

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-073-2014/15

Date of meeting: 9 March 2014



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Safer, Greener & Transport.

Subject: Safeguarding Audit and Reviewed Policy & Procedures

Responsible Officer: Julie Chandler (01992 564214).

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That the summary of the findings of the Section 11 and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Audits, as submitted to Essex Safeguarding Children and Adults Boards in January 2015, be noted; and

(2) That the introduction of the Care Act 2014 (for adults with needs for care and support) with increased duties for local authorities be noted and the Council's revised Safeguarding Policy and Procedures be adopted.

Executive Summary:

The Council is required to undertake annual self-assessment audits in respect of children and Vulnerable Adults and these are reviewed by Essex Safeguarding Children and Adults Boards. Section 11 of the Children's Act 2004 sets out the responsibilities for local authorities in regard to children and duties to Vulnerable Adults will be covered under the Care Act (2014) which is being introduced in April 2015.

The annual safeguarding audits form part of the Ofsted Inspection arrangements for Essex County Council and this year, all organisations were required to complete separate audits for children and adults. The Council submitted its' assessment and accompanying evidence in January and a range of improvements have been identified in the Council's ability to fulfil its' duties. This is attributable to Cabinet's decision to provide additional resources for safeguarding and subsequent appointment of a Safeguarding Officer for the Council. The summary findings of the audit are as attached Appendix A.

Due to many changes in the safeguarding agenda and the emergence of new priority issues, the Council also needed to review the existing Safeguarding Policy and Procedures as part of the audit (as attached Appendix B) and Cabinet is asked to adopt these.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

This report serves to inform Cabinet of the Council's current ability to fulfil its' safeguarding responsibilities and to seek adoption of the revised Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

Other Options for Action:

None.

Report:

1. Safeguarding Children (and young people) from harm, has been a legislative requirement for all public and voluntary sector organisations since 1989, when the Children's Act was initially introduced. Since this time, the Act has been regularly reviewed and updated in accordance with recommendations from Serious Case Reviews and Child Death Reviews. The most recent legislation was introduced in 2004.

2. Safeguarding of Vulnerable Adults has not previously been covered by legislation, although public sector organisations have followed guidance provided by Social Care. However, from April 2015, the Care Act (2014) will introduce a set of new legislative requirements for adults 'with needs for care and support' (The term 'Vulnerable Adults' will no longer be used).

3. Each year, Councils across Essex are required to complete detailed on-line self-assessment audits, which form part of Essex County Council's Ofsted Inspection. This year, Councils have been required to complete separate audit assessments for children and adults and to produce a range of new policies and strategies relating to new safeguarding issues that have emerged. In addition, all evidence related to the assessment themes, such as minutes of meetings, policies and procedures etc. was required as part of the submission and generated a very significant amount of extra work.

4. The submission deadline for audit responses was 30 January 2015 and local authorities were given a three month window, to collate all of the necessary information and produce the various new documents required. These included policies and strategies for Child Sexual Exploitation, Domestic Abuse, Honour Based Abuse and the Prevent Agenda (amongst others), as well as a complete refresh of the Council's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

5. The Council's submission was signed off by Management Board and the information will now be assessed by Essex Safeguarding Children and Adults Boards, who will produce a comparison report on the effectiveness of each local authority in Essex.

6. Last year, the 2013/14 safeguarding audit demonstrated that the Council was only partly meeting its' responsibilities, with 55% effectiveness in some areas and 'not meeting' key requirements for Senior Leadership Commitment, which included training of Elected Members. However, following a series of training sessions provided during 2014, around 65% of current Members are now trained.

7. The results of the 2013/14 audit led to the request for additional resources to be made available within the Council, to undertake the work identified in the Safeguarding Improvement Plan which was populated as part of the self- assessment. Approval was therefore given by Cabinet Committee, for a DDF item to enable the appointment of a Safeguarding Officer and part-time Administration Assistant. Due to this additional staff capacity, the Council has fared much better in the recent audit, with an average of 80 – 85% effectiveness and some areas reaching 100% compliance.

8. The key actions for improvement that were identified through the audit process will be addressed through the new Safeguarding Strategy which will be developed over

the next few months. These will be prioritised according to level of importance and potential impact, and any actions needing an immediate response will be dealt with whilst the strategy is being produced. It is envisaged that the strategy will be presented to Cabinet for adoption, at its meeting in June 2015.

9. Although this is an excellent achievement, safeguarding duties and responsibilities for tier 2 local authorities are continually increasing and the Care Act includes a range of changes in the way that Councils need to work, to address duties for adults with needs for care and support. These changes will impact directly on the work of the Housing Services teams and the content of the Council's new Safeguarding Policy, which will need to be updated as soon as the Care Act comes into effect.

10. The main changes made to the Council's Safeguarding Policy include:

- Updates regarding information sharing and making referrals
- Addition of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Updated responsibilities for the Council and individual services
- Reviewed designation of safeguarding roles across the organisation
- Revised Whistleblowing information, and;
- The need for Risk Assessment.

11. The Council's Safeguarding Officer has already started undertaking work to address outstanding actions arising from the assessment process and there are many areas of corporate safeguarding practice that need ongoing maintenance, including training provision for staff, Elected Members and new recruits, coordination and confidential recording/ storing of safeguarding referrals and provision of support and advice to front line staff. Members who have undertaken Safeguarding Awareness training will know that the volume of referrals and concerns that are raised within the Council is continually increasing and with new issues emerging and greater responsibility under the Care Act, it is unlikely that this volume will reduce.

12. As already stated, it was necessary to completely revise the EFDC Safeguarding Policy and Procedures to meet with the latest guidelines for safeguarding. These documents are available on the Council's Intranet for staff and Members to refer to. However, it should be noted that due to the ongoing changes within the safeguarding arena, this document will require regular review and updating.

Resource Implications:

None relevant to this report.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Section 11 Children Act legislation and the Care Act 2014 comes into effect from April 2015.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The District Council is responsible for ensuring that all children, young people and adults in need of care and support are protected from harm and exploitation. These responsibilities are set out within the Children Act 2004 and the Care Act 2014.

Consultation Undertaken:

Not relevant to this report.

Background Papers:

Cabinet report 02.12.13 - EFDC Safeguarding Audit and resource requirements
Children's Act 2004
The Care Act 2014

Risk Management:

Safeguarding is included as an item within the Councils' Risk Register and within individual Directorate Business Plans. A Safeguarding Strategy document is also currently being produced, which will outline the key actions that need to be undertaken by the Council and the frequency of reviews required.

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

Children, young people and adults in need of care and support (previously described as 'Vulnerable Adults') are affected by this report, in a positive way. The report serves to demonstrate how the Council addresses and meets its' safeguarding duties and responsibilities, in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of local residents and service users who fall within these categories.

The report refers to the Children's Act 2004 and the new Care Act 2014 which is being launched in April 2015, which provide the key legislative requirements for children, young people and adults in need of care and support.