staff development frameworks (including the Social Care Development Framework, and Leadership and Management Development Framework)
- [Every Day Matters, KCC's Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2013-16.](#)

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3. The organisational offer

- 3.1 If practitioners are to carry out the difficult work described in part 2 "Effective social work", they can expect to have a range of support from their managers and from the organisation as a whole.
- 3.2 It is important to remember that this offer is solely in relation to the delivery of a high quality, professional social work service – there are also broader benefits available to staff such as the 'Kent Rewards' scheme, various leave entitlements, excellent local government pension, staff counselling etc.

What follows is the offer specifically to social work practitioners from Specialist Children's Services within the Social Care Health and Wellbeing Directorate.

The 8 headings are:

- 1. Professional Leadership**
- 2. Supervision**
- 3. Management Decision-Making**
- 4. Caseloads and caseload management**
- 5. Skilled workforce- learning, training and professional development**
- 6. Competencies, professional development and Career Progression**
- 7. Systems, Processes and IT**
- 8. Quality Assurance**

3.3 These 8 elements are described in greater detail below – for some there may be separate and comprehensive documents behind the summary set out here.

3.4 Actions identified correspond with existing live plans i.e. the Children's Services Improvement Plan (page 3).

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Priority 1: Professional leadership

What this Means:

- That the senior management team in this service is committed to exhibiting and modelling good standards of social work values and behaviours.
- It starts from an assumption that the internal culture of the organisation must reflect the expectations on external service delivery.
- Leaders, senior managers and our Principal Practitioners in Kent will champion the cause of social work, defend and promote its values, share honest feedback and lead the service within the Council and across the partnerships.
- Managers will be visible and accessible and always available to discuss particularly difficult cases, to offer advice as needed, to defend the decisions taken by the service in Courts and other arenas and to ensure that the service is committed to meeting the best interests of the children and families we work with.

Staff can expect:

- To see professional leadership and can challenge senior managers where it is absent.
- To have ready access to their Team Manager, Service Manager, Assistant Director, and the Director as required
- To have ready access to coaching, mentoring, workshops and support from the Performance Improvement team- comprising of two Principal Practitioners (advocated by Eileen Munro), and a team of Performance Officers.
- That senior managers will be available to explain difficult decisions (for example, around budget reductions) in terms of the best interest of children
- Senior managers will lead on the creation and maintenance of an organisational culture which promotes and enables best practice and allows for a free flow of information and discussion up, down and across the organisation.

Our progress will be measured by:

- What you, as practitioners, think of the division's leadership and management. How supported do you feel when they are making difficult decisions?
- Deep Dives, Staff Briefings and management meetings will be used to test out the effectiveness of this leadership.

Actions for 2014-16:

- The Expert Practitioner Group led by the Principal Practitioners will continue to act as main point of contact for senior managers to the front line. The group will be utilised as a reference group to consider new policy and procedures, as well as considering the day-to day challenges of practicing in Kent, and providing potential solutions to mitigate difficulties arising.
- The two Principal Practitioners will continue to work regularly with senior managers, Members and partners in promoting social work values, and addressing concerns
- The Deep Dive process will continue to be used to bridge between senior managers and the front line and between practice and performance
- Continue to communicate and share regularly key decisions / news on from across the organisation in a clear and easy to understand way
- Build closer 'feedback loops' between the activity of Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB), and other governance/ scrutiny mechanisms and operational teams

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Priority 2: Supervision

What this Means:

- Supervision in children's social care is the single most important organisational process. It's how managers can be reassured that the necessary work to keep children safe is being carried out; it gives practitioners an opportunity to reflect on their work thoughtfully and analytically and it is the place where the connections can be made between individual practice experience and career progression and continual professional development.
- The [Supervision Policy](#) sets out clear expectations on both supervisors and supervisees – supervision is by definition a two-way process and can only be effective if both parties are clear about their responsibilities.
- The Policy sets out in detail the key elements of what is defined as quality supervision and what staff can legitimately expect from it.
- This will deliver improved case management and care planning and more timely decision making , staff feeling both more challenged and more supported and a range of high quality team managers and supervisors

Staff can expect:

- All practitioners will receive a dedicated supervision session at least once every four weeks and more frequently for newly qualified staff
- That each session is recorded and shared with the supervisee and is held in an appropriately confidential area and is undisturbed
- That supervision is informed by real evidence about the practice of the supervisee, whether through file auditing, joint visits or joint meeting attendance – each member of staff can expect to have at least one area of observed practice during the course of each year

- That over the course of a supervision cycle, all allocated cases are discussed, proper time is given to issues of career progression and staff members are enabled to reflect on their learning and development needs
- To be supported to develop supervision skills, in order make time spent together the most effective and productive it can be

Our progress will be measured by:

- Monitoring the frequency of supervision sessions
- Auditing the quality of supervision through the on-line audit programme and other specific themed audits, ensuring supervision is giving appropriate challenge, support and critical reflection
- The quality of assessment, planning and provision to ensure that decision-making is timely and child-centred
- Levels of satisfaction reported by staff and a reduction in staff turnover

Actions for 2014-16:

- Refresh the Supervision Policy in partnership with the Expert Practitioner Group to support a more reflective style of supervision across the directorate. This document will be made available on the Children's Procedures Manual (Tri.X) upon completion.
- To continue the supervision training for all supervisors
- To develop reflective supervision tools for use within and across teams.
- Roll out a Supervision Enhancement Project (led by the Safeguarding Unit), incorporating district based workshops to continue to drive up supervision standards in the teams
- Carry out face-to-face auditing in a sample of cases to help build confidence by enabling social workers to articulate their work
- Conduct audits to ensure supervision recording consistently evidences management oversight and is embedded on to the records in Liberi.

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Priority 3: Management and decision making

What this means:

- Separate from supervision is the frequent need that practitioners have to seek management decisions on their cases, whether they relate to the commissioning of resources or decisions about case management. Both sets of decisions have to be explicitly child-centred and be able to evidence the impact and help to improve circumstances for the child or family.
- Practitioners can expect to have easy access to managers, including senior managers (up to and including the Director) and they can also expect that their voice and opinion will be heard in the making of those decisions.

Staff can expect:

- Strategic decisions made about the division will be cascaded via the management chain, and targeted messages so that staff remain informed about changes.
- All case decisions taken by managers will be recorded on the child's file with an explanation about what the decision was and why
- Access to Area based resource panels will be straightforward and well-publicised and panels will require the minimum paperwork necessary to enable them to make their decision
- All panels can offer a consultancy service – in complex cases it is perfectly acceptable for practitioners to not know what resources are required or what next steps may be and advice and consultation will be readily available
- Managers will assume responsibility for the decisions they take and assume proper ownership of any risks associated with those decisions (for example, being ready to give evidence on them in Court hearings if required)

Our progress will be measured by:

- Evidence of management oversight and decision making on files revealed through case audits
- All key decisions being routed through Area Resource Panels
- Staff report ready access to managers through surveys and staff briefings

Actions for 2014-16:

- Review the online peer-challenge audit tool in order to identify and evidence that appropriate management oversight is being undertaken and recorded on case files.

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Priority 4: Caseloads and caseload management

What this means:

- We recognise that practitioners can only do the quality of work that they want to do and the service needs them to do if their caseloads are actively managed and maintained at a reasonable level.
- We do not employ a caseload management system in Kent believing that demands are too fluid to impose any workable system onto them – it is the core activity of all team managers that they should know about and manage the changing demands on team members' time.
- We have set targets for case (and by case it means children not families) numbers – the average targets are 15 for Children in Care teams and 20 in all other social work teams
- These figures are lower for NQSWs, who should expect to have a 10% reduction in their caseload.
- Challenge caseloads which are too high, ensuring additional support is provided to the case-holding practitioner as required

Staff Can Expect:

- Casework allocation will always take place directly either in 1:1 sessions or in team meetings
- Within the demands of the service, which must always take precedence, allocation will pay full regard to the interests and professional developmental needs of individual practitioners
- Allocation will reflect the needs of newly qualified staff, those returning from extended absences and other individual circumstances
- Managers will explore the opportunities to jointly allocate work and/or to identify some activities as lending themselves to co-working as a way of sharing different skills and experiences

Our Progress will be Measured By:

- Through the county –wide and district performance scorecards
- Feedback from social workers; social workers feel confident and supported in the delivery of their work.

Actions for 2014-16:

- Caseload data is monitored and the impact on quality direct work with families is highlighted through to the senior management team.
- Continue to manage down those caseloads which are above the average County targets.
- Continue to reduce the average caseload for Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)
- Allocate caseloads to CP Chairs

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Priority 5: Skilled workforce- learning, training and professional development

What this means:

- the provision of high quality continuous professional development opportunities that challenge and support staff is central to our work
- Learning and development opportunities will be constructed for all levels of staff, ensuring we meet the needs of NQSWs up to the most experienced practitioners
- Learning and development opportunities will increasingly be delivered through a variety of methods , including Action Learning Sets; 1:1s, appreciative inquiry, research book clubs, coaching, e-learning and webinars; locally based workshops as well as more traditional ‘classroom’ learning

Organisational commitments:

- That the learning and development offer will be reviewed every year to avoid a recirculation of potentially outworn training inputs

- That we will explore all available resources and techniques to deliver our learning and development work, not simply relying on ‘classroom learning’
- That learning and development offers will relate directly to the individual needs of staff in terms of their developmental needs and career progression aspirations as well as addressing the needs of the service as a whole.
- That we will recognise and build on the internal expertise of our own staff group as well as buying in the best external training.

Our progress will be measured by:

- The impact of the Social Care Development Framework, and Leadership and Management Development Framework on practice.
- Yearly increase in numbers attending and committed to learning and development sessions (including KSCB multi-agency training with the wider partnership)
- Feedback from staff surveys

Actions for 2014-16:

- Practice development activities will be delivered by the Safeguarding Unit across all the Areas, in partnership with area-based staff, addressing those issues identified by the respective Areas as ones that require additional input
- The county-wide learning and development programme will be reviewed and driven as much as possible by practitioner need through the Expert Practitioner Reference Group
- Further ‘Masterclasses’ will be delivered by national leading figures in Children’s Services
- To embed a clear model of intervention into service delivery

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Priority 6: Capabilities, TCPs and Career Progression

What this means:

- Linked to the corporate Learning and Development (L & D) training offer is Kent’s Social Care Capabilities Framework, which ensures clarity and transparency about how staff can progress through the service.
- All staff will be set clear, agreed SMART objectives. Personal targets will link to organisational objectives.
- Targets and performance will be monitored and reviewed regularly
- The capabilities outlined in the Social Care Capabilities Framework will be used to define good and excellence practice and inform the personal appraisal (Total Contribution Pay- TCP) process.
- Good performance and potential is recognised. Talented and hardworking individuals will be identified and promoted at all levels in the organisation. Career pathways are clearly articulated in Kent’s Social Care Capabilities Framework (based on that described by the national College of Social Work, which set out what are the core expectations on all practitioners whether newly qualified through to our senior practitioners).

- Poor performance will be confronted and challenged on a 1-2-1 basis, to ensure necessary changes are made. Targets will be monitored, reviewed and revised according to progress.
- All staff at all levels are encouraged and enabled to identify their development needs, share their learning, engage in relevant training (including multi-agency KSCB training), and set targets for themselves which stretch their ability.
- Kent is a large and complex organisation and has within it many career development opportunities for staff –secondments will be actively encouraged to enable staff to learn new skills and to aid retention

Organisational commitments:

- That each practitioner will have a live, relevant and appropriate appraisal that sets out expectations against the core competencies
- That those who can will be accelerated through the service in line with their achievements and skills
- All newly qualified staff will be taken through an AYSE programme designed to help them learn their trade and build up their skills and knowledge
- There will a clear pathway for staff who are able to demonstrate abilities to perform at a senior social worker/practitioner level

Our progress will be measured by:

- Retention rates
- Percentage of staff benefitting from TCP
- Numbers of staff progressing their careers in a range of different ways, including secondments

Actions for 2014-16:

- Appraisals completed on all staff

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Priority 7: Systems, Processes, I.T and “Liberi”

What this Means:

- There is an inevitable level of bureaucracy and process-led work within social work - some is essential to the delivery of good quality work and some is imposed on us through information reporting demands etc. Equally, there is potentially a plethora of new equipment and new technologies that can if properly used make the social task easier.
- We are also aware that other elements of a practitioners working life can be overly bureaucratic separate from the demands of Liberi. These may relate to the claiming of expenses, the process for car hire, booking contact sessions or accessing other internal resources. We will work to simplify them wherever possible – our aim is to free up as much practitioner time for practice as possible.

Organisational commitments:

- We will construct systems and processes such that they support rather than hinder best practice
- All new technology and all changes to the IT systems will be trialled with practitioners before usage
- That all practitioners can challenge any unnecessary and overly-bureaucratic processes and expect to see them changed if upon exploration they add nothing to the social work task or the successful working of the service
- That practitioners can identify other bureaucratic processes within the service or the Council with an expectation that they will be simplified or eradicated

Our progress will be measured by:

- Staff reporting easier systems and less time spent on the computer
- Successful implementation Liquid Logic 'Liberi' version 10

Actions for 2014-16:

- Implement Liquid Logic 'Liberi' version 10
- 0-25 Unified Programme: utilise and implement the findings of the 'Design Phase' and the 'Sandbox' so that the "processes behind the practice" facilitate solutions and outcomes-focused, effective, evidence based practice.
- 0-25 Unified Programme: continue to with work to streamline the child's pathway so that services join up around the child, not the division.
- Integrate available children's services to create a resource-efficient service
- Implement the ContrOCC financial payments system by the end of 2015
- Explore utilising new technologies to support effective social work
- Introduction of an electronic record holding system on Liberi, to minimise need for paper records and to ensure that all information about the child is available on the system

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Priority 8: Quality assurance (QA) and Safeguarding

What this Means:

- It is in the best interests of individual practitioners, of the service as a whole and most importantly children and families, that there are robust and regular quality assurance processes in the service. Given that safeguarding children is a necessarily complicated and complex task, ensuring there are checks and balances in the system that confirms that work is being carried out to good standards and identifies and remedies any weaknesses is essential.
- The regular analysis and interrogation of key data sets is important and can and should generate some key questions about the work of the service or of a team and in particular the extent to which children appear to be progressing through our systems in a timely and appropriate manner. However, that will only ever tell

part of the story and a rounded approach top quality assurance has to be informed by case details of individual children and their families.

- SCS has developed a [Quality Assurance Framework](#) which captures both the detail and culture of quality assurance work in Kent's Specialist Children's Services.

Organisational commitments:

- That QA systems measure and report on those elements of practice and service provision that support the standard of social work described in this 'Contract.
- That QA will focus on the best interests of the child - not the best interests of the service or the practitioner
- That QA systems will be designed in such a way that they allow practitioner input and contribution – it is important that staff do not feel QA systems are 'done to them' and do not assist in learning and development
- That those carrying out the QA function will do so in the best interests of children and will raise their concerns in a timely and straightforward manner with the practitioner and manager concerned
- That operational managers will accept critical feedback openly and non-defensively acknowledging it is designed to improve outcomes for vulnerable children
- Findings from audit and other QA activity are fed back to support organisational learning and planning

Our progress will be measured by:

- Continued delivery of the Deep Dive process with an increasing emphasis on self-evaluation from the services under scrutiny and less centrally driven focus

Actions for 2014-16

- Improve the quality of safeguarding practice within and across agencies
- The embedded Deep Dive process will be refreshed to build in stronger 'feedback loops' between the learning and good practice of individual districts, and the shared learning and practice of the county as a whole.
- Ensure findings and learning from performance management and quality audits are used to systematically drive progress and improvement in practice through targeted intervention by performance officers at district level, learning and development programme
- Audit and Quality Assurance arrangements are in place to monitor the quality of return interviews
- Increase the percentage of cases audited where child-focused practice is judged as 'Good' or better
- Learn from best practice through approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry
- Principal practitioners and performance officers identify and disseminate examples of good practice across the directorate (embed in training and reflected in policies and guidance) from:
 - Local best practice
 - Best practice from other local authorities
 - National research

- Legal precedent
- Legislation and statutory guidance

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4. Conclusion

- 4.1 This document sets out the ‘way we do things around here’. It describes the kind of social work practice that is expected and encouraged and sets out how the organisation at all levels will create the conditions within which that practice can take place. It is mostly about describing the culture of the organisation that we are and will continue to create. The detail of this programme will develop over time – what is set out are examples and commitments which will continue to grow and develop. This is not a piece of work that can ever be said to be complete and the programme will be regularly reviewed, added to and changed to reflect changing circumstances, innovations and lessons emerging from the performance monitoring work.
- 4.2 The consistent theme should always be to ensure services are and remain properly child-centred and that they recognise the complexity and importance of the work to keep children safe.

Philip Segurola- Acting Director of Specialist Children’s Services
Social Care Health and Wellbeing

Document last modified: December 2014

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