

North Tyneside Council

Report to Cabinet

Date: 9 July 2012

Item 7(e)

Title: Ofsted Announced
Inspection of
Safeguarding and Looked
After Children Services

Portfolio(s): Children, Young People and Learning

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor David Lilly

Report from Directorate: Children, Young People and Learning

Report Author: Paul Cook (Tel: 643 7381)
Head of Preventative and Safeguarding Services

Wards affected: All

PART 1

1.1 Purpose:

This report provides Cabinet with details of the outcome to the announced Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services within North Tyneside. Cabinet's authority to take forward actions to address the areas for improvement highlighted in the inspection is sought.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1.2.1 Note the outcome of the announced inspection; and
- 1.2.2 Authorise the Head of Preventative and Safeguarding, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning and the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Learning, to put in place and take forward, an action plan to address the areas identified for improvement, attached as Appendix 1.

1.3 Forward plan:

This report is listed in the Forward Plan for the Cabinet meeting on 9 July 2012.

1.4 Council plan and policy framework

This report has no direct link to the Council's Strategic Plan 2012-15.

The report is in line with the Council's Policy Framework for Children and Young People as outlined in the North Tyneside Children and Young People's Plan 2010-14. In particular:

- Theme 1 Safeguarding, Health and Positive Lifestyles: Priority Outcome 1.1 vulnerable children, young people and families are supported at the earliest opportunity.

1.5 Information:

In 2009 Government introduced a programme of announced inspections of safeguarding and looked after children services, a programme that will be concluded in 2012 to be replaced by a reviewed inspection regime. North Tyneside was one of the last areas to be inspected under this system.

The inspection team consisted of four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one inspector from the Care Quality Commission. The purpose of the inspection is to 'evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring children and young people are properly safeguarded and determine the quality of service provision for looked after children'.

The inspection took place from the 5 - 16 March 2012. The resulting report was placed on the Ofsted website on the 8 May 2012.

The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:

- Discussions with 44 children, 39 parents and carers, 10 foster carers and adopters, front line staff and managers, commissioned providers, elected members and a range of community representatives.
- A review of 60 case files.
- Analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children and Young People's Plan, performance data and information from the inspection of local settings such as schools and day care provision.

The inspection examines 22 areas and provides an outcome grade for each one: inadequate, adequate, good or outstanding. North Tyneside has 20 (91%) of the separate areas rated as either good or outstanding. Two are rated as adequate. This outcome places North Tyneside as one of the top 10 councils inspected to date.

The report highlights:-

- Safeguarding services have an overall effectiveness rating of good with an outstanding capacity for improvement. Importantly the report highlights (section 61) 'effective action is taken by the council and partners to ensure that front line child protection services are suitably resourced'.
- Services for looked after children have an overall effectiveness rating of good with an outstanding capacity for improvement. Significantly the report notes (section 90), 'arrangements to safeguard looked after children and young people are outstanding. All Looked after children and young people spoken to by inspectors and nearly all who responded to the Care4Me survey said they felt safe in their placements and their placements were good.'
- The Children Young People and Learning Board (CYPL Board) is recognised as providing very effective governance to a range of initiatives and services that has lead to significant and sustained outcomes for young people. The Council is particularly praised for its 'highly effective data management which is a significant strength of the organisation and particularly effectively supports the monitoring of priorities set by the CYPL Board'.

- The Children and Young People’s Plan demonstrates the Council and partners’ strong vision for and commitment to services for children. In addition the ‘exceptionally well administered activities of the Young Mayor, Cabinet and Council add significant value to the engagement processes’.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is noted to have a robust business plan and a strong commitment to multi-agency working with the effectiveness of services to ensure children and young people are safe and feel safe being rated as good. Health colleagues are noted to have put in place good arrangements to carry out child protection medicals and children attending A+E at North Tyneside General Hospital are safeguarded well. Good partnership working ensures that, as required, unborn children are safeguarded.
- The engagement of the Council’s elected members and senior officers in the safeguarding and looked after children agenda is noted as being very effectively achieved. The ‘knowledgeable and well informed Lead Member and Elected Mayor are well linked to Children’s Services through a cycle of regular meetings’.
- The Change, Efficiency and Improvement Programme is acknowledged as providing clear and robust financial management of services. The inspectors note that successful implementation of the programme ‘is leading to a situation in which there are no cuts in front line children’s services and there are areas of investment such as in early intervention and preventative services’.
- The ambition for and prioritisation of, safeguarding services to looked after children and young people is rated as outstanding. The Corporate Parenting Committee is praised for its wide ranging knowledge and expertise. Members are noted as championing the needs of looked after children. The presence of members on the fostering and adoption panels is seen as strength. Additionally the work of the children’s scrutiny committee is noted as significant and appropriately focusing attention on the care and wellbeing of looked after children.
- The inspectors were impressed by the strong partnership ethos that pervades the delivery of services and highlight in particular -:
 - Effective collaboration with Adult services and especially the collaboration between the LSCB and the Safeguarding Adults Board.
 - The Council’s Legal Services Team is acknowledged as being creative and skilled and providing a high standard of advice to social workers and managers.
 - A range of effective partnerships with third sector organisations offer significant added value to services for children and young people - ‘organisations spoken to said they feel a valued member of an inclusive partnership’
 - The well attended Domestic Abuse Partnership that has enhanced the borough’s understanding of domestic violence through its work with the courts and other forums
 - Public protection arrangements as organised through Northumbria Police are seen as very effective risk management processes with highly speedy examples noted of positive intervention.

Following publication of the report a letter was received from Tim Loughton MP and Parliamentary Under-secretary of State for Children and Families, praising the Council and partners for the very strong outcome to the inspection and encouraging a sharing of the good practice with other councils. The region has strong arrangements in place to do so and we are already making plans to take up peer review opportunities within the region. One of our senior managers has assisted in two Peer Reviews with other councils.

The report has been widely circulated around the Council and to partners. The outcome reflects the Council and partners' commitment to children, young people and their families and the drive to continually improve services that will make a real difference to those in our community who are vulnerable and in need.

The inspection report highlighted areas in which the Council and partners can improve its service to children and young people. The action plan at Appendix 1 provides full detail of the recommendations and the actions proposed to remedy the matters raised.

The areas for attention fall into four categories:-

1. Infrastructure. The inspection recommends that staffing be increased in some areas to meet rising demand e.g. the Independent Review Team and the Designated Nurse service for looked after children. The report also supports a change of working practice by the Northumbria Police Public Protection Unit to ensure police staff are more readily available to attend day time meetings.
2. Practice issues. The inspectors found some files they examined did not accurately record the work undertaken with service users. The report notes an inconsistency in the standard of some documents contained in case files. The recording of assessments, pathways plans and user views requires improvement.
3. Early help and prevention services. The inspection outcome supports the direction of travel the directorate wishes to pursue in relation to a service re-design that will strengthen early help and prevention services to all those aged 0-19 years. Our services are noted to be of a high quality and readily available to those in need. To further improve effectiveness we are required to better embed the single assessment process (The Common Assessment Framework – CAF) and ensure a broad multi-agency take up of the system.
4. Training and development. Linked to numbers 2. and 3. there is a need for some staff to have additional training in certain aspects of their work e.g. Life Story Work so that they are more confident in working with children and young people in this regard. The changes proposed in the delivery of the Council's early help and prevention services will also result in training being provided to staff as they adopt new roles.

1.6 Decision options:

- 1) To agree the action plan proposed as a result of the announced inspection and the areas for improvement identified (Appendix 1).
- 2) To decline to accept the action plan and require officers to submit detail of an alternative action plan

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Cabinet is recommended to agree the proposed action plan. The effectiveness of services to meet safeguarding and looked after children's needs will be improved through the implementation of the action plan and ensure continued high levels of service.

1.8 Appendices:

Appendix 1: The 2012/13 Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services Action Plan.

1.9 Contact officers:

Paul Cook, Head of Preventative and Safeguarding – telephone: 643 7381
Anthony Gollings, Financial Business Manager, CYPL – telephone: 643 8071

1.10 Background information:

- Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services – Ofsted Report 8 May 2012
- Letter dated 21.5.12 from Tim Loughton MP
- Framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children (Ofsted April 2012)
- Inspections of safeguarding and looked after children services (Ofsted October 2010)

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

Safeguarding and looked after children services are appropriately funded by the Council and no additional resources are required as a result of the inspection. The areas for improvement within the action plan can be delivered within existing budgets.

2.2 Legal

The Council's legal duty to discharge safeguarding and looked after children services, as required by the Children Act 1989 and 2004 and related guidance, have been shown to be appropriately discharged.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

The inspection programme included a number of opportunities for users of safeguarding and looked after children services to comment upon the service provided to them and be involved in assessing the quality and effectiveness of services.

2.4 Human rights

Safeguarding and looked after children services are provided in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

Equality and diversity is an area that the inspection evaluates in relation to the provision of safeguarding and looked after children services. The report notes that equality and diversity actions are good.

2.6 Risk management

There are no specific risks directly arising from this report.

2.7 Crime and disorder

The inspection report notes that safeguarding and looked after children services in the borough are undertaken in partnership with Northumbria police. This partnership works well and contributes to making the borough a safe place to live.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

There are no environment and sustainability implications directly arising from this report.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Strategic Director(s)
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)
- Chief Executive
- Chief Finance Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Strategic Manager
Policy and Partnership



Report author

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