

**WILTSHIRE COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL**

**15 MAY 2012**

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**QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

**FROM CLLR NICK FOGG, MARLBOROUGH WEST DIVISION**

**TO CLLR LIONEL GRUNDY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**Question 1**

- a) Where would you say responsibility for OFSTED's finding of 'serious and significant shortcomings' in Wiltshire's care for at least some of its vulnerable children may lie?
- b) What precise steps are being taken to remedy these failings?
- c) Is the report in the Gazette & Herald of April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012, which stated that care workers had not been invited to child protection meetings, even though they were best placed to represent the child's interests, correct?

**Response**

- a) The Ofsted report highlights that all partner agencies must take responsibility for ensuring that vulnerable children are safe. Each agency is accountable for making sure they are clear about their safeguarding responsibilities. All partners have stated that the main priority is to safeguard children and young people and minimise the risk of them being subject to harm and they are in agreement that the improvement plan and actions must be delivered with some urgency, to ensure that Wiltshire children and young people are protected.

A multi-agency Safeguarding Improvement Board has been established and is responsible for monitoring progress and overseeing the delivery and evidence of improvement. The inspectors judged that there is adequate capacity to improve safeguarding services and for looked after children the capacity to improve is good and that the political and managerial ambition and prioritisation across all partners is to improve and be better than adequate across all services.

- b) The inspectors reported that as soon as the issues were raised with the council that immediate and appropriate action was taken to ensure the children and young people identified were re-assessed and appropriately protected. A detailed improvement plan was drafted and shared with inspectors before they left. This plan has subsequently

been developed following receipt of the inspection report.

The immediate actions as set out in the inspection report and the improvement plan are either well underway or have been completed. An Improvement Board has been set up and has already met twice. The terms of reference for this board and its role have been agreed. Its key purpose is to oversee, challenge and support the delivery of improvement. Membership is at senior level and includes representatives from the council, health services and police and the chair of the newly established safeguarding scrutiny task group. An independent chair has been appointed. A multi-agency operational group, will support the board to ensure that the improvements are delivered.

An external audit of all child protection cases and cases held within the Referral and Assessment team has been undertaken and action has been taken in response to any identified issues. Additional management capacity is in place. Staff and managers are regularly updated and invited to attend development sessions.

The Department for Education has confirmed that our actions to date have been timely and appropriate and the inspectors stated that the council is committed, within challenging budget reductions, to protecting its front line services.

c) Without knowing where these comments originated it makes it very difficult to respond to the Gazette & Herald's coverage. However, the Ofsted inspection team, throughout the duration of their inspection and in the final report did not raise any concerns about the attendance of professionals at child protection conferences.

There is a clear process in place; the Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LSCB) has an escalation procedure which sets out the steps to be followed if there are any concerns in respect of child protection practice. It is the responsibility of all professionals to follow this procedure if they have concerns. We can confirm that no specific concerns of this nature have been highlighted to the LSCB or to the Director of Children's Services.