

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Overview & Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 15th October, 2009

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WARD(S): All

PART I **FOR CONSIDERATION**

MEMBER CALL-IN – CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

1. Purpose of Report

To advise the Committee of the receipt of a Member call-in and to seek the Committee's views and instructions on how it wishes to deal with it.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to consider the call-in from Councillor Stokes and to decide what action it wishes to take in response to it and instruct officers accordingly.

3. Community Strategy Priorities

None arising from this administrative report.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 A Member call-in has been received from Councillor Stokes, a copy of which is attached as an Appendix to this report. Given the breadth of the subject matter involved, it was considered appropriate to refer the call-in to this Committee in the first instance to seek instructions as to what action the Committee wishes to take in response to it.
- 4.2 The Committee may take the following action on a call-in:-
- Consider the matter itself at this or a future meeting and pass comments or recommendations to the Cabinet for other appropriate body.
 - Refer the call-in to the appropriate Scrutiny Panel for consideration and report back.
 - Establish a Task and Finish Group to consider the subject matter of the call-in in detail and report back.
 - Take no action on the call-in, the reason for any such decision to be recorded in the minutes and the Member who called the issue in to be so advised.

Implications of the Call-in

- 4.3 Councillor Stokes's call-in seeks to scrutinise both the Borough Council and all relevant partners in respect of their child protection policies and practices. The Borough Council's partners in child protection include the three local health authorities (Berkshire East Primary Care Trust, the Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals Trust and the Berkshire Healthcare Trust), the Thames Valley Police, the local voluntary sector and the Probation Service, amongst others. It will be noted that Councillor Stokes has suggested that all relevant partners be invited to separate meetings to facilitate the scrutiny of individual policies and practices and to assess partner co-ordination.
- 4.4 Members should note that all of these partners are members of the Slough Local Safeguarding Children Board, established arising out of the recommendations of Lord Laming, and whose role specifically is to ensure that the child protection procedures across the partners are fit for purpose and regularly scrutinised. The Board has an independent Chair and has recently been involved in the revision and republication of the child protection procedures across Berkshire and these are now available on-line to all agencies as well as to the general public. Members may wish to consider whether a detailed scrutiny as suggested by Councillor Stokes would to some extent duplicate the work already being undertaken by the Safeguarding Board.
- 4.5 As well as the role of the Safeguarding Board, Members will also wish to take into account the other forms of scrutiny that child protection has been subject to in the last year. These include –
- External scrutiny from Ofsted, as well as requests from the DCSF and the Government Office of the South-East for information over the last nine months following the death of baby Peter.
 - Report and briefing at Council in December 2008.
 - Reports to the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel in June, 2009 and again in October on the recent unannounced Ofsted inspection.
 - Three discussions at the Local Strategic Partnership in the last year.
 - A considerable amount of officer time has also been dedicated to briefing and training Councillors on their safeguarding role.
- 4.6 If Members wish to undertake a detailed scrutiny, there are several options that could be considered. One option would be to establish a Task and Finish Group (T&FG) of Councillors with the time to commit to a series of daytime meetings. Assuming this proved possible, it would also be necessary to devote officer resources to organising such meetings and carrying out any necessary research required. At the present time, the Council has only allocated one post of scrutiny support officer which is currently occupied on a secondment basis to support all of the Council's scrutiny work. It would be necessary to identify additional officer resources to support a T&FG in the terms envisaged by Councillor Stokes.

- 4.7 A T&FG as envisaged above could have significant resource implications for the time of officers both within the Borough Council and in partner organisations, including possibly the risk of agencies spending time serving the Group instead of spending their time on managing child protection work. Accordingly if a T&FG is proposed, the Committee needs to be very clear about its purpose, remit and timescale, and why it is required outside of the existing inspection, scrutiny and LSCB processes.
- 4.8 A second option would be to ask for a briefing by the Strategic Director of Education & Children's Services on the authority's child protection policies and practices and to outline the role of the Local Safeguarding Children Board in engaging all partners in child protection and ensuring that best practice is followed in referral processes and arranging for appropriate training to be undertaken for staff in all agencies. Such a briefing could be made either to this Committee at a future meeting or at the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel. The advantage of this option is that it would enable Members to consider the robustness of the existing scrutiny arrangements before considering further action.
- 4.9 A third option could be for the Committee to ask the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel to itself undertake a detailed scrutiny of child protection procedures to satisfy itself of their robustness.
- 4.10 The Committee's instructions are requested.

5. **Appendix**

Appendix A – Call-in from Councillor Stokes.

6. **Background Papers**

None.