

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 10 September 2009
AUTHOR/S: Executive Director (Operational Services)

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

Purpose

1. This report sets out the Council's responsibilities and obligations to safeguard children and presents a new Safeguarding Children Policy (attached as **Appendix A** pp 1-10) and Procedures for adoption (attached as **Appendix B** pp 11-25).
2. This is a key decision because
 - it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in the District
 - it raises new issues of policy, or is made in the course of developing proposals to amend the policy framework, or is a decision taken under powers delegated by the Council to amend an aspect of the policy framework.and it was first published in the August Forward Plan.

Background and considerations

3. Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty on the Council to make arrangements to ensure that, in discharging its functions, it has regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
4. In July 2004 Cabinet adopted a 'Protection of children and young people from abuse' policy. The Safeguarding Children policy replaces the previous policy, and reflects developments in child protection arrangements over the past five years.
5. High profile child death cases such as Victoria Climbié, the Soham murders and most recently the Baby P case have led to significant public and media interest in the arrangements for preventing child abuse and protecting children. While responsibility for child protection rests with the County Council, and the Local Safeguarding Children Board, the Council's own staff have an important role to play in the safeguarding children agenda and can be the first to have concerns that need to be referred to the County Council for investigation.
6. An officer Safeguarding Children Group, chaired by the Executive Director (Operational Services), and attended by designated officers from all the Council's main service areas, meets bimonthly to ensure that the Council is meeting its safeguarding obligations. Its deliberations reflect the fact that the Council does not provide children's services of significant scale, for example compared to other district Councils which directly provide leisure services, and so actions and resources must be proportionate to the scale and nature of the Council's business.
7. A variety of Council staff visit families with children in their homes, and arts, sports and youth activities are promoted through the Council's New Communities Service. In the period January 2009 to June 2009, Council staff made 11 referrals to the County Council's child protection teams as a result of their concerns about a child's welfare.

8. Every year the Safeguarding Children group completes a self assessment using a benchmarking toolkit, which measures the Council's performance against eight safeguarding 'standards for partners'. That self assessment, which is reported to the Local Safeguarding Children Board, is used to develop a annual local action plan, which the group then oversees. For 2009/10 the action plan includes:
- Revision of the Council's safeguarding policy and procedures
 - Safeguarding training for Council staff
 - Recruitment and selection practice
9. The Policy is based upon 'Statutory guidance on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under section 11 of the Children Act 2004', and it adopts as its aims the eight key features expected within local authorities, namely
- (a) Senior Management commitment to the importance of safeguarding and protecting children's welfare
 - (b) A clear statement of the Council's responsibilities towards children is available for all staff
 - (c) A clear line of accountability within the Council for work on safeguarding and protecting the welfare of children
 - (d) Service development takes account of the need to safeguard and promote welfare and is informed, where appropriate by the views of children and families
 - (e) Staff training on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children
 - (f) Safer recruitment
 - (g) Effective inter agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children
 - (h) Information sharing
10. In addition to annual self assessment, last year the Council employed internal audit to undertake a review of the Council's recruitment and selection procedures in respect of its safeguarding children responsibilities. The audit resulted in a satisfactory assessment and recommendations were reviewed and incorporated, where appropriate, into the Safeguarding Childrens Group's action plan for 2009/10.
11. The Council also has responsibilities in respect of vulnerable adults and its current Protection of Vulnerable Adults policy was adopted in 2004. It is intended to review the Council's vulnerable adult arrangements early next year and explore the benefit of bringing the Councils arrangements for safeguarding children and protection of vulnerable adults together.
12. The establishment of the Independent Safeguarding Authority, which will shortly oversee checks for staff delivering services to both children and vulnerable adults, may accelerate the benefit of joining these two agendas locally.

Options

13. As the existing child protection policy was adopted over five years ago, on adoption of the new policy may expose the Council to criticism that its arrangements in this area are not sufficiently up to date.

Implications

14. Financial	All commitments made in the new policy are included in the Council's budgets
Legal	Included in report
Staffing	Included in report

Risk Management	Reputational risk if Council's policies and procedures are not revised and found to be ineffective.
Equal Opportunities	An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and can be viewed on the website. No adverse impact has been assessed.

Consultations

15. The new policy and procedures have been developed with the Safeguarding Group of officers and have been considered by Senior Management Team. The policy has also been sent to the Local Safeguarding Children Board whose comments have been incorporated.

Effect on Strategic Aims

16. **Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.**
The policy commits the Council to listening to the views of children and young people and taking their needs into account when planning services.
- Commitment to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for all.**
The policy is intended to ensure that the Council plays a full and appropriate part in working with partners to protect children and young people from abuse.

Recommendations

17. That Cabinet adopts the Safeguarding Children policy attached at Appendix A and notes the supporting procedures attached as Appendix B.

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

Statutory guidance on making arrangements to safeguard the welfare of children under section 11 of the Children Act 2004, DfES 2007

What to do if you're worried a child is being abused, DfES 2006

Protections of Children and Young People from Abuse, SCDC Policy 2004

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