

**AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

**25 September 2015**

**INSPECTION OF THE CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING SERVICE AND PROGRESS  
OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITY**

**Report of the Head of Assurance, Procurement and Projects**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. To provide an update in relation to the Children's Safeguarding Service and action taken by the Council to address weaknesses identified in two independent reports and the recent Ofsted inspection report.

**2. Background**

- 2.1. In early 2014, the People Services Directorate commissioned an independent review of the Children's Safeguarding Service by Coreassets Consultancy and Resourcing. Shortly after, a LGA Peer review also took place of the Service. Both of these reviews identified a number of issues which resulted in the development of an Improvement Plan.
- 2.2. The findings of these two reviews provided limited assurance on the arrangements in place within the Children's Safeguarding Service which were reflected through 'red' ratings in the Corporate Assurance Map from September 2014. The Chief Operating Officer for the People Directorate has attended Committee meetings to provide updates on the progression of the Improvement Plan.
- 2.3. In May/June 2015 Ofsted undertook an inspection of:
- Services for children in need of help and protection
  - Children looked after and care leavers
  - The effectiveness of the local safeguarding children board
- 2.4. The Inspection Report was published 20th July and judged the services to be inadequate (copy attached at Appendix A).

**3. Ofsted Inspection**

- 3.1. The inspectors graded each of the areas listed in paragraph 2.3 above as inadequate and concluded that:

*“There are widespread and serious failures that leave children unsafe and mean that the welfare of children looked after is not adequately safeguarded or promoted. It is Ofsted’s expectation that all children and young people receive the level of help, care and protection that will ensure their safety and help prepare them for adult life”.*

- 3.2. The inspection report provides a list of 27 recommendations that inspectors consider to be priorities for the Local Authority and a further 7 recommendations for the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).
- 3.3. During the inspection, the Council developed a 100 Day Plan in response to immediate issues raised for the Local Authority by inspectors. Over the last 3 months the Directorate has progressed actions and reported against the 100 day plan.
- 3.4. The main themes of the 100 Day Plan were:
  - Recruitment, Retention & Workforce Development
  - Leadership & Decision Making
  - Quality Assurance & Performance Management
  - Children in Need of Help and Protection
  - Education
  - Inter-agency Communication & Co-ordination
- 3.5. Following the Inspection, the Education Secretary appointed Nick Whitfield, Chief Executive of Achieving for Children and Director of Children's Services at Kingston and Richmond-upon-Thames to work with the Council as Commissioner for Children's Services in Sunderland. The Commissioner will shortly publish a new improvement plan to address the recommendations made by Ofsted. An interim Director of Children's Services has also been appointed.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1. The financial impact of the improvement plan and looked after placement pressures have been regularly reported to Cabinet. One off funds were earmarked during the budget setting process for 2015/2016 and at outturn 2014/2015 to address the identified pressures at that time. This took into account implementation of the improvement plans which would help to reduce pressures in looked after placements. However, the cost pressures have continued to increase following the Ofsted inspection.
- 4.2. The review of the safeguarding improvement plans to be undertaken by the Commissioner will be key in assessing the on-going financial requirement which will be taken into account as part of the budget setting process for 2016/2017.

## 5. Assurance Reporting

- 5.1. The Risk and Assurance Team has been supporting the planning and monitoring of the Children's Safeguarding Improvement activities. The Team has also provided an independent view of progression against planned actions and the impact of improvement activity so that the assurance rating in the Corporate Assurance Map is kept under review, which currently remains 'red'.
- 5.2. Until early August, the Risk and Assurance Team were reporting monthly to the Safeguarding Improvement Executive Group & Board and reporting weekly to the Directorate Management Meeting regarding the arrangements to implement the 100 day plan. The weekly presentation of progress against the 100 Day Plan together with the Risk & Assurance Reports highlighted that although improvement activity had been undertaken in some key areas a number of the planned actions were either behind schedule or had not started.
- 5.3. Whilst the Commissioner's new Improvement Plan is awaited it is understood that monitoring activity has continued within the People's Services Directorate and management reporting has taken place to the Leader of the Council, the Commissioner, Scrutiny and the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Risk and Assurance Team will liaise with the Interim Director of Children's Services regarding obtaining assurance on delivery of the new improvement plan.

## 6. Impact of Improvement Activity

- 6.1 In order to obtain assurance about the impact of early improvement activity, the Risk and Assurance team has sought some performance data from the Council's Performance Team as set out below.
- 6.2 **Unallocated Cases** – The table below shows the impact of the remedial action taken during and since the inspection. There is a significant reduction in the amount of unallocated cases and check status which is a result of data cleansing and case review activity.

Category	19/05/15	01/09/15	Reduction
Open Cases	3,617	2,565	1052 (29%)
Unallocated Cases	1,003	129	874 (87%)
Check Status (no action recorded or plan)	988	158	830 (84%)

- 6.3 **Data Quality** – The recording of key data in relation to contacts was an area of concern prior to the inspection. Recent performance reports show the recording of contacts has improved generally within all the locality teams although some issues still remain in two areas, one of which is the MASH. Whilst not as

significant an area of concern prior to the inspection the recording of referral information has also improved.

- 6.4 **Case Management timescales** – As demonstrated in the table below there has been a significant improvement in the timeliness of Initial and Core Assessments and Section 47 investigations.

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>19/05/15</b>	<b>01/09/15</b>	<b>Reduction</b>
Number of Initial Assessments not completed in timescale	540	98	442 (82%)
Number of Core Assessments not completed in timescale	455	161	294 (65%)
The number of Section 47 investigations that have been open more than 28 days	173	6	167 (97%)

- 6.5 Notwithstanding the above, as at 1st September 2015 there was a small number of Initial and Core Assessments shown as significantly overdue and requiring immediate attention.

## **7. Recommendations**

- 7.1 The Committee is asked to consider the significance of the work required to improve Safeguarding Services in Sunderland. It is recommended that the Committee continues to receive regular reports to monitor the progress and impact of improvement activity in this area.