

CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD

29 January 2009

The meeting commenced at 9.00 a.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor Cath Hill (Children's Services Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Adrienne Simcock, Director of Children's Services
Peter Devlin, Chief Solicitor
Sally Robinson, Assistant Director Safeguarding and Specialist Services
Danielle Swainston, Sure Start, Extended Services and Early Years Manager
Ian Merritt, Head of Commissioning and Children's Partnership
Charlotte Burnham, Scrutiny Manager
James Walsh, Scrutiny Support Officer
Sarah Bird, Democratic Services Officer

32. Adoption Service Inspection Report *(Assistant Director Safeguarding and Specialist Services)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

The report was presented in order to inform the Portfolio Holder of the findings of the recent inspection of the Council's Adoption Service, to agree the Action Plan from the findings and to consider the issue of the constitution of the Adoption Panel in respect of Members.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

As a requirement of the Care Standards Act 2000 for inspections to be carried out on all adoption services including that of local authorities, Ofsted inspected Hartlepool Borough Council's service in October 2008 by interviewing a number of staff, adopters and adoption panel members and attended an adoption panel. The report was subsequently received by the Authority.

Overall findings were that the service quality rating was satisfactory and

noted that 'The core business is undertaken with skill, thoroughness and commitment. Similarly, the arrangements for supporting people affected by adoption are undertaken in a conscientious and focussed way that provides an inclusive approach.' It had been noted that there had been some improvements since the last inspection in October 2005 but some matters remained outstanding regarding compliance with regulations, for example ensuring that the panel was quorate, the quality of the children's guide and a strategic approach to training of staff.

Specific area of inspection were:-

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe – Satisfactory. The inspection had noted the varying quality of child permanence reports and that these did not routinely contain information about the birth parent's health. It was also noted that further members of the panel needed to be recruited but that senior managers had this in hand.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do – Good. The inspection had noted that there was a strong approach to supporting adoptive placements and that there was very strong professional medical advice available to the adoption panel, agency, adopters and children. The Portfolio Holder asked that the medical advisor be thanked.

Helping children make a positive contribution – Good. The reported noted that there was a strong and committed approach to maintaining children's histories and backgrounds and that birth parents were all provided with the facility to access support.

Organisation – Satisfactory. The inspection had noted the lack of a permanent manager in post and although the core work of the service had been conducted to a generally good standard, it had limited the scope to undertake strategic planning, particularly with regard to training. The Portfolio Holder was informed that a permanent manager was now in post which should address this issue.

An action plan had been developed to address the issues emerging from the inspection and the recommendations made would be implemented. Additional staff resources had already been agreed and the appointments made which should ensure that the issues raised by the inspection could be addressed appropriately with no further financial impact.

It was also noted that the Authority in accordance with the regulations should have only one elected Member on the adoption panel and this had been noted. Discussion took place about the need to ensure that the panel be quorate and the Portfolio Holder was informed that members would be advised of the importance of the role during training to encourage attendance.

The Portfolio Holder commented that the latest Inspection Report had improved and that the Authority was delivering a good service and would

improve mechanisms to continue to provide the best for children and young people in Hartlepool.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder:-

- ❖ Received the inspection report
- ❖ Agreed to the action plan detailed as Appendix 1 to the report
- ❖ Confirmed that as part of the action plan, only one Member be appointed to the adoption panel

33. Safeguarding Children in Hartlepool *(Assistant Director Safeguarding and Specialist Services)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

The report was presented to update the Portfolio Holder in relation to the arrangements for safeguarding children in Hartlepool and to seek agreement to regular reporting on safeguarding issues to the Portfolio Holder on a quarterly basis.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The report was produced to provide the Lead Member for Children's Services with details regarding activity in relation to safeguarding children and was intended to be a quarterly reporting arrangement to the Lead Member.

In 2008, the Department for Children, Schools and Families had published updated 'Statutory Guidance: The Roles and Responsibilities of the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Service.' which highlighted the key roles for the Lead Member.

The report detailed activity in Safeguarding and Specialist Services in relation to 861 children in the town. 62 of these were subject to protection plans, 163 were looked after and the remaining 636 were children in need, which was broadly in line with national and comparative authorities. The service received an average of 75 referrals per month. Three main categories under which referrals were made were child abuse or neglect, family dysfunction or families in acute stress. The number of children subject to a protection plan had remained fairly stable since April 2008 but this had declined over the past year as a direct result of an initiative to ensure that only those children who require a plan, have one in place, rather than previous guidance which entailed some children having a protection plan as well as being looked after.

The category of neglect represented 60% of all children subject to protection plans with physical abuse being the second most frequent category and this reflected national trends. The most frequent reason was as a result of children affected by parental substance misuse and in recognition of this, an additional social work post had been created to specialise in this area.

There were 163 children looked after by the Authority, 99 subject to legal orders, 42 accommodated under Section 20 of the Children's Act 1989 and 22 receiving short break care on a regular basis as part of a family support package.

74% of looked after children live inside the council boundary and it was noted that those who did not was because their specialist needs could not be accommodated within the Authority.

Staffing details were also provided by the report and it was highlighted that although it had not been possible to provide details of sickness absence, arrangements had been put in place to accommodate this in future reports. The Safeguarding and Specialist Services Divisional Management meeting reviewed information in relation to social work caseload on a monthly basis and this information was shared with the Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive.

The service also had in place a Complaints and Representation Procedure and results of the ten complaints received in the current year were detailed. The service had received seven compliments since recording of this had begun in September 2008.

The work plan for the Local Safeguarding Children Board to be implemented by its sub groups was provided as well as details of the recent annual Development Day.

Details of the services provided, staffing details, caseloads, comments, complaints and compliments and the Hartlepool Local Safeguarding Children Board were outlined in the accompanying report.

The Portfolio Holder agreed that quarterly updates would be useful. Discussion took place about the Inspector's report which had identified that there was no routine auditing mechanism. The Assistant Director Safeguarding and Specialist Services confirmed that an audit tool had been identified which was compliant with the Integrated Children's System which would be able to audit the children's, foster carers and adopters case files.

The Portfolio Holder stated that she was confident that the Authority was providing a good service for children, young people, foster carers and adopters in Hartlepool and thanked staff for their input.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder noted the content of the report and agreed to the production of a report on safeguarding activity on a quarterly basis.

34. Local Government Access to Information

Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public were excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

Minute 35. Call-In of Decision: Service Specification for Children's Centres Outreach Package – Formal Comments of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum (para 3)

35. Call-In of Decision: Service Specification for Children's Centres Outreach Package – Formal Comments of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum (para 3) – *Children's Services Scrutiny Forum*

Type of Decision

Key (tests i and ii)

Purpose of Report

The report was presented to provide the formal comments of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum in relation to the Call In of the Service Specifications for Children's Centre – Outreach Package Decision taken by the Children's Services Portfolio Holder on 13 November 2008 as per the Authority's Call-In procedure.

Issues for Consideration by the Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder had at her meeting on 13 November considered a report on work which had been undertaken in developing a children's centres outreach support service specification and had authorised the tender process for an outreach package for Children's Centres. Subsequently a Call-In Notice had been submitted, the reasons for which were outlined in the accompanying report, which was considered initially by the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee and then by the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum.

The Children's Services Scrutiny Forum submitted comments and asked that the Portfolio Holder re-consider her decision made on 13 November.

Decision

The decision is outlined in the not for publication section of the minutes.

The meeting concluded at 9.35 am

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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