

Scrutiny Report

North East Derbyshire District Council

Overview and Scrutiny

Safeguarding Children

March 2012

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Chairs Forward

Of the myriad of responsibilities entrusted to local authorities none are more important than its duty to protect the residents it serves, particularly those who are the most vulnerable or most at risk.

A review into child safeguarding may seem a strange priority for a district council in a two tier system where all of the major children's service are provided by the county council but all the evidence shows that children are best protected when all agencies work together.

This review was undertaken at the request of the Director of Health and Wellbeing who had started the process of carrying out his own assessment of how this Council fared and wanted the input of elected members who could act as a critical friend to help ensure that nothing was overlooked.

On behalf of the Committee I'd like to thank all of those who took part in this review, both the staff here at NEDDC and our partners. What we have found is that this is a responsibility that this Council takes seriously and that it has robust systems in place. But like all organisations there is always room for improvement, for doing things better and for learning lessons from others.

Review Panel

The review panel comprised the following members:

Councillor Kevin Gillott (Labour) – Review Panel Chair

Councillor Alan Garrett (Labour)

Councillor John McGrory (Conservative)

Councillor Pam Hemsley (Labour)

Councillor Janet Hill (Labour)

Councillor Clive Hunt (Labour)

Councillor Barry Lewis (Conservative)

Councillor Peter Ramshaw (Conservative)

Councillor Derrick Skinner (Labour)

Support to the panel was provided by the Overview and Scrutiny Manager and the Principal Governance Officer

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Safeguarding Children Policy be updated to include up-to-date information including link officer details.
- 1.2 That staff be encouraged to attend MAT training courses at external locations.
- 1.3 That the content of the initial training and refresher training be reviewed to ensure they are specific to the needs of the course attendees.
- 1.4 That stakeholders such as police and social services be involved in training for staff to give a different perspective on first hand experience
- 1.5 That an awareness training session be provided for elected members.
- 1.6 That a mechanism be put in place to ensure that lower risk areas that are provided with information packs of safeguarding children are aware of their role and responsibilities.
- 1.7 That a mechanism be put in place to ensure and monitor that outside contractors have robust safeguarding arrangements.
- 1.8 That ways to improve the links with multi agencies be identified, including improved information sharing and proactive feedback from social care.
- 1.9 That a rolling publicity campaign be undertaken to maintain awareness of the importance of safeguarding arrangements and the role all staff have to play in this.
- 1.10 That the Council continue encouraging and supporting the identification and reporting of incidents wherever possible both within the Council and its Partners.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 At its meeting on 16th June, 2011 the Safer Homes and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny committee considered its work programme for 2011/12. A request had been received from the Director of Health and Wellbeing for the Committee to consider looking at the arrangements within the Authority for safeguarding children.
- 2.2 Recent high profile cases such as Baby P had demonstrated the importance of regularly keeping safeguarding arrangements under review to ensure they were fit for purpose. The Committee supported this request and thought it was timely to scrutinise how the Council ensured that a robust framework for safeguarding children was in place within the Authority.

3. Scope of Review

- 3.1 The review aimed to identify the current service provision within North East Derbyshire and establish whether it was providing an effective service. With this in mind, the panel agreed to explore the following areas:
- Are reporting lines adequate in terms of controlling and governing our safeguarding arrangements
 - Are staff adequately trained and is this refreshed and monitored
 - Do Members need to be more involved in safeguarding in terms of training and monitoring
 - Where we have third party organisations delivering council functions, is safeguarding taken seriously and have they adopted the correct processes and governance
 - Where contracts are being let to third party suppliers had staff had the correct training? Is it part of the contract that they identify safeguarding issues and have the correct processes and governance in place to escalate issues
 - Are staff aware of safeguarding matters. Do they know who their Child Protection Link Officers are within their directorate
 - Multi Agency Teams and our potential role in them
 - What other improvements can be made to our safeguarding activity

4. Method of Review

- 4.1 The principle method used to undertake the review was interviews with a range of District Council officers and partners to develop an understanding of the existing process.
- 4.2 Additionally the Panel decided to form a separate working party comprising three elected members, Councillors K Gillott, J Hill and J D McGrory to consider key documentation used in the service.
- 4.3 The Committee gathered a large amount of information from the interviews held and consideration of documentation. They were also provided with an analysis of views expressed in the interviews they had undertaken. This helped identify examples of good practice together with areas for improvement.

5. Evidence and Research

- 5.1 The following documents were considered as part of the review
 - Presentation by Paul Hackett – Director of Health and Wellbeing including responsibility for Safeguarding Children
 - List of Child Protection Link Officers
 - Quarterly update reports to Corporate Management Team
 - Reports to Cabinet
 - NEDDC Child Protection Policy
 - Rykneld Homes Safeguarding Children Guide
 - Staff Training Schedules
 - Concern Card
 - Derbyshire Safeguarding Children’s Board Agendas
 - Examples of serious case reviews - Ofsted

6. Key Findings

Areas of Good Practice

The role of the Council in Safeguarding Children

- 6.1 Evidence was provided that demonstrated that the Council understood its role in safeguarding children and that it was taken seriously. Staff consistently demonstrated that they understood how important this area of work was and in some front facing services such as leisure that there was a need to be constantly vigilant. The Director of Health and Wellbeing was already reviewing the safeguarding arrangements

within the authority and had specifically asked scrutiny to support him in this role by undertaking this review.

Reporting Arrangements

- 6.2 Taking the role seriously was further demonstrated by good reporting mechanisms being in place. Copies of quarterly performance reports to the Senior Management team over a number of years were provided. These reports set out details of new initiatives being trialled, the Councils legal requirements, regular amendments to policies and processes, monitoring of staff training, and an overview of activities within Rykneld Homes including the number of cases being dealt with. Similar update reports were also submitted to Cabinet regularly.
- 6.3 Staff who were interviewed demonstrated that they were clear about reporting mechanisms. Child Protection Link Officers were the principal way staff could refer and discuss issues. The majority of staff demonstrated that they knew who their link officer was or where the information of Child Protection Link Officers was published. The intranet contained a copy of the Child Protection Policy which contained details of how to raise issues and who to report to. Whilst for the majority of staff interviewed safeguarding was a secondary role within their job, the issue was taken seriously and people recognised the need to be vigilant. It was also understood that due to the complexity of the issues involved for most staff their role was to highlight issues so they could be referred to suitably qualified specialists at the County Council.

Training

- 6.4 There was a comprehensive training schedule in place which was monitored. Staff in high risk areas received initial training and subsequent refresher training at regular intervals. A data base was in place of course attendees and was monitored to ensure that staff attended the required training. Staff in areas of lower risk received less frequent training or information packs to keep them aware of their responsibilities.

Documentation Working Party

- 6.5 The working party met on one occasion to consider training records for staff, partners and elected members, Child Protection Policies for both North East Derbyshire District Council and its partner Rykneld Homes, monitoring reports and reporting mechanisms. The group recognised that they were not child protection experts so comments were made as lay persons examining the evidence.
- 6.6 They concluded that both the Child Protection Policy and the Safeguarding Children Guidance seemed fit for purpose. Both

documents had recently been updated. The reporting procedures seemed to be in place via Corporate Management Team and Cabinet. This was verified subsequently by questions to staff at interview. The role of link officers was clear and documented and this was also verified at the interviews to ensure staff understood the process contained within the documentation.

- 6.7 Training on safeguarding had taken place with a number of people as evidenced by the training schedules of courses completed. However, the working party also noted that it wished to consider the levels of awareness in the Authority generally.
- 6.8 One area the working party thought may need further investigation was the level of reporting particularly outside immediate Council Buildings. This was a difficult area to assess as there was no clear evidence of under reporting of incidents but the group felt it was an area that needed to be kept under review.

Areas for Improvement

Documentation and Policies

- 6.9 The panel found that some of the information was out of date within the policy due to organisational changes. The key areas were correct but link officers' names had become outdated due to the changes in personnel. However, the reporting procedure was still clear and officers referred issues to other link officers on the list if necessary.

Training and Information Packs

- 6.10 Several interviewees commented on the provision of training. Whilst the frequency was considered correct there was a general consensus that more variety of information should be incorporated. Currently the training provided was the same for new starters and for those members of staff returning for refresher training. As a consequence much of the information provided was repeated. It was suggested that this could be significantly improved by a more tailored programme for refresher courses and at both sessions the inclusion of case studies from professionals working in the area.
- 6.11 The provision of enough training courses throughout the year was dependant on Derbyshire County Councils timetable. At present staff favoured attending in house courses although others were provided at external locations. If staff could be encouraged to attend external courses this would increase the number of staff that could be trained within a period.

- 6.12 A range of services had involvement in safeguarding but the risk varied. Establishing the right degree of information and training to provide was therefore carefully assessed. One area raised at the interviews was information packs provided to some services and a discussion was held on how best to ensure that the information was understood. It was suggested that sufficient information was being provided but that some form of monitoring to ensure the information was read would be useful.
- 6.13 Similarly the role in safeguarding of elected members varied. Whilst Cabinet members had more responsibility it was felt that every member could play a part in safeguarding by the nature of their role and involvement at a Community level. It was suggested that a brief update be provided to members on the importance of safeguarding arrangements to enable them to have an up to date awareness in this area.

Contractors

- 6.14 Interviewees provided examples of how we ensure contractors have fit for purpose safeguarding arrangements in place. These could include pre tender screening, checking training programmes, clauses within service level agreements and approved provider certification. However, it was suggested that the monitoring of contractors actual performance in this area could be improved. There was no evidence of contractors failing to meet their obligations but the system for checking this could be more systematic.

Publicity

- 6.15 Interviewees suggested that more publicity in this area would be beneficial. Whilst many could not definitely say there had been no publicity, their lack of recall of recent initiatives suggested that the profile of the service would benefit from more regular publicity.

Multi Agency Teams

- 6.16 The role of multi agencies was discussed. It was widely recognised by interviewees that closer working arrangements needed to be built with Multi Agency Teams. In particular their involvement in staff training would be extremely beneficial because of the expertise they could bring.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The Committee concluded that overall the Council took its safeguarding arrangements very seriously and was undertaking a number of steps to ensure it fulfilled its responsibilities.
- 7.2 However, a number of improvements had been identified which focused on maintaining the profile of this area to ensure people remained fully aware of the role they played in safeguarding arrangements.

Footnote:

Outside of the review process Councillor B Lewis a Member of the Review Team raised an issue on safeguarding with regard to possible under reporting by Rykneld Homes. No evidence was provided to the Committee but they were minded to raise this issue for Cabinet to consider if they wish to make further investigations and pursue the matter with the Director of Children's Services at Derbyshire County Council to see if there were any issues.

8. List of Stakeholders Engaged During the Review

- Steve Birds – Swimming Development Officer
- Mick Blythe- Assistant Director of Leisure and Culture
- Steve Brunt – Street Scene Manager
- Tania Morrell – Senior Human Resources Adviser and Child Protection Link Officer
- Richard Pentin – Duty Officer – Leisure Services
- Rebecca Slack – Child Protection Lead Link Officer and Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager
- Angela Smith – Solutions and Support Manager and Link Officer, Rykneld Homes
- Lynda Walton – Visiting Officer, Revenues and Benefits
- Mark Walsham – Health Referral Operations Officer