

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

28 OCTOBER 2010

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Children & Young People – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor McCoy

OFSTED INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SERVICES

1. Summary

This report gives feedback on the recent inspection by Ofsted of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Stockton-on-Tees. The inspection resulted in overall judgements of 'adequate' in relation to safeguarding and 'good' in relation to looked after children.

2. Recommendation

Cabinet are recommended to receive the report and note the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

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

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;

- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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OFSTED INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SERVICES

SUMMARY

This report gives feedback on the recent inspection by Ofsted of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Stockton-on-Tees. The inspection resulted in overall judgements of 'adequate' in relation to safeguarding and 'good' in relation to looked after children.

RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet are recommended to receive the report and note the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services.

DETAIL

1. Ofsted undertook an inspection in September of Safeguarding and Looked After Children (LAC) Services in Stockton-on-Tees. Their fieldwork took place from the 13th to the 24th of September. The inspection team comprised six inspectors, five from Ofsted and one from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) who looked at the role of health services across the inspection themes.
2. 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 have on improving outcomes, including through managing risk and minimising incidence of child abuse and neglect. During the fieldwork period, there were 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 our policies, strategies, plans and procedures.
3. Our 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, would act as 'limiting judgements' on the annual assessment by Ofsted of Children's Services – meaning that we 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 our progress in implementing the action plan we developed to respond to the Unannounced Inspection and, in particular, the improvements we have made in the quality of casework practice.

4. 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.
5. Ofsted's report on the findings of the Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection is attached (*N.B. for Cabinet agenda meeting, the report will be tabled, as the final version will not be available until 15th October, for publication on 22nd October*). The report includes a total of 33 separate scored judgements; these are listed in the tables on the final two pages of the inspection report.
6. The 'adequate' judgements for the overall effectiveness of safeguarding, and capacity to improve in this area, represent a positive acknowledgement that progress has been made following the Unannounced Inspection. Without this progress, it seems certain that we would have been rated as 'inadequate' and our annual assessment of Children's services by Ofsted would then have been 'performing poorly'. Significant issues impacting on the Safeguarding judgements included:
 - a) Inspectors were satisfied that the Areas for Priority Action highlighted in the Unannounced Inspection have been addressed; and that appropriate learning and action has taken place following the Serious Case Review which was rated as 'inadequate' earlier in the year.
 - b) Inspectors stated that children and young people are safeguarded and that the children and young people they saw felt safe as well.
 - c) CAF (the Common Assessment Framework) is not being used effectively, and needs to be owned by all partners.
 - d) There is still considerable variability in the quality of casework.
7. Significant issues impacting on the 'good' judgements for the overall effectiveness of Looked After Children services, and capacity to improve in this area, included:
 - a) Good leadership, shared vision across the Children's Trust Board, and clear commitment from corporate parents.
 - b) Imaginative work with the Children in Care Council to give looked after young people and care leavers a voice.
 - c) Good front line focus on placements based on the needs of children.
 - d) Need to ensure strategy is consistently applied and performance is managed to ensure permanency is achieved whenever possible.
8. Areas for improvement have been identified in the inspection report (paragraph 17 of the attached report for Safeguarding; and paragraph 49 for Looked After Children). Work has now started to develop action plans for these areas for improvement. Progress in delivery of these improvements will 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).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Resource issues to address areas for improvement will be managed through the annual cycle of service planning and review of the medium term financial plan.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

11. The reporting of the inspection outcome is categorised as low to medium risk, with existing management systems sufficient to control and reduce risk. The outcome of the inspection and subsequent implementation of the action plan to address areas for improvement, will impact on the review of an existing risk (score of 20) in the Risk Register relating to: 'Serious Injury or death leading to a Serious Case Review '.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

12. The inspection findings make a significant contribution to the 'Children and Young People' theme of the Sustainable Community Strategy, by providing evidence of the impact of services in meeting priorities within that theme, and by highlighting areas where further improvements can be made. The inspection findings in relation to safeguarding of children are relevant also to the 'Safer Communities' theme as they provide evidence of partnership working to keep young people safe within our communities.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

13. This report is not subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment because it is an information item. It does not seek approval for any actions or change of policy, strategy or service delivery

CORPORATE PARENTING

14. The inspection report relates substantially to looked after children. It provides evidence of the impact of services on outcomes for children and young people who are looked after, and identifies areas that will help to improve future outcomes. The report will be considered in detail by MALAP (the Multi-Agency Looked After Children Partnership) at its next meeting, and actions to address improvements will be reflected as appropriate in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

15. Consultation was not relevant in relation to this report.

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Education related? Yes

Background Papers: Ofsted report 'Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services – Stockton-on-Tees' published 22 October 2010.

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors: The inspection report will be in the public domain from 22nd October and will be available to all Councillors for information.

Property: The report does not have implications in relation to the Council's property.