

TO: THE EXECUTIVE
29 MARCH 2011

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT: BEING SAFE – A REVIEW OF SAFEGUARDING
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Director of Children, Young People and Learning

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 To determine the Executive's response to the recommendations in the report by the Children Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel's Working Group on 'A Review of Safeguarding Children and Young People', attached at Annex 1.

2 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 **That the responses to the recommendations outlined in the supporting information in section 5 of this report are approved;**
- 2.2 **That the members of the working group are thanked for their report.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Working Group has spent considerable time researching the issues relating to safeguarding, through reading a wide range of relevant reports and documents, meeting children and parents, meeting professionals from a range of agencies, and reflecting on their findings with appropriate officers and partners. As a result, the report is a thorough scrutiny of a complex area of work. The recommendations are fully informed and merit support.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Not applicable.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The report sets out a positive picture of the state of safeguarding within Bracknell Forest. "In overall terms, in all major respects we are very satisfied that the Council and its partners have done all they reasonably can to safeguard children and young people". However, there are some areas for further development, and the following recommendations along with a considered response are set out below.

Working Group Recommendations and proposed response

- 5.1 **Working Group Recommendation 1** The Council should continue to ensure that it provides the necessary profile, resources and support for safeguarding children and young people, which we see as among the most important responsibilities of a local authority.

This recommendation is agreed. Promoting the welfare and development of children and young people is at the heart of the Council's business, not just within the

Department of Children, Young People and Learning but across all departments and partnerships. This is reflected in budget decisions on preserving services for children and young people and in retaining good quality staff.

- 5.2 **Working Group Recommendation 2** Reflecting Lord Laming's encouragement for local authorities to put children at the heart of everything we do, all Council service areas could usefully look to see how their contribution towards safeguarding children could be more explicitly recognised. Similarly, to improve universal awareness and understanding of the vital business of safeguarding, we recommend that the Council raises the profile of safeguarding where possible, for example in adopting a job specification for the Lead Member for Children's Service, reflecting their statutory duties (paragraph 3.51), also articles in 'Town and Country' (paragraph 4.30).

This recommendation is agreed. Part of the work of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) has been to lead a phased self assessment process with all partner agencies so that safeguarding responsibilities are recognised and prioritised within the organisation. The Council service areas undertook this work in phase 1 (the current phase 3 is focused on the voluntary sector) and it would be beneficial to review the learning from all 3 phases once complete. The LSCB has also led a range of innovative projects to raise universal awareness and to promote the work of the LSCB and its member agencies including the Council. The use of Town and Country as a further mechanism for raising awareness will be included in future activity. The recommendation of a job description for the Lead Member for Children and Young People is a useful one and will be developed further.

- 5.3 **Working Group Recommendation 3** Better arrangements should be made for dealing with unforeseeable increases in Social Services workload, since experience of tragedies elsewhere shows this to be a great risk to effective safeguarding. This could include larger contingency arrangements – both financial and staffing – and developing more reciprocal arrangements with other local authorities nearby (paragraph 4.12).

This recommendation is partially agreed. There needs to be a flexible and responsive workforce to accommodate fluctuating demand and in the main, this is the case. The recent and rapid increase in demand in relation to child protection cases, care proceedings and looked after children is unprecedented. Arrangements are in place to increase staffing resources when and where necessary, and although the availability of a pool of competent and experienced social workers is a national problem, locally, independent social workers who are known to the service are the best way of responding quickly. Reciprocal arrangements with neighbouring local authorities have not proved to be workable in the past or currently, as all local authorities are experiencing similar pressures. The work of the Social Work Reform Board will be the longer term way of developing a sufficient pool of suitably trained and experienced social work staff.

In relation to financial contingency arrangements, the Council is advised by the Borough Treasurer in the annual budget report on contingencies and reserves. Contingencies are not held within individual service budgets but are set aside in a Council Wide Budget in order to meet the risks across all budgets. In addition the Council is advised on the minimum level of General Reserves in case the annual budget is ever overspent. In advising the Council on Contingencies and the level of General Reserve, the Borough Treasurer takes account of potential changes in volatile, high cost services, such as children receiving Social Services.

- 5.4 **Working Group Recommendation 4** Whilst we recognise the positive progress made with the important Common Assessment Form in various ways, we

recommend the CAF processes should be reviewed in the light of differing views as to its purpose, and the criticisms expressed to us. In particular, there is a lack of universal understanding about what the CAF process is actually for. The review should determine whether the processes could be improved to give a more appropriate and effective method for assessment and referral of cases (paragraph 4.15), particularly in relation to Special Schools, and feedback to those utilising the forms.

This recommendation is agreed. The Council has supported the development of the use of the Common Assessment Framework through the appointment of the CAF Co-ordinator who has led the implementation of the CAF. This is a slow process, to embed a new way of working, but Bracknell Forest is ahead of many other authorities in its use of the CAF. The Council has already recognised some of the difficulties identified by the Working Group and has developed a CAF Action Plan to address these issues as well as to continue the further implementation of the CAF.

- 5.5 **Working Group Recommendation 5** The Council and its partners should consider how to improve joint working and communication with schools, both on individual cases and on increasing schools' knowledge of thresholds and the appropriate use of the CAF.

This recommendation is agreed. A series of short workshops on the use of the CAF and on thresholds, specifically aimed at schools has been arranged for the Spring. Joint working with schools is being improved through a number of mechanisms, eg the Duty Team Manager is now attending the Kennel Lane School Liaison Meeting.. Work has been underway to upgrade and improve the way in which information on CAF is collected, and detail recorded. This will allow for more detailed performance reporting, and information can now be broken down and reported to individual schools on the use of CAF and impact on outcomes for pupils in their schools.

- 5.6 **Working Group Recommendation 6** The Executive Member should review whether an appropriate balance of effort is going into universal prevention measures (paragraph 4.35).

This recommendation is agreed. A new Children & Young People's Plan is being developed and one of the underpinning priorities is to "Embed prevention and early intervention into the routine delivery of all services to children and young people". The new Early Intervention Grant provides some additional financial resource to support this priority. The effectiveness of this approach will be closely monitored by the Children and Young People's Partnership.

- 5.7 **Working Group Recommendation 7** The highly necessary work on early, integrated and targeted intervention and support must be properly resourced. This particularly applies to teenage pregnancy advice, alcohol abuse, and early intervention. This could usefully be co-ordinated with the planned transfer of the Public Health function from Primary Care Trusts to local authorities, which will include sexual health issues (paragraphs 4.13 and 4.19). If the resources could be found, we would particularly like to see the reinstatement of an officer post to give full-time, focused attention to teenage pregnancy issues.

This recommendation is partially agreed. The new Children & Young People's Plan described above also includes an outcome priority to "Improve outcomes for all children and young people, especially the more vulnerable" and this includes those groups of children and young people who are at risk of poorer outcomes because for example of pregnancy, or alcohol misuse. Co-ordinated interventions through a joint

approach is the preferred way of addressing these particular issues, and a refreshed teenage pregnancy action plan will be developed as part of a wider approach to universal and targeted youth support that is currently being developed. This will ensure that all agencies have a part to play in addressing the issue, rather than relying on a single post holder.

- 5.8 **Working Group Recommendation 8** This Overview and Scrutiny report should be presented by the Lead Member of the Working Group to the Local Safeguarding Children Board, for their appropriate action.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board have received the report of the Working Group and met with Cllr Mrs Birch (one of the Working Group members) to discuss the report. Their response to specific recommendations is included below..

- 5.9 **Working Group Recommendation 9** To strengthen the success of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and Children's Trust:

- a) The Council's website should give clearer links to the role and activities of the LSCB and the Children's Trust.
Recommendation agreed. This work will be carried out by the Council's web team
- b) The LSCB should be asked to include 'real life' examples of good practice in their safeguarding Toolkit.
Recommendation agreed. Examples will be included in the updated toolkit.
- c) The Council should continue to actively promote the Toolkit and support the Voluntary sector in their take-up of it.
Recommendation agreed. Active support to the voluntary sector is being provided.
- d) We support the view of the Executive member for Children and Young People that there is scope to further improve engagement with young people, for example, in terms of a 'shadow' Children's Trust, led by children and young people.
Recommendation agreed. The LSCB has initiated some innovative practice in relation to young people's participation eg the development of the young person's safeguarding card. The Children's Trust has also engaged with young people in a range of ways, for example through involvement in partnership meetings and through consultation on the new Children and Young People's Plan. For both partnerships, there is more work that can be done to increase engagement, building on the 'Hear by Right' approach that the Trust has adopted.
- e) The LSCB Safeguarding Cue Cards are an excellent idea, and should remain freely available to all, and promoted at every opportunity.
Recommendation agreed. This will be implemented by the LSCB.
- f) The structure of the Children's Trust also the LSCB should be reviewed, in particular to determine whether it might be better to have the wider groups meeting less frequently with a smaller subset of each group operating in an executive capacity and meeting more frequently, with full accountability to the wider group.

Recommendation agreed. This is being implemented. The LSCB structure has recently been reviewed. A new meeting arrangement was introduced in January 2011, in which the wider partnership (Partnership Forum) meets only three times a year (reduction from five times a year). The LSCB Executive's membership has been extended to include all Statutory Partners and meets six times a year.

The Children's Trust has also changed its meeting arrangement from 1 April 2011, with a Children and Young People's Partnership Board (replacing the Executive) meeting 6 times a year, and the Children & Young People's Partnership Forum meeting 3 times a year. There is scope for considering combining the wider Forum meetings in the future or for combining them for specific themed meetings. However, it is important to remember that the LSCB is a statutory board and its functions must not be diluted by any shared arrangements.

- 5.10 **Working Group Recommendation 10** The Council should consider giving more effective publicity to facilities such as the Family and Children's Centres and parent groups provided by the Council and its partners, to increase uptake, in view of the comments we received from parents that they are valued and more people needed to be aware of what facilities and support are available (paragraph 4.28).

This Recommendation is agreed.

The Parenting Co-ordinator will continue to publicise the range of parenting and family programmes available through a range of publicity mechanisms.

The Children's Centres are publicised through a number of methods : paper copies of flyers and folders/posters which are placed in a variety of community venues, and also electronic methods such as the Council website which are kept updated with the current activities. Health Visitors are also very important in promoting the Children's Centres; they are supplied with an insert for the red book which is given to each new parent they visit. The insert has the details of the local Children's Centre and the parents are encouraged to complete the tear-off slip which is then returned to the Children's Centre. This slip gives the centre permission to contact the parent to ensure that they are kept informed of centre activities. If the centres have a specific activity, the press are notified. Children's Centres have been featured on the community TV programme which is screened in local venues and in Town and Country. Other local agencies such as Home Start also promote the centres and social workers visit the centres as part of their induction so that they are aware of the services that are on offer to families. Word of mouth is always one of the best forms of publicity and many parents hear about the centres from friends.

The Family Centre is a specialist service for children and families who are open cases to Children's Social Care and the leaflet explaining the range of Family Centre services is being updated this year.

- 5.11 **Working Group Recommendation 11** A formal understanding be made between the Council and Thames Valley Police demonstrating how the Council meets its legal responsibility to provide safe and secure accommodation for children who are in custody overnight (paragraph 4.17).

This recommendation is agreed. A formal understanding is being negotiated between the Council and the Local Area Commander of Thames Valley Police that the local authority will ensure that emergency foster carers are available to take children who would otherwise have to remain in custody if they cannot return to parental care, and where local authority foster placements are not available, external provision either through independent fostering agencies or independent children's homes will be found. This agreement will be kept under review and any cases

where it has not been followed will be jointly reviewed by the Council and the Police to identify what further action is required.

- 5.12 **Working Group Recommendation 12** During the massive changes planned by the Government for the NHS, the Executive Member should work closely with the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing to ensure that there is an orderly transfer of the Public Health and related functions from the PCT to the Council and the GP Consortium, such that the NHS's current role in safeguarding remains effective (paragraph 4.19).

This recommendation is agreed. The Council has already established a Health Transition Board with representation from Executive Members to manage the process. The establishment of the Health and Wellbeing Board in due course will also provide an opportunity for ensuring a continued focus for agencies on safeguarding.

- 5.13 **Working Group Recommendation 13** The Council should obtain feedback occasionally from parents and children, along the lines of the two surveys we carried out (see paragraphs 3.42-3.44 and 3.53-3.58), in addition to routinely obtaining views from individual service users at the close of cases.

This recommendation is agreed. Consultation with children and young people is part of the regular activity of Children's Social Care, but feedback from current adult service users particularly those receiving child protection or family support services needs to be further developed. An evaluation form for parent / carers / adults who attend Child Protection Conferences is currently under development and will be piloted in the near future.

- 5.14 **Working Group Recommendation 14** The Council should actively promote putting the interests of the child first. We recommend that the Council should take every opportunity it can to stress that the social services team is there to provide support in the first instance. The emphasis is on helping children to stay with their families wherever possible, and very few children are taken into care. This is to counter the reported views of many parents seeing social workers as a threat, likely to result in their children being taken away from them (paragraphs 4.28-4.30).

This recommendation is agreed. Leaflets and publicity articles will continue to emphasise this point.

- 5.15 **Working Group Recommendation 15** We think it was important for the Council to have analysed the significant increase in the number of child protection plans. We recommend that funding is provided for the monitoring of the recommendations made in the analysis and for future analyses as necessary (paragraph 4.10).

This recommendation is agreed. The monitoring of recommendations has been incorporated into the work of the department and the numbers of children subject to a child protection plan is routinely monitored by the LSCB. Budget provision is available to enable future independent audit of practice to be undertaken now that Government Office South East can no longer provide this support.

- 5.16 **Working Group Recommendation 16** The young people we met thought the complaints system could be more user-friendly and made some suggestions, which we ask the Executive to consider. These included: having a suggestion box which

has slips entitled 'I have a worry about...' More publicity needs to be given to the Council's text message service and the pre-paid returnable card which allow young people to submit their worries or concerns to the Council without having to incur a cost (paragraph 4.28).

This recommendation is agreed. Further publicity is planned by the Children's Complaints Manager and the Child Participation Development Officer both for the text message service and the pre-paid returnable card. Other mechanisms will also be considered which increase the range of ways that children and young people can communicate any concerns and give feedback.

- 5.17 **Working Group Recommendation 17** The Executive Member should consider how the commitment of, and regular flow of information to councillors on the vital issue of safeguarding might be usefully enhanced, specifically through the proposals we set out in paragraph 4.32.

This recommendation is agreed. Further all member briefings on safeguarding will be arranged as part of the annual briefing programme. A copy of the conclusions and recommendations of the report will be sent to all Councillors, and to Town and Parish Councils. A full induction for Councillors on their safeguarding responsibilities will be developed, covering both adults and children.

- 5.18 **Working Group Recommendation 18** The Executive Member is asked to convey to the Council's social workers the Working Group's appreciation that they have a challenging and highly responsible job to do, often in difficult circumstances. We think we speak on behalf of all councillors by saying we cannot thank them enough for what they do to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our society today.

This recommendation is agreed. The Executive Member will write to the Council's social workers expressing appreciation for their work in safeguarding children and young people.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The proposals contained in this report concerning safeguarding are all within the Council's powers and functions.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The Borough Treasurer is satisfied that no significant financial implications arise from this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 The recommendations will assist in ensuring that children and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 Ensuring the safeguarding of children and young people in Bracknell Forest is a strategic risk area and the recommendations will assist in reducing the level of risk.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Officers and Partner Agencies have been consulted as part of the working group's review, and have been consulted on the recommendations. The LSCB also discussed the report during their February 2011 meeting.

Background Papers

Being Safe: A Review of Safeguarding Children and Young People by a Working Group of the Children Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel

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