

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet
AUTHOR: Chief Executive

8 December 2005

CHILDREN'S SERVICES: THE CONTRIBUTION OF DISTRICT COUNCILS

Purpose

1. This report sets out the new statutory duties on District Councils arising from the Children Act 2004 and recommends that a lead member is appointed for children's services.

Effect on Corporate Objectives

2.	Quality, Accessible Services	The quality and accessibility of services for children in Cambridgeshire should be enhanced.
	Village Life	The aim for children/young people to 'make a positive contribution' should contribute to village life.
	Sustainability	-
	Partnership	The Children & Young People Plan is being drawn up and will be delivered by a partnership between the County and District Councils with PCT's, the Police and voluntary organisations.

Background

3. The government published the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' in September 2003 following the report in January 2003 of the Laming Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié. The Children Bill was published in March 2004 and enshrined in legislation in the Children Act in November 2004. The act requires the development of an integrated response to needs, and cooperation between all agencies in order to improve outcomes for all children and young people.
4. The local response to the national agenda has been overseen by Cambridgeshire's Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP). The partnership includes representatives from the County and each District Council, the Primary Care Trusts, the Police, the Learning and Skills Council, Connexions and the voluntary sector; it is chaired by the County's Chief Executive. The CYPSP has developed a vision for children and young people, and agreed the kind of services and the way of organising them in order to deliver the vision.
5. The restructuring of the County Council has created the 'Office of Children and Young People', bringing together the education service and the children's part of social services into an integrated structure. As part of this structure, three new Area Director posts have been created, one of which covers South Cambs and Cambridge; the post holders are now working to develop multi-disciplinary teams in each of their areas.
6. Extensive consultation has taken place with stakeholders and partners concerning the new structures. The outcome of this consultation has resulted in proposals to deliver services at three levels: many specialist services will be delivered at county level; area teams will include, for example, social workers, pre-school specialist

teachers and family support workers; 'locality' teams which will cover two or three village college catchment areas, will include personal advisors, education welfare officers and youth workers. The final details are the subject of a current consultation process.

7. The Children Act requires every county/unitary authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). The LSCB replaces the voluntary collaboration of the Area Child Protection Committee, and its role is to coordinate the activity of partners and ensure their effectiveness in respect of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
8. Officers of the District Councils in Cambridgeshire have been meeting together during 2005 with County colleagues to consider the Districts' contribution to the Children agenda. The I&DeA (Improvement & Development Agency) have assisted with this process, helping to run a workshop 'Working Together to Improve Outcomes for Children' on 21 October, for district members and officers. The workshop considered examples of good practice from each district, discussed how districts could best contribute, and considered needs and priorities in each area: The needs and priorities identified for our area are shown in **Appendix A**.
9. Section 10 of the Children Act creates a new statutory duty on district councils. It requires cooperation with the children's services authority, that is the County Council, by:
 - a) District Councils
 - b) The Police Authority and Chief Constable
 - c) The Local Probation Board
 - d) The Youth Offending Team
 - e) The Strategic Health Authority and Primary Care Trust
 - f) The Learning and Skills Council

These partners must work with the County, have regard to any guidance issued, and may establish a pooled fund for children's trusts.

10. Section 11 of the Children Act applies to the same bodies, with the addition of governors of prisons. This section requires each body to ensure their services have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This means that all reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that in any work with children, young people and their families, the risks of harm to the children's welfare is minimised.
11. Some initial training has been undertaken with managers responsible for staff whose work may bring them into contact with children and young people; this was joined with similar training concerning vulnerable-elderly people, as most of the staff groups concerned may have contact with either group. Further training will be required.

Considerations

12. The CYPSP have recently agreed the draft of the first Children & Young People Plan for Cambridgeshire to meet the assessed needs in the county. This plan is subject to a formal consultation period with partners between 28 November 2005 and 16 January 2006. As the plan is 88 pages long, it is not being circulated with this agenda, but copies are available on request. The questions posed as a basis for the consultation include:
 - a) is the vision right?

- b) are the key performance indicators the right ones?
- c) are the lead organisations identified the right ones for the actions?

The aspects of the plan which particularly affect the district are considered below.

13. The vision set out in the plan states:
- “We believe that as a partnership our role is to ensure all children and young people achieve their potential. We seek to ensure that all children and young people have a sure start in life and an equal opportunity to thrive within their families and communities. We aim to ensure they are supported, particularly at times of need and transition, so that they are able to make the most of education, training and employment opportunities.”

The plan sets out how the partnership will move forward to achieve this vision.

14. In Every Child Matters the government identified five outcomes for children and young people:
- 1. Be Healthy
 - 2. Stay Safe
 - 3. Enjoy and Achieve
 - 4. Make a Positive Contribution
 - 5. Achieve Economic Well-being

The Children Plan identifies actions to make progress towards each of these outcomes for the 119,000 0-18 year olds identified in the 2001 census; it is noted that numbers in South Cambs are expected to see slight-rises.

15. The partnership has, through its review of needs and identification of priorities, set out key outcome areas where improvement is essential between 2006 & 2009. These are:
- 1. Improving the emotional and physical health and well-being of children and young people and those with responsibility for their care.
 - 2. Raising the aspirations of young people to improve their employment and life prospects.
 - 3. Developing supportive communities which provide opportunities for children and young people to participate fully.
 - 4. Better outcomes for children looked after by the local authority.
 - 5. Raising the educational performance for all young people.
 - 6. Ensuring that all young people can lead safe and secure lives free from unreasonable risk.

The full list of these key outcomes, with key performance indicators, are attached in **Appendix B**. Two particular areas are highlighted which affect our district: in outcome 2, the needs of those in rural areas; and in outcome 3, access to recreation and participation in sport and physical activity.

16. The services of this council are affected by both the priority areas identified in para 15, and by the need to maintain and improve performance more widely to achieve the 5 outcomes in para 14. The services most affected are community services and housing, but there are wider implications on all ‘customer services’ we provide. The main areas are set out below.

17. Priority 1 (in para 15) has a performance indicator to reduce the incidence of obesity among children under 11. Clearly our responsibilities for leisure and sport can affect this, and our active role in sports development to increase participation will help. We will need to take this priority into account in our plans for the next 3 years. Unfortunately, the TEAM project, specifically aimed at children aged 8 - 11 with obesity problems, is not able to continue due to reductions arising from capping.
18. There is a set of actions identified concerning Traveller children, which we will need to take into account. These include increasing Traveller attendance and attainment in schools, reducing exclusions and racial harassment or bullying and increasing the level of transition from primary to secondary school. Action 4.8 aims to improve the cultural development of Travellers, amongst others, and including youth work with Travellers. We will need to work closely with partners on some of these issues, and include appropriate items in our own Travellers strategy.
19. Our work with the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) will be affected by a number of actions in the plan. These include increasing the prevention activity of the Youth Offending service, such as promoting restorative justice interventions in antisocial behaviour work, developing a youth crime strategy and the development of Youth Inclusion and Support Panels. We will also need to take into account action 1.6, to reduce teenage alcohol consumption and use of drugs. The established joint work on domestic violence is covered in action 2.17.
20. Action 1.1 expects District Councils to work with the new Area Directors to implement a Play Strategy, aimed at creating more play opportunities through supporting the development of green spaces and facilities for young people. We already provide advice and support to villages and parish councils, and funding for play facilities in small villages; we may need to review what we can provide to meet this action, while taking into account our stretched resources. We should note that this aim fits closely with one in the agreed Community Strategy for South Cambs.
21. In the wider Action Plan, action 4.1 sets out the development and implementation of a comprehensive sports, arts and cultural strategy, delivery physical activity strategies in each district, as well as the delivery of sports and arts programmes in village colleges in South Cambs. These requirements will be addressed as part of our review of cultural and community services, which is being taken forward through a member working group which starts this month.
22. The opportunities provided for facilities for children by the development of new communities is set out in action 3.1, with District Councils nominated to lead. We are expected to ensure high quality educational and recreational facilities are provided including suitable childcare and school places access to sports provision on school sites, facilities designed to meet the recreational and social needs of young people, and services having regard to the diverse needs of the community. These points are being taken forward as part of our planning processes.
23. In Priority 2, about life prospects, a key performance indicator is the reduction of 16-18 year olds who present as homeless. This is extended by 5.8 in the wider Action Plan which aims to improve access to affordable housing for young people through the provision of affordable homes, ensuring a mix of housing suitable for young people and increased provision of appropriate supported housing. These issues will need to be addressed through the delivery of the council's housing and homelessness strategies.

24. The most widespread impact of the Children Act and the plan concerns our duties on safeguarding children. These will affect all our services where staff come into contact with children and families, whether in their own homes, at events or in council offices. Staff need to know how to identify signs which could indicate that the well-being of children is at risk, including possible signs of abuse, and to know how to report these concerns and the appropriate boundaries about sharing information. Some training has taken place but more will be needed.
25. In addition, the Council has clear duties as an employer, to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to prevent the possibility of council staff, or people who undertake work for us, putting the well-being of children at risk or carrying out abuse. We already have measures in place to ensure this, such as requiring Criminal Record Bureau checks for appropriate staff, but we are likely to need to review our practices and consider if further measures are required.
26. The Head of Community Services has been identified as the Council's lead officer with regard to safeguarding children, when our child protection policies were adopted in 2004. However, this responsibility was added to his existing workload, and limited progress has been possible. It is anticipated that a small working group, with representatives from across the council, will be needed in order to review our current policy and practices and consider the need for improvements. East Cambs have recently produced a draft Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy, and this may be useful in considering what is required at South Cambs.
27. At the I&DeA event referred to in para 8 above, the proposal emerged that there should be nominated lead officer for Children and Young People at each district council. While this recommendation from I&DeA is accepted as good practice, current resourcing limitations make this very difficult.
28. We are required to identify a lead member for Children and Young People; all the other districts in Cambridgeshire have already done so, as far as we are aware. The lead member will be invited to contribute to the CYPSP, as well as taking a leading role within the Council itself. There is also one district representative on the Safeguarding Children Board; as and when the current representative comes to the end of their service, I would anticipate that the next representative might be one of the lead members from another district.

Options

29. The council does not have a choice about involvement in the county partnership on Children and Young People; the only options concern how this involvement is undertaken. Given the severe constraints after the staff reductions following capping, the nature of the involvement will depend on incorporating tasks into existing staff workloads. Where this is not possible, the involvement is likely to be very limited.
30. The council has an option on who is appointed as the lead member. The responsibility for actions above fall within a number of portfolios. However, the majority of actions fall within the Community Development portfolio; this would tie in with the officer involvement, which is largest in Community Services.

Financial Implications

31. There are no quantified financial implications of this report. Some of the actions could lead to financial commitments in the future, depending on the nature of our involvement which is agreed.

Legal Implications

32. Paragraphs 9 & 10 above refer to our new statutory duties under the Children Act 2004. This Council's level of cooperation will be limited by our reduced capacity following capping. The legislation provides for Joint Area Reviews of services, which could examine the extent and nature of the contribution of all parties. The CPA (Comprehensive Performance Assessments) inspections for both the District and the County are likely to focus on how the statutory duties with regard to children are fulfilled.
33. The provisions of the draft Children Plan for Cambridgeshire will affect a number of staff across the organisation, particularly over the measures to safeguard children which will require additional training. The work will need to be incorporated into existing staff workloads. Paragraph 27 refers to recommendation that a lead officer for Children and Young People is nominated: if the cabinet chooses to follow this recommendation, it needs to be done in the knowledge that there is limited capacity to input on these issues.
34. The most significant risk arising from this report concerns any failure to ensure that children's welfare is protected by council staff, as set out in paragraphs 24 & 25. Risk mitigation measures are in place. In one of the most vulnerable areas, where the council employs sports coaches, there has been considerable training and Criminal Records Bureau checks are made prior to employment. Further training and review of procedures across the council are likely to be required.
35. Consultation has been undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders by the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership.
36. The measures in this report are part of the changing government agenda with which we need to comply, at whatever level of services we provide. The Children and Young People Plan sets out both some priority actions and a much wider range of other actions to implement the five outcomes for children set out in paragraph 14. The large majority of these actions will be led by the County Council and other agencies; only a few involve this Council, and these are covered in the Considerations part of the report.
37. Most actions will need to be addressed through a partnership response, through cooperation between different agencies. The aid of many of the actions will fit in with the Local Area Agreement (LAA) which was considered by cabinet in November, as one of the four 'blocks' of the LAA is focussed on services for children and young people. This Council is already working in partnership, and this approach is likely to develop.
38. Delivering aspects of the Children Plan will involve some adjustment to the roles of a wide range of staff, rather than requiring major changes for a few. The only way South Cambs can respond is to integrate the work as part of our mainstream responsibilities.
39. The draft Plan is subject to a period of consultation until mid January. Comments from cabinet can be incorporated into a response, although due to capacity restrictions only a relatively brief response is likely to be possible.

Recommendations

40. It is recommended that:

- (a) The Portfolio member for Community Development is appointed as the lead member for Children and Young People.
- (b) Any comments on the draft Children Plan are incorporated into a response to the consultation.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- a) Change for Children in Cambridgeshire – Briefing Note for District Councils: Delivering change for Children and Young People
- b) Formal Consultation on Proposals for the Area and Locality Structures – Cambs County Council
- c) Draft Children and Young People Plan
- d) I & DeA Report on Cambridgeshire District Councils Seminar on 21 October 2005
- e) Draft Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy, East Cambs District Council.

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