



Agenda item:

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<b>Decision maker:</b>	The Cabinet
<b>Subject:</b>	Response to Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel report
<b>Date of decision:</b>	06 December 2010
<b>Report by:</b>	Julian Wooster, Strategic Director and Director of Children's Services.
<b>Wards affected:</b>	All
<b>Key decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Budget and policy framework decision:</b>	No

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## 1. Summary

The Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel conducted a review into the protection of vulnerable children. The aim of the review was to investigate the current practices and resources for protecting vulnerable children in Portsmouth and to make recommendations on how they can be improved. This report considers the recommendations of the Panel and makes recommendations to the Cabinet.

## 2. Purpose of report

To respond to the review into the protection of vulnerable children, which was carried out by the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel.

## 3. Background

3.1 At a meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2009 the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel commenced a review into the protection of vulnerable children. The Panel agreed the following objectives for a scrutiny review into the protection of vulnerable children:

1. Definitions of neglect
2. Existing levels of support for children and families suffering neglect
3. The importance of early intervention
4. Training, resources and support for social workers
5. Recruitment and retention of social workers
6. Kinship care
7. Implementation of the Laming report recommendations
8. Implementation of the serious case review recommendations

3.2 The panel, chaired by Councillor James Williams, met formally on five occasions where they took evidence not only from officers working in children's services across the council but external representatives from the police and health services. The Panel also visited the social work team at Merefield House where they spoke to practitioners about their work.

3.3 The conclusions of the Panel are as follows:

- The definition of what constitutes neglect is very wide thus sometimes making it difficult to identify
- The frequency of incidents or behaviour is a key factor in defining neglect
- The main causes of neglect are poor parenting skills, domestic violence, substance misuse, alcohol abuse, learning difficulties and adult mental health conditions
- Acting on and helping to prevent neglect is everyone's responsibility
- There is a need to raise awareness and emphasise the importance of early reporting in some sectors and agencies
- The importance of early intervention is crucial as prevention is better than cure which can be costly both financially and emotionally
- More action to prevent neglect from escalating needs to be taken at the Universal and Targeted Services stage leading to long term cost savings
- The older a child is the more say they have about their care and it is difficult to make them do things they do not want to do
- Portsmouth is being proactive in providing a wide range of services for children and young people at risk of and suffering from neglect
- Portsmouth's Social Care team takes an innovative and proactive approach to providing high quality training for social workers
- The practice of kinship care is very often a preferred option for helping a child
- The FIRST Option programme provides quality assistance to families with highly successful outcomes. The programme has an exemplary record of helping families cope with difficult relational problems and is a prime example of a model that works well.

3.4 The recommendations of the panel are attached as appendix 1.

#### **4. Recommendations**

4.1 That the Panel is thanked for its work in undertaking the review.

4.2 That in respect of the recommendations the cabinet considers and approves the action plan as attached at Appendix 2.

#### **5. Reasons for recommendations**

5.1 The recommendations endorse the findings of the scrutiny review whilst recognising that the delivery of some of these may be subject to future funding shortfalls depending on the government spending review and/or significant changes in demand or government guidance and policy.

## **6. Options considered and rejected**

6.1 Key recommendations are in line with three key strategies within PCC and the wider Children's Trust arrangements:

- Children's Social Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy – Approved by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2010.
- Placement Strategy for Looked After Children – Approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2010.
- Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy – To be approved by a future meeting of the Children's Trust Board

These strategies have included review of options regarding levels of service provision, training and support of social care staff, prevention and support of looked after children's placements.

## **7. Duty to involve**

7.1 This report recognises the need to involve local communities within consultation. The strategies referred to above have involved consultation with children and young people, foster carers, professionals involved in delivering services to 'looked after' children as well as the wider staff group within children's social care.

## **8. Implications**

8.1 The key recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel are in line with strategies already being implemented within children's social care and the wider partnership arrangements as outlined above.

## **9. Corporate priorities**

This report and the review it refers to contribute to the following corporate priorities:

- Protect and support our most vulnerable residents

## **10. Equality impact assessment (EIA)**

Equality Impact Assessments will be aligned to the delivery of the Placement Strategy and the Recruitment and Retention Strategy. Additional impact assessments may be required in line with recommendations of the scrutiny review.

## **11. Legal implications**

There are no immediate legal implications arising from the recommendations arising from this report.

**12. Head of Finance's comments**

Safeguarding budgets are currently under extreme pressure, as previously reported to Cabinet and it is recognised that savings need to be made overall. The majority of the recommendations outlined in appendix 1 can be carried out at low or no cost and from within existing budgets. If the requirement for additional funding is identified, this will need to be subject to a detailed financial appraisal and approval sought before implementation.



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Signed by: Julian Wooster  
Strategic Director and Director of Children's Services

**Appendices:****Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>
1 Nil	
2	

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected.

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Signed by: The Leader of the Council