

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
TUESDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2009**

Councillors Councillors Bull (Chair), Adamou (Vice-Chair), Aitken, Alexander, Dodds and Winskill

Apologies Felicity Kally

Also Present: Councillors Engert, Meehan, Newton and Weber

<b>MINUTE NO.</b>	<b>SUBJECT/DECISION</b>
<b>OSCO01.</b>	<p><b>WEBCASTING</b></p> <p>The meeting was webcast on the Council's website.</p>
<b>OSCO02.</b>	<p><b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Felicity Kally.</p>
<b>OSCO03.</b>	<p><b>URGENT BUSINESS</b></p> <p>There was no urgent business.</p>
<b>OSCO04.</b>	<p><b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b></p> <p>Cllrs Dodds and Weber declared an interest by virtue of being panel members on the dismissal appeal of the former Director of the Children and Young People's Service.</p>
<b>OSCO05.</b>	<p><b>DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS</b></p> <p>There were no such items.</p>
<b>OSCO06.</b>	<p><b>ACTION PLAN IN RESPONSE TO THE JOINT AREA REVIEW OF SAFEGUARDING IN HARINGEY</b></p> <p>The Chair of the Committee gave a brief introduction and outlined the scope of the meeting. The Cabinet Member for Children &amp; Young People and the Director of the Children &amp; Young People's Service introduced the Action Plan produced at the request of the Secretary of State in response to findings of the Joint Area Review into safeguarding services in Haringey. The deadline for the submission of the Action Plan to the Secretary of State was 27 February 2009.</p> <p>The Action Plan would provide a framework within which progress could be made through partnership working to improve safeguarding services and was based around seven key themes, with the aspiration of ultimately becoming an exemplar for Children's Services. The Plan</p>

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had been developed by a cross partnership project group and would evolve over time to incorporate feedback from consultation exercises held with relevant stakeholders.

The Committee were advised that the financial plan to support the Action Plan had yet to be finalised. Initial costings anticipate additional funding demands in excess of £3 million, with the potential for further financial implications associated with any amendments requested by the Secretary of State prior to approval. Partner organisations expressed a clear commitment to prioritising child protection in organisational budget setting and allocation processes.

It was recognised that the Action Plan represented a high level, strategic document illustrating the involvement and commitment to change at senior level. The Committee raised concern that the success of the Action Plan relied fundamentally on implementation and delivery at a frontline, operational level. It was acknowledged that this would necessitate ensuring that appropriate support systems were in place for frontline staff and that staff were fully trained in order to encourage the shift in culture necessary to achieve and maintain improvements in safeguarding services. The importance of ongoing consultation with social work staff and facilitating a culture of openness to permit issues to be flagged up promptly was emphasised. Discussions were also held around the need to embed reflective practices and a greater focus on sceptical challenge and assertiveness in frontline delivery. This would also assist in collaboration with management supervision in ensuring the monitoring and maintenance of the quality of casework records.

The importance of the role of scrutiny both in the development and implementation of the Action Plan was emphasised, including the need to develop proposals to facilitate ongoing scrutiny by the Committee. Additional opportunities for scrutiny would include independent chairing of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board, encouraging more frequent external examination e.g. IDeA peer reviews and the opportunity for opposition Members to sit on the Children's Trust Board. It was reported that there would be a greater level of unplanned inspection, audit and external verification of processes and that this would be ongoing. It was confirmed that a condensed version of the Plan would be developed to clearly identify milestones and prioritisation for key themes to facilitate the scrutiny process. In addition, the scheduled refresh of the LAA would give priority to safeguarding indicators to allow scrutiny of performance.

In response to concerns raised relating to the limited extent of public involvement in the development of the Plan and the subsequent impact on perceived transparency, a clear commitment to ongoing public engagement was expressed outside of the time constraints imposed by the Secretary of State's deadlines. This would include partnership engagement with young people and the voluntary sector, with the objective of facilitating engagement with hard to reach groups.

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Discussions were held around the issue of CRB checking being undertaken only for selected Members, given that all Members have responsibilities as corporate parents and potentially come into contact with vulnerable individuals while undertaking duties as Ward Councillors. Confirmation was provided that CRB checks are undertaken within the current legislative confines, which precludes blanket checks for all Members.

The Committee requested that further detail be provided in the Plan on the development of a 'whole council' approach to child protection and in particular the potential role of Strategic Housing.

Concerns were raised regarding the level of London weighting allocated to social worker salaries at Haringey Council and its possible impact on recruitment issues. The Committee were advised that the proposed 'Haringey Offer' recruitment package incorporated a range of issues identified during consultation with social work staff as being important considerations in addition to salary when deciding whether to work at an organisation. These included offering a high quality environment, incorporating good management and supervision systems. In addition, feedback was provided that a recent re-banding of health visitor salaries had not enhanced the recruitment of staff to the extent anticipated.

The training and structures being established in order to support the role of elected Members in safeguarding were outlined, and Members were encouraged to use the experience from their work as Ward Councillors to identify any issues that required addressing.

It was emphasised that the success of partnership working was entirely dependent on direct and comprehensive information exchange and a strong foundation of trust and openness at all levels, both between partner organisations and within individual organisations.

The Committee agreed that at a school level the Action Plan should incorporate measures for the monitoring of challenging behaviour and attendance issues as possible indicators of child protection issues. It was also suggested that the Plan include details regarding the role of pastoral teams in schools in child protection and closer monitoring of the educational achievement of children subject to Child Protection Plans and children educated at home. The Committee requested that the feasibility of the co-ordination and linkage of all relevant personal plans for a child, for example Child Protection Plans, Personal Education Plans, etc to form a single document be explored.

The Committee discussed the pivotal priority of improving communication both within the partnership at all levels to ensure necessary information sharing, and with the public and Members to raise the profile of safeguarding and the procedures for raising concerns. The Committee were advised that the lack of a central 'spine' to NHS records systems remained a national issue and presented a technical obstacle to information sharing between

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departments and allied organisations including GP practices. Local arrangements would be developed to facilitate the sharing of child protection information within appropriate data protection safeguarding protocols and to encourage ownership of responsibility for this at an individual officer level.

The Chair expressed thanks to all partners and officers for their contribution to the meeting and demonstration of a partnership-wide commitment to safeguarding. The Committee considered its feedback on the Action Plan.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee feedback on the Action Plan in response to the Joint Area Review of Safeguarding in Haringey:

- i) That the lack of “joined-up” communication both within organisations and between partner organisations be emphasised as a key issue and addressed more explicitly in the action plan.
- ii) That the importance of publicity for raising awareness of the role of the public in safeguarding children and mechanisms for reporting concerns be reflected in the action plan, and that communication material be reviewed and enhanced as necessary.
- iii) That the action plan clearly identify systems for monitoring the mandatory safeguarding training for GPs, health workers and other professionals in regular and sustained contact with children and families.
- iv) That the Council continue to lobby central Government in relation to the grant settlement, to address the current funding disparity compared with inner London Boroughs, in particular identifying a need for our social workers to be paid Inner London Weighting in the same way that we choose to pay our teachers.
- v) That the Council continue to lobby central Government in relation to the issue of obtaining CRB checks for all elected Members being investigated further, considering the current legislative framework.
- vi) That the action plan include the development of a clear protocol on Members’ access to information in accordance with national legislation, specifically relating to the different roles within the Authority, such as the accountable Cabinet Member and Corporate Parenting roles of all Councillors, in order to facilitate the discharge of their statutory duties.
- vii) That the areas of the action plan relating to education be further developed, to explicitly include measures for the monitoring of challenging behaviour and attendance issues

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as possible indicators of child protection issues. That the action plan also include the issue of ensuring pastoral teams are in place in all schools, that best practice in this area is shared, and that monitoring visits from the Local Authority place an emphasis on this and on Safeguarding in general. In addition, that the action plan includes closer monitoring of the educational achievement of children with Child Protection Plans and children educated at home, and that the feasibility of co-ordinating all relevant personal plans, for example Child Protection Plans, Personal Education Plans, etc, to form a single document for each child be explored.

- viii) That the role of Housing Services in safeguarding children be further developed in the action plan, and reflected in the development of the new Housing Strategy, and in particular that all Housing Officers are CRB-checked and provided with regular Safeguarding training due to their ongoing close contact with vulnerable children and families.
- ix) That the need for transparency relating to the resource contributions of all partners be emphasised.
- x) That the possibility of developing local performance indicators in respect of safeguarding children be explored.
- xi) The quality and comprehensiveness of information exchanged between partners and between council officers and Members be addressed more transparently in the action plan.
- xii) That details of the role of Scrutiny in child protection be further developed.
- xiii) That the action plan details more thoroughly how the views of all children with CPPs or who are Looked After will be listened to regularly, including the views of primary age children, children living in placements outside of the borough, children in short-term/interim fostering arrangements, and children in informal/family-based fostering arrangements.
- xiv) That good mental health and wellbeing of social workers is a priority, and that the Haringey Offer for social workers includes regular meetings with line managers and/or counsellors that focus on this.
- xv) That the Council ensures that every area of the Council's work and services regularly monitors the roles it can play in Safeguarding, and in particular that IT is used to minimise the written work necessary of frontline social work staff.

**RESOLVED**

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	<p>That the report and action plan be noted and that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee feedback on the Action Plan in response to the Joint Area Review of Safeguarding in Haringey be put forward for consideration by Cabinet.</p>
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COUNCILLOR GIDEON BULL

Chair