

<b>CABINET</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM No. 8</b>
<b>12 DECEMBER 2011</b>	<b>PUBLIC REPORT</b>

Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Scott, Cabinet Member for Children's Services Councillor Holdich, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and University	
Contact Officer(s):	Director of Children's Services	Tel: 01733 863606

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S	
<b>FROM :</b> Director of Children's Services	<b>Deadline date :</b> N/A
1. That Cabinet notes the developments within Children's Services and the planned improvement activity.	

### 1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

This report is submitted following Cabinet's consideration on 26<sup>th</sup> September of a report on the response to the Ofsted inspection of safeguarding arrangements. Cabinet requested that it receive quarterly updates on progress in implementing the actions and recommendations arising from the Ofsted Inspection.

### 2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet with details of improvement actions undertaken since the 26<sup>th</sup> September meeting in response to the findings of the Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding carried out in August 2011.
- 2.2 This report is for Cabinet to consider under its Terms of Reference No. 3.2.3. To take a leading role in promoting the economic, environmental and social well-being of the area.

### 3. TIMESCALE

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	<b>NO</b>
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### 4. PROGRESS REPORT

- 4.1 The Council has responded vigorously following the receipt of the Ofsted judgement. We quickly secured the three month secondment of an experienced Director of Children's Services from Cambridgeshire County Council, Mr Adrian Loades to provide immediate leadership of the improvement activity. The Leader, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and University have also met with Mr Tim Loughton the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children to reassure him as to the high priority the Council is placing on rapid improvement in Children's Services. The Minister has informed the Council that he will issue an Improvement Notice in response to the inspection. At the time of writing this report, the final Improvement Notice had yet to be received although it is expected that it will not necessitate major changes in the planned improvement activity. The Council has also levered in expert support from authorities in the region to support the improvement programme.

- 4.2 An early draft of the improvement plan has been considered by the Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequality Scrutiny Committee. The plan will be subsequently restructured and organised on a more thematic basis as opposed to the chronologically structured version considered by the Scrutiny Committee. The plan brings together the recommendations made by Ofsted and the findings of the diagnostic work and case file audits.
- 4.3 The improvement plan gives a specific focus to improving social work practice in Peterborough. A separate audit of 190 recent social cases has also been undertaken and the findings of the audits have also informed the improvement plan. While there are examples of some very good practice, the audit work confirmed the Ofsted view that social work is too variable and that systems and processes either do not support effective social work practice or fail to ensure effective practice.
- 4.4 The Council has established an External Improvement Board independently chaired by Jane Held, a former Director of Social Services with LB Camden. Membership of the Board includes the Council's Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and representatives from the police, health organisations, schools, the Department for Education and the Peterborough Safeguarding Children's Board. The Improvement Board will review general progress in delivering the improvement plan as well as undertaking detailed reviews of specific areas. The Board will monitor progress through focusing on a range of qualitative measures of social work.
- 4.5 In addition, Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee has proposed to form a task and finish group to oversee the implementation of the improvement plan. The Committee is proposing to do this through regular visits to social care teams to assess progress and improvement at the front line.
- 4.6 Short term action has been necessary in order to respond to immediate pressures. Demands on the service have increased since the Ofsted report and as a consequence it has been necessary to deploy additional resources within the Contact Centre and the contact, referral and assessment function where caseloads remain too high, which is impacting on timeliness. Additional capacity is also being made available to address backlogs in case recording.
- 4.7 Changes have been made to quality assurance and performance management arrangements within children's social care. Arrangements for the assessment of risk and protective factors have been strengthened. An audit of supervision has been undertaken and arrangements put in place for monitoring the timeliness and quality of social work supervisions.
- 4.8 Partner agencies have been reminded of the escalation procedure should they have concerns over the progress of social care cases or social care practice.
- 4.9 Work has also commenced on a number of longer term activities, including the review and development of social work procedures, staff training and development, clarifying thresholds and reviewing and creating a realistic staffing establishment for children's social care. A review of the implementation of the replacement of the current information system, RAISE, has been undertaken with a view to bringing forward the implementation of the Liquid Logic replacement system. Hertfordshire County Council is providing support to a review of the contact centre and contact referral and assessment arrangements in order to strengthen the processes for responding to referrals.

- 4.10 Work has also commenced to develop a strategy for reducing the numbers of children in the care of the Council. This involves considering the arrangements for supporting families with children on “the edge of care”, reducing the time of children in the care of the Council and the unit cost of care and ensuring that effective planning and support arrangements reduce the risk of children returning to the care of the Council.

## **5. CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 Partner agencies, parents and children will be involved in the improvement activity.

## **6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES**

- 6.1 The improvement activity has been planned to secure the following outcomes:
- The implementation of robust arrangements for contact, referral and assessment in response to the immediate issues for action identified in the inspection report;
  - Improvements in the capacity and capability of leadership and management arrangements; and
  - The development of a longer term improvement plan with a particular focus on developing the capacity required for sustainable improvement.
- 6.2 The Ofsted inspection methodology will change from 1 April 2012. The current consultation on inspection arrangements envisages longer unannounced inspections with a focus on the inspection being on the child’s “journey” from needing help to receiving help. The improvement activity is intended to ensure that the Council receives a successful inspection outcome.

## **7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1 The Council needs to secure immediate improvements to safeguard children and in the longer term put in place a sustainable high quality Children’s Service in Peterborough.

## **8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 8.1 Not applicable. The Improvement Plan reflects a considerable amount of activity for all of Children’s Services. The diagnostic work has informed the approach taken to improvement and identified the need to focus on improving social care practice.

## **9. IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The cost of the improvement programme can be met from within existing budgets. Resources are available to secure improvement in the immediate and longer term.
- 9.2 The Secretary of State has the power to issue a statutory notice if he or she deems this is required to secure the necessary improvements within a failing service.

## **10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding: Peterborough 6<sup>th</sup> September 2011

Ofsted Unannounced Inspection of contact referral and assessment arrangements 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2011

Ofsted Safeguarding and Looked after Children Inspection: Peterborough 21<sup>st</sup> May 2010

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