

**STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PROFORMA**

Cabinet Meeting .....28th October 2010

1. Title of Item/Report

OFSTED Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services

2. Record of the Decision

Cabinet considered a report that provided feedback on the recent inspection by Ofsted of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Stockton on Tees.

The inspection was focused on the contribution of all local partners to improving outcomes for children and young people and the impact that practice and services had on improving outcomes, including through managing risk and minimising incidence of child abuse and neglect. During the fieldwork period, there was 92 separate meetings / focus groups / interviews, involving 385 people – staff from the Council and partner agencies, members, parents / carers, and over 50 children and young people. In addition, inspectors reviewed 26 randomly selected case files, analysed performance data and information from inspections of local settings such as schools and day care provision, and examined a wide range of documentation about Council policies, strategies, plans and procedures.

The Council's response to the findings of the annual Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment Services, undertaken in January 2010, was a significant element of the evidence evaluated by inspectors. That Unannounced Inspection resulted in some areas for development along with two 'priority actions' which, under new criteria, developed by Ofsted from April this year, acted as 'limiting judgements' on the annual assessment by Ofsted of Children's Services – meaning that the Council would be rated as 'poor' in the annual assessment unless a subsequent Safeguarding and LAC inspection provided evidence to the contrary. A significant element of the recent inspection fieldwork, therefore, was to assess the Council's progress in implementing the action plan developed to respond to the Unannounced Inspection and, in particular, the improvements made in the quality of casework practice.

The inspection evidence also included evaluation of the action that had

taken place by partners following the Serious Case Review, which was rated as 'inadequate' by Ofsted earlier in the year.

Ofsted's report on the findings of the Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection was provided. The report included a total of 33 separate scored judgements; these were listed in the tables on the final two pages of the inspection report.

The 'adequate' judgements for the overall effectiveness of safeguarding, and capacity to improve in this area, represented a positive acknowledgement that progress had been made following the Unannounced Inspection. Without that progress, it seemed certain that the Council would have been rated as 'inadequate' and its annual assessment of Children's services by Ofsted would then have been 'performing poorly'. Significant issues impacting on the Safeguarding judgements included:

- Inspectors were satisfied that the Areas for Priority Action, highlighted in the Unannounced Inspection, had been addressed; and that appropriate learning and action had taken place following the Serious Case Review which was rated as 'inadequate' earlier in the year.
- Inspectors stated that children and young people are safeguarded and that the children and young people they saw felt safe as well.
- CAF (the Common Assessment Framework) is not being used effectively, and needs to be owned by all partners.
- There was still considerable variability in the quality of casework.

Significant issues impacting on the 'good' judgements for the overall effectiveness of Looked After Children services, and capacity to improve in this area, included:

- Good leadership, shared vision across the Children's Trust Board, and clear commitment from corporate parents.
- Imaginative work with the Children in Care Council to give looked after young people and care leavers a voice.
- Good front line focus on placements based on the needs of children.
- Need to ensure strategy is consistently applied and performance is managed to ensure permanency is achieved whenever possible.

Areas for improvement had been identified in the inspection report and work had started to develop action plans for those areas for improvement. Progress in delivery of those improvements would be monitored through the cycle of performance reporting to the Council, the Children's Trust Board, the Local Safeguarding Children Board, and MALAP (the Multi-Agency Looked After Children Partnership).

RESOLVED that the Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services be received and the outcome be noted.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The report was presented in order to raise awareness of the results of this important inspection and its implications for future service planning and development.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

By no later than midnight on Friday 5 November 2010.

Proper Officer  
01 February 2010