

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee
Thursday 11th September 2008

Report on Improvements in Social Care and Educational Provision

1. Purpose of the Report

On the 22ND May 2008 Children's Services Scrutiny considered the Monitoring Officer's Report on a Finding of Maladministration Leading to Injustice. This refers to the Ombudsman Report on an Investigation into Complaint No 06/B/06454. Members asked the Interim SEN Manager to explain what steps Children and Families Branch was taking to avoid the errors which led to maladministration. Appendix A to this report outlines further the actions taken to address the issues raised in the Ombudsman report.

2. Action Required of the Scrutiny Committee

To note the report and to make any further recommendations as required.

3. Background

The parents of a severely autistic primary aged daughter made a complaint that the Local Authority was not meeting the educational and social needs of their daughter and the needs of the family. The Ombudsman upheld the complaint and identified a number of areas where the Council had failed to meet the needs of the family. The areas of failure in this case related to the integrated management of the Core Assessment of the child and the failure to properly assess the needs of the child and the family in a holistic way, taking account of the social and educational needs of the child and the impact that a lack of provision was having on the family as a whole. The Ombudsman also observed that the Council's eligibility criteria (to access services) were "completely obscure".

Appendix A sets out the areas identified for improvement across social care and special educational needs services to date. Senior officers in both services have been actively involved with the service improvement planning.

4. Current Position

The service improvements outlined in Appendix A represent ongoing activities. Service standards will be reviewed regularly and policy and procedure changed and amended where necessary.

5. Service Implications

Implementing these improvements will provide better outcomes for children, young people and their families. Staff will be better trained and skilled in

working with complex cases. Though we recognise the complexity in the provision of services, in some cases, the drive towards better collaborative working and joint commissioning of services to support families and schools will advance our ability to work more effectively across services particularly education, social care and health.

6. Financial Implications

More effective service delivery will drive down the number of complaints and reduce the need for financial settlement. The drive toward better collaborative working will enable better decision making and better allocation of resources.

7. Risk Assessment

The lessons learnt from this case have been significant in generating a re-focusing on the importance of a 'joined up' approach to service delivery. Taking forward the action plan both in terms of process and case management arrangements will contribute to a lessening of the risk of further findings against the Local Authority in situations of this kind.

8. Conclusion

The Children and Education Department has developed a more thorough response to complaints received. Where service procedure and policy is challenged by service users every effort is made to understand the challenge and to consider whether any change needs to be considered. More effective and timely communication with families is promoted and where necessary steps are taken to mediate where there are difficulties to resolve.

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