

# Report to the Active and Cohesive Scrutiny Committee

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## Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults



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### Introduction

The Children Act (1989) and (2004) and the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act (2006) place statutory duties on District Councils to make arrangements to ensure that in discharging their functions they have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults.

The statutory guidance '*Working together to safeguard children: a guide to inter agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (2013)*' provides core legislative requirements regarding the expectations of the role of District Councils working alone or in partnership with other organisations.

### Background

The Children Act 2004 requires each upper tier local authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) made up of representatives from the agencies and bodies which have regular contact with children or have responsibility for services to them (or their families) in the local area. Staffordshire County Council take the lead on this with assistance and contributions from a range of other partners including the Borough Council as one of the eight Districts in Staffordshire.

As a statutory authority, providing services in the community to children and their families, the Borough Council is therefore required to co-operate in the establishment and operation of the LCSB and is a member of the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (SSCB), which became operational in April 2006. The Council also has a legal responsibility to safeguard, promote wellbeing and protect children and vulnerable adults.

In the context of the Councils activities, this means:

- Respecting and promoting the rights, wishes and feelings of children and vulnerable adults.
- Raising the awareness of the duty of care responsibilities relating to children and vulnerable adults throughout the Council.
- Promoting and implementing appropriate procedures to safeguard the well-being of children and vulnerable adults to protect them from harm.

- Creating a safe and healthy environment within all our services, to protect all parties and reduce the risk of abuse or allegations of abuse from occurring.
- Recruiting, training, supporting and supervising staff, elected members and volunteers to adopt best practice to safeguard and protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse, and to also minimise any risks to themselves.
- Responding promptly to any suspicions or allegations of misconduct or abuse of children or vulnerable adults in line with the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) and Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Adult Safeguarding Partnership (SSAP) policies and procedures.
- Requiring staff, elected members and volunteers to adopt and abide by the Council's Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy and Procedures, codes of conduct and associated procedures.
- Reviewing and evaluating this Policy and Procedure on an annual basis or in line with best practice, changing legislation, organisational requirements and service delivery.
- Ensuring representatives of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council who have contact with children, young people or vulnerable adults are subject to safer recruitment procedures. This is also applicable for when the Council is working in partnership with other private, voluntary or contracted organisations and employees.

The Council needs to ensure that it has robust mechanisms in place in order to appropriately co-ordinate Safeguarding activity in the Borough and an Action Plan has been created (Appendix 2) to accompany and help to embed the Policy and to assist in disseminating information to staff, elected members and volunteers.

The following individuals have been identified to champion Safeguarding within our organisation;

- Portfolio Holder - Cllr Tony Kearon
- Executive Manager - John Sellgren (Chief Executive)
- Head of Service - Mark Bailey (Head of Business Improvements, Central Services and Partnerships) and Sarah Taylor (Head of Human Resources)
- Designated Lead Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Officer - Sarah Moore (Partnerships Manager).
- Deputy Designated Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Officer – Catherine Fox (Community Safety Officer).

The Council have also appointed a number of volunteer representatives from each service area as 'Safeguarding Champions'. The Champions will assist the Designated and Deputy Designated Officers to ensure that all staff, elected members and volunteers are trained appropriately to recognise safeguarding issues and know where to refer any concerns that may arise in relation to children and vulnerable adults in our communities.

## **Recent developments and progress made**

Since the Policy was adopted, there have been a number of developments and changes that have occurred and this briefing note seeks to update Active and Cohesive Scrutiny Committee on those issues and raise any new areas for consideration as follows:

### **1. Safeguarding Policy**

The Policy is currently being reviewed and revised by the Partnerships Manager. This is to take account of recent developments and recommendations from the Section 11 self-assessment audit (December 2014), Peer Review of Safeguarding in Recruitment (January 2015), changes to Safeguarding Champions and contact information and most recently an internal Audit of Safeguarding (due to conclude at the end of June 2015).

Progress is being made and a revised Policy is expected to be complete by the Summer 2015. The Policy itself is expected to remain largely unchanged but the accompanying procedure will be updated to reflect the recommendations, learning and changes to personnel.

## 2. Section 11 Self-Assessment Audit

Working Together (2013) recommends that LSCB audit compliance with S.11 of the legislation. All partners in Staffordshire are required to complete and submit a self-assessment by SSCB and to provide evidence of how they comply with S.11 when carrying out their day to day business. This audit gives an indication of how well organisations are working to keep children safe. The audits follow the pattern of a self-assessment one year, and a peer audit the next. Partners are then asked to develop action plans to address any weaknesses identified.

The self-assessment audit was completed by the Partnerships Manager and signed off by the Chief Executive in December 2014. The Council is considered to be performing satisfactorily (from the self-assessment) with some recommendations and areas identified for improvement, which include;

- Completion of safeguarding training to all staff.
- Include role of Deputy Designated Officer and Safeguarding Champions in job descriptions.
- Further promotion of Policy and Safeguarding Champions.
- Development of quality assurance for service contracts and distribution of promotional materials for contractors.
- Testing of staff awareness and use of information sharing Policies in Audit.
- Ensure that all staff are confident in reporting incidents/making allegations against people working with children. Ensure that escalation contacts are promoted and support is given to whistle-blowers.
- More intensive training to be identified at time of the induction if appropriate for certain roles.
- Identify further training and development opportunities for Safeguarding Champions e.g. specialist areas.
- Consider incorporating CSE and extremism into training for Champions.
- Formalise safeguarding within the supervision/annual review process for staff who may be reasonably expected to have contact with children or vulnerable adults. Ensure that record keeping with supervision is managed effectively and action appropriately.

## 3. Peer Review of Safeguarding in Recruitment

A Peer Review was carried out with the assistance of Staffordshire County Council in November 2014. This was a follow up to a similar review that was undertaken in 2011. The review highlighted a number of suggested areas for further strengthening of the Councils processes and procedures. A number of recommendations for actions were identified and are being progressed as part of the Councils Safeguarding Action Plan 2014-16 (Appendix 2).

## 4. Training

Significant progress has been achieved in training of staff in an awareness of safeguarding children. A compulsory on-line Level 1 (as defined by SSCB) training module was rolled out to all PC based staff in Summer 2014. To date approximately 300 staff have completed the module (as at March 2015) and face to face training is also being provided to operational teams without access to a computer at the Depot, J2 and Kidsgrove Sports Centre, delivered by Catherine Fox in the Partnerships Team.

In addition Safeguarding Champions have been identified and the majority have now attended the Level 2 Working Together training so that they are able to field enquiries from their colleagues in the absence of the Designated Lead and Deputy Designated Lead Officers.

Further efforts are needed to ensure that all staff complete the e-learning training and it is anticipated that the Level 1 training will be cascaded to all Elected Members by the end of 2015.

## 5. Child Sexual Exploitation

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) has publically received more attention since a widespread and organised child sexual exploitation ring was revealed in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, between 1997 and 2013, due to the failure of the authorities in Rotherham to act effectively against the abuse and even, in some cases, to acknowledge that it was taking place.

Although the Borough Council is not responsible for the care of young people and their families, many of our services impact on, and effect young people's lives and could be crucial in contributing to preventing and addressing potential CSE in our communities. These services include;

- Leisure and Culture – J2, Kidsgrove Sports Centre, Museum, Parks.
- Community Safety – Anti Social Behavior, Domestic Abuse and Alcohol and Substance misuse.
- Licensing – Taxis licensing and licensed premises.
- Environmental Health – Food Safety Team.

The Council needs to ensure that wherever possible reasonable steps have been made to ensure that young people can be protected from CSE and that those risks are mitigated where possible and appropriate.

The Partnership Commissioning and Delivery Group within the Newcastle Partnership structure has identified CSE as a concern and is looking at how best to co-ordinate activity in the Borough in order to raise awareness and assist colleagues at Staffordshire County Council and Staffordshire Police.

Officers have requested guidance regarding CSE from SSCB through the District Safeguarding Sub Group and a response is awaited.

## **Conclusions**

It is requested that A&C Scrutiny Committee maintain responsibility for monitoring delivery of the Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy Action Plan 2014-16 and support Officers to disseminate the importance of the Policy and associate preventive safeguarding work throughout the Council for the benefit of our communities.

## **Relevant Portfolio Holder(s)**

- Councillor Tony Kearon (Safer Communities)

## **Background Materials / Appendices**

- **Appendix 1** - Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy 2014.
- **Appendix 2** – Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy Action Plan 2014-16.