

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Subject:	Director of Children's Services Local Assurance Test Review
Committee:	Audit Committee
Date:	17 September 2015
Cabinet Member:	Councillor McDonald
CMT Member:	Tracey Lee, Chief Executive
Author:	Alison Botham (Assistant Director, Children Young People and Families) Siobhan Wallace (Acting Head of Service, Children Young People and Families)
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Key Decision:	No
Part I:	Yes

Purpose of the report:

This report explains the reason for and purpose of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) assurance test. It explains the review of the assurance test undertaken this year following the People Directorate review and the OFSTED inspection of Children's Services.

The report presents the audit of the assurance test undertaken by Devon Audit Partnership and the recommendations and actions to be undertaken by PCC in response to the audit, for information and note.

The Brilliant Co-operative Council Corporate Plan 2013/14 -2016/17:

The DCS assurance test being undertaken contributes to Plymouth's aspiration of becoming a "Brilliant Co-operative Council" through its support of the Caring objective within the Corporate Plan. The assurance test specifically supports the outcomes "We will prioritise prevention" and "Children, young people and adults are safe and confident in their communities" which are supported by the Children's Services Improvement Plan and the Plymouth Children's Safeguarding Improvement Plan within which this action and related activity sits.

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land

None identified

Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management:

- Child Poverty
- Community Safety
- Health and Safety

- Risk Management

The DCS assurance test is undertaken to ensure that the focus on outcomes for children and young people are not be weakened or diluted as a result of adding other responsibilities to the role of Director of Children’s Services.

The role of DCS includes ensuring a wide range of outcomes are achieved for vulnerable children and families, the majority of which relate to addressing issues of risk management, health and safety, community safety or child poverty.

Equality and Diversity

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

Recommendations and Reasons for recommended action:

1. Members note the DCS Assurance Test has been reviewed and revised using a risk assessment framework.
2. Members note that Devon Audit Partnership have audited this work and made recommendations that officers are implementing.

Alternative options considered and rejected: None

Published work / information:

The Department for Education guidance “Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services and Lead Member for Children’s Services” (April 2013)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271429/directors_of_child_services_-_stat_guidance.pdf

Background papers:

Title	Part I	Part II	Exemption Paragraph Number							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Internal Audit Report Director of Children’s Services Local Assurance Test Review										

Sign off: comment must be sought from those whose area of responsibility may be affected by the decision, as follows (insert references of Finance, Legal and Monitoring Officer reps, and of HR, Corporate Property, IT and Strat. Proc. as appropriate):

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1.0 Introduction

The Plymouth City Council (PCC) Senior Management structure is such that the single role of Strategic Director for People encompasses the duties of Directors of Children's and Adult's Services.

The Department for Education guidance "Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services" (April 2013). This guidance sets out the expectations for local authority DCSs; their appointment, role and responsibilities in relation to education and children and young people's services.

Section 6, entitled *Additional Functions not related to Local Authority children's services*, states that "local authorities should undertake a local assurance test so that the focus on outcomes for children and young people will not be weakened or diluted as a result of adding such other responsibilities".

1.1 PCC Structure

In 2012 PCC combined the role of the DCS and the Director for Adult's Services, and created the People Directorate. In 2014, a review of the Directorate was undertaken and it was restructured at the beginning of 2015.

2.0 PCC DCS Assurance Test

A template for the local assurance test has been obtained from another Local Authority and completed by the Assistant Director for Children, Young People and Families. The Local Assurance Test document is split into six sections which contain a total of 13 questions. These are designed to confirm that the role of Director of Children's Services and its key responsibilities are being sufficiently resourced and addressed.

The assurance test was first undertaken in 2013, and it was agreed that this should be reviewed this year, in light of the implementation of the People Directorate Review, as well as comments by Ofsted in their report on the Single Inspection published in January 2015.

The review was undertaken and completed in June 2015 and is contained within the audit report document.

3.0 Devon Audit Partnership audit of the assurance test

On completion of the updated assurance test, PCC commissioned the audit partnership to audit the test.

The report of the audit into the local DCS assurance test concluded-

Overall the responses address the majority of points outlined in the questions and the supporting evidence confirmed the information given. The supporting evidence was defined and then obtained in order to verify the detail within the answers. Sources of evidence, including the recent Ofsted report, PCC structure information and interviews/discussions with a cross section of around six staff, supported a number of the management responses.

In some cases it is felt that the response could be enhanced as the supporting evidence shows more compliance than had been recorded. There are also a number of questions that would benefit from inclusion of additional information such as information on data sharing (Question 4), recognition of capacity issues

(Question 7), delegation outlined within formal role profiles (Question 8) and recognition of how family views are incorporated into policy and practices (Question 9).

Whilst there may be potential to expand the answers provided or provide additional information, this review can confirm that the responses provided are suitably evidenced.

4.0 PCC Response to the Recommendations

Appendix A of the audit report includes a summary Internal Audit comment for each of the 13 questions. The following recommendations and actions are noted below:-

Q1. Are line management and accountability arrangements for safeguarding and the promotion of improved outcomes for children and young people clear and transparent and perceived to be working well?

The audit found that the evidence reviewed, supported by discussions with staff, confirmed there is a clear structure in place to provide line management and accountability at all levels and to promote improved outcomes for children. The management response references the Ofsted report as this is a key independent source of confirmation on how the service is working. The response makes specific reference to “*Leaders and Managers knowing the strengths and weaknesses which need to be addressed as a priority*”. The audit report recommended-

- To include (very brief) key information on either those actions completed or still outstanding, or reference to the Improvement Plan within the management response.
- For an appraisal review meeting to take place with the Independent Chair of the PSCB in November 2015 (i.e. after 6 months of objective/target setting) to review progress.

Q4. Are the means by which the LA intends to deliver its children's services functions clear and understood by (i) staff (ii) partners (iii) councillors?

The audit found that the evidence reviewed, which included the Members area of the PCC Intranet and safeguarding presentations and also the discussions with staff, confirmed the response provided in relation to structures, referral systems and key relationships & processes. The audit report recommended-

- The management response needs to evidence information sharing agreements more fully. The presence of the Plymouth Safeguarding Board (PSCB) implies that actions have been taken in respect of data sharing but this needs to be evidenced, or addressed if not in place.
- That progress re work with partner agencies should continue to be monitored by the children's improvement board and the PSCB.

Q5. How are children's services functions reported and accountable to (i) the corporate organisation and (ii) the democratic structure? How effective is the scrutiny process and how involved are Members?

In undertaking the audit performance information was reviewed, which confirmed there is a clear level of data available for review, and this is presented to a number of audiences in order to enable the service to be held to account, this included operational management and Councillors. The audit report recommended-

- The effective running of the Safeguarding Assurance meetings in terms of evidencing improvements in outcomes and safeguards should continue to be reviewed and adjusted as appropriate.

Q9. How do the voices of children, young people and families inform and influence policy making and priorities for CYP and families.

The audit found that the management response identifies a number of avenues for the capture and integration of Children, Young People and Family (CYP&F) views into policy formation and whilst not all were reviewed, those that were, including Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) reports, showed a wealth of information with which policy can be informed. The discussions with staff further cemented the view that there is ample opportunity for children to input into the service. Whilst overall there was nothing to contradict the management response, the input of parents and families into the policy making process and setting of priorities was highlighted as not being as strong as it could be. The question specifically makes reference to families as well as Children and Young People, the response provided does not clearly address how the views of the “wider” family are given suitable opportunities to be presented and incorporated into the service where relevant and possible. The report recommended-

- The Chair of the PSCB and the Shadow C&YP Board should develop formal working links and meeting schedules during 2015/16 to ensure the 'voice of the child' is fully embedded in the day to day work of the Board.
- Further work around the 10 Wishes will be undertaken during 2015/16 to seek the views of C&YP on whether in their view, agency commitments to the said wishes are being met.

Q10. Are the operational management and practice systems clear, understood and implemented?

The audit found that a comprehensive response has been provided to this question and the discussions with staff confirmed the sound basis of Supervision, Review and Learning & Development. Some concerns were raised over the capacity to carry out all of these so whilst in place there is a risk to the effectiveness of each. This links into previous responses and also the comments in the Ofsted report relating to staff caseloads being too high. Capacity has been recognised within the CSC Improvement Plan.

When discussed with staff there was clarity about the role of the LADO and what happens when the main appointed person is not present, again supporting the response provided.

In respect of the ability to protect vulnerable children from being drawn into terrorism, the review found a mixed response and the management response has not specifically addressed this point. Whilst training has been provided to some staff on this issue there is potential for further work to be done and the Local Assurance Test (LAT) document would benefit from recognising and including this.

The report recognised that capacity issues and that ensuring the operational management and practice systems are clear, understood and implemented will be monitored via the CSC Improvement Plan.

Q11. Is there a clear model for and offer of 'early help'?

The report found that the management response identified the work being undertaken in relation to

Early Help and this was clearly evidenced through the Integrated Health and Wellbeing Programme. The discussions with staff highlighted a high level of positivity towards the effectiveness of the CAF overall, again supporting the response given including Planning in Isolation.

The report recognised that ensuring a clear model for and offer of 'early help' will be monitored via the CSC improvement plan.

Q12. Is the PSCB effective and authoritative?

The report found that there is clear evidence in place as outlined in the management response that the PSCB is effective and authoritative. The management response was fully evidenced through the review of the Safeguarding Business Plan, PSCB minutes, the Post Review Improvement Plan, most recent Ofsted report and previous Internal Audit Reviews. The report recommended-

-PSCB Safeguarding Improvement Plan to be monitored by the Executive Group and a report on progress to be reported to the Full Board. PSCB to analyse results of the Schools Section 175/157 self-assurance audit during July/August 2015 and report findings to the Full Board in September 2015. PSCB Business Manager to identify and review future format, mechanism and timing for PSCB reporting to the Children's Partnership and Council Scrutiny Committee.

These include actions for the PSCB, which will be passed to the Independent Chair to ensure completion and oversight.

It is recognised that the work-streams and actions in Qs 4, 5, 9, 10, and 11 (work with partner agencies around referral systems, scrutiny from the Improvement Board and Safeguarding Assurance meeting, embedding responses to the 10 Wishes, addressing capacity issues, ensuring the quality of supervision, and development of the early help offer) are already contained within the CSC Improvement Plan, and subject to robust monitoring and scrutiny. Therefore additional actions in relation to these recommendations are not required.

Outstanding Actions:-

1. An overarching action, in response to the audit report's comments across several areas, requires the management response to the assurance test to be reviewed. Further information will be included to provide supporting evidence to enhance responses in the areas identified above. The evidence will be reviewed as part of the appraisal process by the Chief Executive and Strategic Director People.
2. The audit report should be shared with the Independent Chair of the PSCB. This will be done by sharing the updated version with the chair of the PSCB in October 2015.
3. Since completion of the audit report, all CYPFS staff have been offered an online training course on the prevention of terrorism. Staff training needs in this area will be kept under review by agency leads in the light of a rapidly changing landscape. This information will be included in the updated management response, as in point 1 above.
4. Work around data sharing agreements is being undertaken alongside the early help offer and development of the gateway. A specific update and this work will be provided through the Children Service Improvement plan monitoring.