

Cabinet – 13 April 2011

Review of Safeguarding Services for Vulnerable Children

Portfolio: Councillor R Andrew, Children's Services

Service: Children's Services

Wards: All

Key Decision: No

Forward Plan: No

1.0 Summary of Report

1.1 This report is a response to the recommendations of the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel which was submitted to Cabinet on 16 March 2011.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the actions that have been implemented in response to the recommendations of the Children's and Young People Scrutiny Panel set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report be noted.

3.0 Background Information

3.1 In July 2010 the Children's & Young People Scrutiny and Performance Board were aware that there were particular pressures placed on Children's Specialist Services with an increase in referrals meaning more Initial Assessments, more Child Protection investigations and a corresponding rise in the number of Looked After Children. At the same time the workforce has become less experienced compounded by difficulty in recruiting experienced social workers. This led to there being a number of Looked After Children and Children in Need children without an allocated social worker. It was apparent that established working methods were not delivering the required outcomes.

3.2 The Scrutiny and Performance Panel set up a working group to look at these issues, inputting into the Working Smarter for Looked After and Vulnerable Children Working Group report. The Working Group agreed that safeguarding services for vulnerable children were critical to the success of the borough and noted the significant progress and developments made in a number of key areas during the life of the working group. The Group was also keen that officers remained innovative in delivering effective services in the context of increased demand and a challenging funding environment.

3.3 The working group report was presented to the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel at its meeting on 25 January 2011. The Panel voted unanimously to endorse the report and to recommend to Cabinet the proposals as set out in the report.

3.4 The recommendations made by the Working Group, along with comments addressing them, are set out below:

- **Children's and Young People Scrutiny & Performance Panel Members are identified on an annual basis to act as Leads as part of Children's Specialist Services visits and inspection activity;**

Councillors O Bennett, R Martin, D Shires and R Thomas have agreed to be the key links to the Council's Children's Homes. In addition, it is intended to run an Appreciative Enquiry meeting with key staff and customers to gain their views on the service later in the year.

- **The role of Members as Corporate Parents is strengthened. This should include representation from each of the main political parties on the Corporate Parenting Board;**

The Corporate Parenting Board now has each of the main political Groups represented:-

Councillor R Andrew, Portfolio holder for Children's Services, Conservative; Councillor K Chambers, Labour Champion; and Councillor D Shires, Liberal Democrat Champion.

- **Officers continue to Work Smarter, including the identification of the most effective methods for ensuring that social workers have manageable caseloads in support of the delivery of services;**

The Working Smarter programme has continued to progress. Some reshaping has occurred to reduce workloads and a series of experiments are being undertaken to learn more about how administrative support can be used differently, a redesign of contact services and changing processes to enable social workers to spend more time with children.

In the meantime, workloads are being tightly managed through the balanced score card monthly performance process and the Council has put itself forward as an early adopter for the Social Work Reform Board Employer Standards of which this is a part.

- **Officers continue to strengthen the risk assessment process and first line management provided to staff in support of the delivery of service.**

Managers are being trained in the Tony Morrisson Reflective supervision model (this is the only evidenced based model specifically for child protection). Feedback from the first 2 cohorts has been very positive and the impact will be assessed through audits and 360 degree appraisal later in the year.

4.0 Resource considerations

4.1 Financial:

There is a considerable budget pressure on Children's Services as a result of the number of looked after children and children with a Protection Plan. It is hoped that the Working Smarter approach will help ease the numbers of children requiring this level of support making budgets more manageable.

4.2 Legal:

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

4.3 Staffing:

There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

5.0 Citizen impact

The proposals will result in improved services for vulnerable children and their families.

6.0 Community safety

The proposals will result in improved services for vulnerable children and their families.

7.0 Environmental impact

There is no environmental impact as a result of this report.

8.0 Performance and risk management issues

8.1 Risk:

There is no environmental impact as a result of this report.

8.2. Performance management:

The proposals will result in improved services for vulnerable children and their families.

9.0 Equality implications

The proposals will result in an improved approach to vulnerable children.

10.0 Consultation

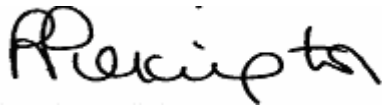
The working group consulted with the Scrutiny and Performance Panel and key members of staff in formulating the report.

Background papers

Review of safeguarding services for vulnerable children

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Signed:
Executive Director: Pauline Pilkington
Date: 15 March 2011



Signed:
Portfolio Holder: Councillor R Andrew
Date: 31 March 2011