

Test of Assurance – North Tyneside Council Director of Children’s Services Functions

Background

North Tyneside Council introduced new senior leadership arrangements in October 2013. A new post of Deputy Chief Executive was established with responsibility for all services relating to people and place, including children’s services. The post replaced the existing positions of Director of Community Services and Director of Children, Young People and Learning. Under the new arrangements, the statutory Director of Children’s Services function was assigned to the Head of Children, Young People and Learning. (see annex 1)

Director of Children’s Services - Legislative Requirements

Section 18 of the Children’s Act 2004 requires every top tier local authority to appoint a Director of Children’s Services. The Director of Children’s Services has professional responsibility for:

- the leadership, strategy and effectiveness of local authority children’s services;
- securing services which address the needs of all children and young people;
- the performance of the local authority functions relating to the education and social care of children and young people and
- ensuring systems are in place to discharge these functions.

It is legally permissible to combine the Director of Children’s Services function with other operational functions, providing the Council is assured that any additional responsibilities do not detract from the focus on improving outcomes for all children and young people. Government guidance recommends that a Test of Assurance is carried out when new arrangements are put in place. Local authorities are free to devise their own arrangements for testing assurance.

North Tyneside Council’s Test of Assurance

The purpose of this test is to provide assurance that the North Tyneside Council’s structure and organisational arrangements enable it to

- fulfil the statutory duties around children and young people effectively
- provide transparency about accountabilities and responsibilities
- support inter-agency and partnership working.

The test will consider whether assigning the statutory Director of Children’s Services function to the Head of Children, Young people and Learning has weakened or diluted the focus on children and young people’s outcomes. It will also consider whether the new arrangements provide a clear line of accountability for safeguarding children and young people.

North Tyneside’s Test of Assurance considers the six elements identified in Government guidance as critical for delivering the statutory Director of Children’s Services functions. The table below sets out the essential elements of assurance, North Tyneside’s arrangements, identification of risk and corresponding mitigation and any additional actions that are required.

Test of Assurance

Essential Element of Assurance	North Tyneside Council’s Proposed Arrangements	Risk Areas and Mitigation	Any Additional Action Required?
<p>Clarity about how senior management arrangements ensure the safety and educational, social and emotional needs of the children and young people are given due priority and how they enable staff to help the local authority discharge its statutory duties in an integrated and coherent way.</p>	<p>Robust senior management arrangements are in place to ensure the Council fulfils its statutory duties regarding children and young people. The Director of Children’s Services reports directly to the Deputy Chief Executive of the Council and is a member of the Senior Leadership Team. She also reports directly to the Chief Executive through the Corporate Assurance Group.</p> <p>The local authority’s Officer Delegation Scheme and Sub Delegations sets out clear responsibilities for senior leadership.</p> <p>The Director of Children’s Services is supported by a strong and experienced management team that covers the full range of services available to children and young people aged 0-19/25 years. This ensures a coherent approach to the planning and delivery of services and</p>	<p>There was a potential risk arising from the significant change in the senior leadership arrangements.</p> <p>Temporary management arrangements were put in place during the first 6 months of the revised structure to ensure a smooth transition of key safeguarding responsibilities to the new Director of Children’s Services. The measures ensured the continuity of key assurance elements during this period.</p>	<p>This test of assurance will be revisited following any future significant changes to the senior management arrangements.</p>

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	<p>resources.</p> <p>A clear understanding of the new management arrangements and responsibilities exist amongst staff. A clear line of accountability has been maintained, ensuring staff know where to report issues and how to escalate any concerns.</p> <p>The arrangements for reporting under the revised organisational structure are established and well understood.</p>		
<p>Clarity about how the local authority intends to discharge its children's services functions and be held accountable for them from political, professional, legal and corporate perspectives (including where, for example, services are commissioned from external providers or mutualised in an arm's length body).</p>	<p>Robust systems are in place to ensure Children's Services are held accountable by the corporate and democratic structures. The Corporate Assurance Framework for Adult's and Children's Services sets out a clear framework for ensuring the Council's statutory duties with regard to children and young people are met. (see annex 3)</p> <p>The establishment of North Tyneside's Corporate Assurance Group is a key development. Senior managers meet each month to provide assurance to the Chief Executive for Adult's and Children's services. This is chaired by the Chief Executive and ensures Children's Services functions are held to account from a</p>	<p>A Corporate Assurance Framework was established to provide integrated strategic oversight for children's and adults' services. It also ensures the Council meets its statutory obligations around reporting and accountability.</p>	<p>As above</p>

Essential Element of Assurance	North Tyneside Council's Proposed Arrangements	Risk Areas and Mitigation	Any Additional Action Required?
	<p>professional, legal and corporate perspective. (see annex 2).</p> <p>Strong arrangements are in place to ensure political accountability for children's provision. The Corporate Assurance Group reports to the elected Mayor and Cabinet (including the Lead Member for Children, Young People and Learning). This ensures that senior political leaders receive the evidence they require to fulfil their statutory duties to children in the borough.</p> <p>The Lead Member for Children Young People and Learning continues to be a discrete role and provides a clear focus for political accountability. The Lead Member is able to hold the Director of Children's Services to account for decisions and outcomes at weekly meeting.</p> <p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Children, Education and Skills Sub Committee continue to provide robust challenge to children's provision in the borough.</p> <p>The introduction of the Education and Safeguarding Panel of elected members will further strengthen accountability.</p>		

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	<p>The Head of Commissioning and Investment oversees the Council's commissioning of services for children and young people. There is a dedicated Children's Commissioning Team, which is integrated with the Adult Social Care Commissioning Team. The Lead Member for Children, Young People and Learning holds weekly meetings with the Head of Service.</p> <p>The Children, Young People and Learning Partnership's Commissioning Executive Board oversees joint children's commissioning arrangements, providing robust challenge and scrutiny.</p> <p>In all cases the best interests of the child are central to any decision made.</p>		
<p>The seniority and breadth of responsibilities allocated to individual post holders and how this impacts on their ability to undertake those responsibilities (especially where a local authority is considering allocating any additional functions to the Director of Children's Services post).</p>	<p>North Tyneside's arrangements demonstrate that responsibilities are allocated to post holders with sufficient seniority. The breadth of responsibilities remains proportionate and coherent.</p> <p>The Director of Children's Services has the experience and knowledge to exercise the statutory functions. The arrangements also ensures they have a clear purview over the children's services agenda. This enables coherent action to be taken to address issues facing children and young</p>		<p>As above</p>

Essential Element of Assurance	North Tyneside Council's Proposed Arrangements	Risk Areas and Mitigation	Any Additional Action Required?
	<p>people.</p> <p>Those additional functions placed on the Director of Children's Services are proportionate and are Children's Service functions. This does not undermine the focus on children and young people's outcomes.</p> <p>The Director of Children's Service reports to the Deputy Chief Executive who has responsibility for People and Places. This facilitates the integration of children's services with key support services, enabling joined up solutions to the issues faced by children and young people and provides greater flexibility around resources.</p>		
<p>The involvement and experiences of children and young people in relation to local services.</p>	<p>Arrangements remain unchanged. Children and young people are strongly involved in planning and reviewing of services and this will continue to be the case.</p> <p>Our nationally recognised Participation and Engagement team ensures children and young people have a wide range of opportunities to shape local services and contribute to the national agenda. These include an opportunity to stand for Young Mayor who attends full Cabinet, a Youth</p>	<p>No additional risks.</p>	<p>As above</p>

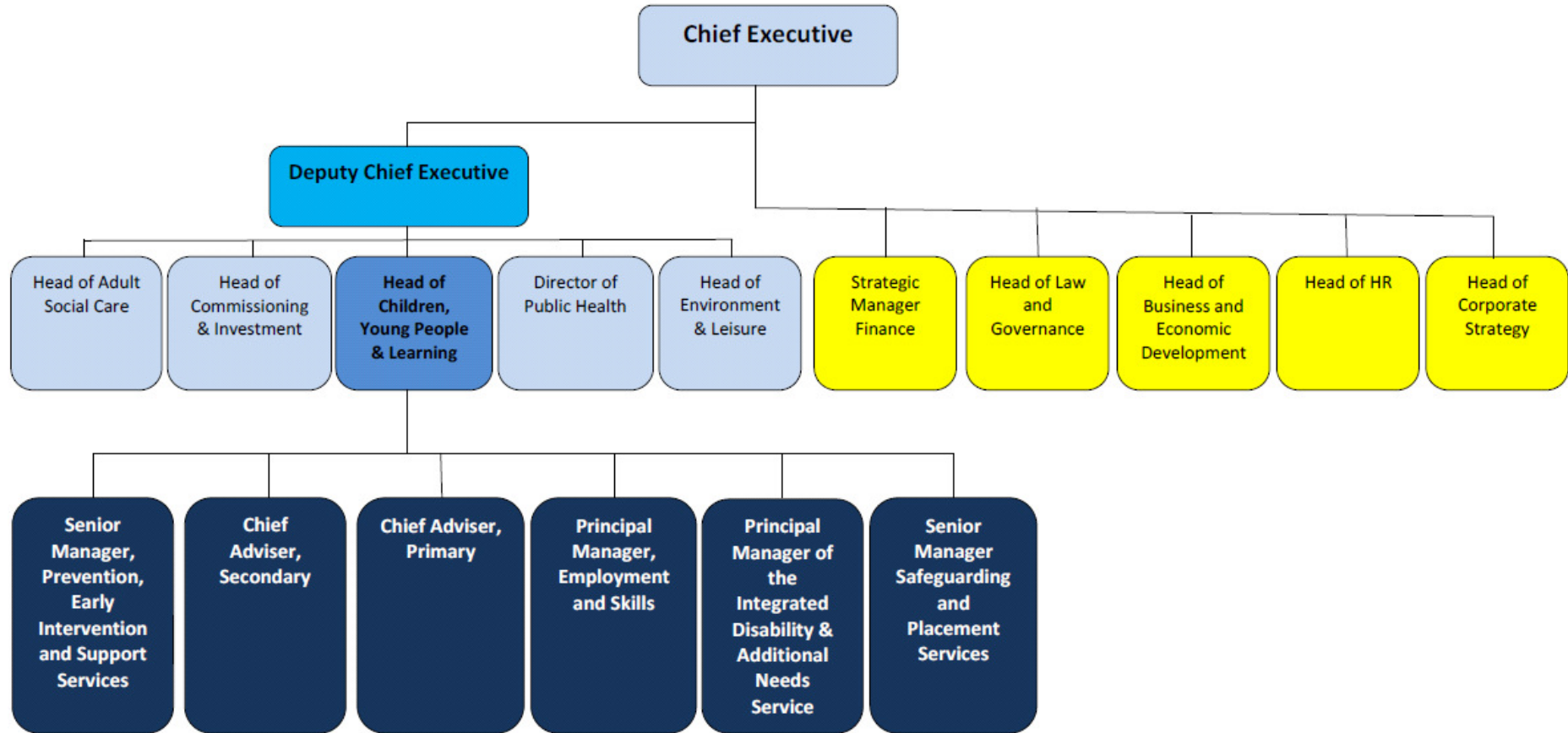
Essential Element of Assurance	North Tyneside Council's Proposed Arrangements	Risk Areas and Mitigation	Any Additional Action Required?
	Council and Looked after Children Council.		
<p>Clarity about child protection systems, ensuring professional leadership and practice is robust and can be challenged on a regular basis, including an appropriate focus on offering early help and working with other agencies in doing so.</p>	<p>Responsibility for North Tyneside's child protection systems lies with the Director of Children's Services. Operational delivery of safeguarding, prevention and early intervention is overseen by experienced senior managers.</p> <p>The Director of Children's Services is a member of the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board. The Board coordinates and quality assures safeguarding across partner organisations, holding members to account for their performance.</p> <p>The Corporate Assurance Group holds the Chair of the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board to account at 6 monthly meetings.</p> <p>In addition, the Deputy Chief Executive regularly meets with the Chair of the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board and Adults Safeguarding Board quarterly to challenge their leadership of the safeguarding agenda and support them in discharging their roles.</p>	<p>The role and remit of the North Tyneside Local Safeguarding Children Board has been further strengthened by the appointment of a new chairperson in summer 2014. He has led a review into the board's roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p>The adequacy and effectiveness of local</p>	<p>The Children, Young People and Learning Partnership brings together key</p>		

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<p>partnership arrangements e.g. the local authority's relationship with schools, the LSCB, the courts, the children's trust cooperation arrangements, Community Safety Partnerships Health and Well Being Boards, Youth Offending Team Partnerships, Youth Offending Team Partnerships, Police, Probation, Multi-agency Risk Assessment conferences) and their respective accountabilities)</p>	<p>representatives from across children's services to improve outcomes for children and young people through the integration of provision. The partnership is chaired at a Head of Service level. The Children and Young People's Plan for 2014-18 has been agreed by partners and contains shared priorities for action.</p> <p>The Prevention and Early Intervention Board brings together partners to deliver a sustainable balance between preventative services and remedial services. The Board has a clear strategy and action plan that is driving integrated delivery.</p>		

Summary

North Tyneside's Council's arrangements fulfil the statutory duties around children and young people. The revised structure provides clear accountabilities and responsibilities and systems are in place to provide political, professional, legal and corporate accountability. The arrangements support the borough's track record of effective partnership working and continue to ensure that children in North Tyneside are as safe as they can be. The assignment of the statutory Director of Children's Services functions to the Head of Children, Young People and Learning do not detract from the strong focus on children and young people's needs that exists within the borough.

Annex 1 Revised Organisational Structure for Children's Services



Annex 2 Corporate Assurance Group

Purpose

The group provides assurance of the Council's statutory functions around children and adults. It also provides a strategic forum for considering current and emerging intelligence that may impact upon the statutory functions. The group holds key partners and the safeguarding boards to account for their roles in assisting the Council's to fulfil its statutory duties for children and adults.

Membership

Membership of the group comprises:

- Chief Executive North Tyneside Council
- Deputy Chief Executive North Tyneside Council
- Head of Children, Young People and Learning (Director of Children's Services statutory functions)
- Head of Adult Social Care

The following people are invited to attend twice a year:

- Chair of North Tyneside Adults Social Care Safeguarding Board
- Chair of North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board

Chief Officers of key safeguarding partner organisations are invited to attend an annual meeting with the group.

Frequency of Meetings

Meetings are held monthly and are chaired by the Chief Executive of North Tyneside Council

Standing Agenda

The following items form the core of the group's agenda at each meeting.

- Review of previous minutes and actions
- Monitoring of Children, Young People and Learning service data
- Monitoring of Adult Social Care service data
- Review of current trends and pressures
- Performance and engagement
- Soft intelligence from frontline professionals

- Issues arising from the safeguarding boards
- Inspection updates
- Serious Case Review updates
- Key messages for the Elected Mayor, Cabinet Members and the Senior Leadership team.

Members of the group can also add items to the agenda as appropriate.

Reporting Arrangements

Minutes of the meetings are shared with the:

- Elected Mayor
- Cabinet members including Lead Member for Children, Young People and Learning

Annex 3 Corporate Assurance Framework

