

Executive

27 February 2007

Report of the Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services

Child Protection Update report

Summary

1. This report updates the Executive on the work of the newly established Safeguarding Children's Board and specifically provides details of the business plan priorities for the Board for 2007-10 (**Annex 1**). The paper also seeks the approval of the Executive for the adoption of a high level child protection policy for the council as attached to this report (**Annex 2**).

Background

2. At its meeting of the 7th March 2006 the Executive received a briefing on the national requirement to replace existing Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) with new statutory bodies called local Safeguarding Children's Boards. In that report Executive were briefed on the role of the new Boards and the core objectives of the new LSCB as set out in section 14.1 of the Children Act 2004:
 - a) to co-ordinate what is done by each person or body represented on the Board for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area of the authority by which it is established; and,
 - b) to ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each such person or body for that purpose.
3. Executive also received at that point copies of the draft constitution of the new local Board and key information relating to consultation, membership, funding and chairing proposals. Executive approved the recommendation of the March 2006 report to:
 - ✓ Note the legislative requirement for the authority to lead the establishment of a Local Safeguarding Children's Board
 - ✓ Endorse the thorough process described to establish the new Board
4. The Board is now fully operational and is embracing the wider safeguarding expectation. The work of the Board has benefited from wider representation and clearly operates within the wider context of children and young people's planning work in the authority. As a consequence the priorities of the Boards

first business plan (Annex 1) have been developed through a process closely aligned with the development, analysis and consultation conducted in developing the new Children and Young People's Plan for the city. The Board has also recently moved to having independent chairing arrangements and are confident that this will further add to the scrutiny and challenge function of the organisation. For further details of the Boards activity, minutes of meetings etc and for access to safeguarding information generally the Executive members are signposted to the Board's website <http://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk/>

5. A significant piece of work led by the Board already relates to the undertaking of **Section 11 audits**. In the Children Act, guidance under Section 11 sets out the key arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. It covers, for example, issues relating to policy, procedures, safe recruitment practice, staff training etc. It applies to all those key local people and bodies named under section 11(1). Part 1 of the guidance sets out those that are likely to be common to all or most of the agencies to which the duty applies. There will, however, be differences in how they are applied depending on the functions of each agency. Part 2 deals with implementation in each particular agency to which the section 11 duty applies. The audits represent a good example of the Board setting and monitoring compliance of local agencies with key national guidance. Audit templates have been produced and completed by most relevant agencies with gaps being made the subject of action plans within the respective agency. On receipt of the templates agencies were asked to review their current policies, procedures and practices, analyse the current state of safeguarding and promoting children's welfare within their bodies and decide what steps are necessary to include in the action plan to implement national guidance. These arrangements will help agencies to create and maintain an organisational culture and ethos that reflects the importance of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
6. The audit relating to key council services against section 11 has been completed. Whilst there are some specific areas of practice to address, the most significant deficit was the lack of a council wide Child Protection Policy. This position is not uncommon and indeed it is difficult to identify across the country examples of such LA policies. As in York, procedures and guidance exists, often in abundance, but without an overarching policy statement. This paper seeks to address that omission by seeking approval of the draft policy attached at Annex 2 of this report.

Consultation

7. The local Safeguarding Children's Board has led a process of developing its first Business Plan through a clear process of consultation involving debate at key partnership forums, website interaction and through shared access to the widespread consultation undertaken in developing the new Children and Young people's plan for the city. The Board was particularly mindful of comments relating to the "Staying Safe" agenda.

8. Consultation on the proposed Child Protection Policy for the authority has been less widespread but opportunities for other relevant senior officers to comment on the content have been created.

Options

9. In considering this paper members have no specific options relating to the Business Plan, as it is a partnership-approved document. However if there are concerns regarding the content of the Plan then those will be shared with the full Board at its next meeting. In relation to the proposed Child Protection Policy, Executive has the option of approving the document at Annex 2 or seeking further amendments. The Executive also has the option of not adopting a policy given that it carries only guidance status within the Act.

Analysis

10. The Business Plan provides a comprehensive and challenging work plan for the Board to undertake. As Annex 1 demonstrates however, progress is already being made against key organisational priorities. Much of that work falls to lead officers across partner agencies who form the Board's executive. They in turn are supported by the dedicated resources/staff in the Board's Safeguarding Unit.
11. In approving or amending the Child Protection Policy for the authority the Executive will be demonstrating
 - * Senior commitment to the importance of safeguarding and promoting children's welfare;
 - * A clear statement of the agency's responsibilities towards children available for all staff

Corporate Priorities

12. This report contributes to the improvement statement of the council relating to "Improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged and disaffected children, young people and families in the city".

Implications

13. This report does not carry any specific implications in any of the following categories: Financial, Information Technology, Property. The report does contribute to the authority fulfilling legal responsibilities specifically in being compliant against Section 11 of the Children Act and indirectly contributes to our equality, human resources and crime and disorder agendas.

Risk Management

14. The risks to the council of not establishing robust safeguarding arrangements within the authority are significant. They arise operationally in relation to the specific risk of harm/injury to local children and young people. Whilst even

highly effective partnership working cannot totally prevent abuse occurring, there is a clear responsibility to ensure that the likelihood of such harm is reduced and to ensure when it does occur that there are appropriately robust and effective interventions. The local authority has a leadership role in ensuring those arrangements are in place. A lack of effectiveness in those arrangements could result in considerable public criticism. This is also a highly regulated area of the council's responsibilities and safeguarding arrangements will undoubtedly be the focus of considerable scrutiny as part of the Joint Area Review inspection process which is to be undertaken in Jan/February 2008.

Recommendations

15. Executive are asked to:

- Note the development of the Business Plan 2007-10 of the local Safeguarding Children's Board and endorse its contents, as attached at Annex 1.
- Approve or amend the draft Child Protection Policy for the Council, as attached at Annex 2.

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Report Approved

Date 5th February 2007

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Specialist Implications Officer(s) *List information for all*
N/a

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

Executive Report 7th March 2006

Annexes

Annex 1: Safeguarding Children's Board Business Plan 2007-10

Annex 2: City of York Child Protection Policy