

EXECUTIVE BOARD
28TH February 2005

Report of: Neighbourhood Renewal Business Unit

Title: Code of Good Practice on Safeguarding Children from Harm

Ward: All

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Key Decision: Yes

Lead Member: Councillor Dan Paskins

Scrutiny responsibility: Community

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board agrees to:

1. Adopt the Code of Good Practice on Safeguarding Children From Harm.
2. Agree the proposals for implementing the Code as set out in the report.

Summary

1. This report asks the Executive Board to adopt the Code of Practice on Safeguarding Children from Harm. The report also sets out proposals for it's implementation.

Background and context

2. The CPA identified the need for the Council to have a Child Protection Policy.
3. The Code of Practice adopted by Oxfordshire County Council has been adapted to suit the needs of Oxford City Council. It was produced in consultation with Oxfordshire Social Health Care Child Protection Services and Sure Start.

The Draft Code of Practice

4. The Draft Code of Practice includes:
 - The context
 - Draft Policy Statement
 - General Principles
 - Safe Services
 - Dealing with Allegations of Abuse
 - Community Awareness of the Child Protection Role
 - Awareness of Abuse
 - Reporting Allegations
 - Confidentiality
 - Cross Referencing with other Policies
 - Key Contacts
 - a. A copy is attached in Annex 1.

Consultation

5. The Draft Code of Practice was endorsed by Community Scrutiny Committee (December 2004).
6. The Draft Code of Practice was circulated to all Business Managers following the endorsement of Scrutiny Committee.
7. There has been consultation with the Social and Healthcare Directorate in the County Council.

Implementation

8. Once the Draft Code is adopted a training programme will be implemented for all staff who come into contact with children. The type of training need will vary according to the different needs of Business Units and the level of contact that staff have with children. Individual training needs will be identified through the staff Appraisal process and the Training and Development Plan for each Business Unit.
9. There will be a standard reporting form for all Business Units that is based on the County Council Social and Health Care Pro forma.
10. In order to inform children, parents, carers and workers of the Code of Practice and to publicise the importance of child safety a leaflet and poster will be produced that will be placed throughout City Council buildings. Information will also be placed on the Council's web site and intranet.

Financial / Staffing implications

11. The Human Resources Training budget can include provision for this training, although it is likely to be a significant amount that may impact upon other training needs. Staff will also have to attend the training. The management of the referral process will be done within existing resources within Corporate Services, Human Resources and the Neighbourhood renewal Business Units.
12. The cost of producing the leaflet and posters for raising awareness of the Code of Practice will be met within existing budgets within Neighbourhood Renewal Business Unit.

Legal implications

13. Oxford City Council's Housing Service has a specific statutory duty under section 27 of the 1989 Children Act to help Social and Healthcare departments with their enquiries but this code of practice applies to all staff in all business units.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY:
Portfolio Holder for Social Inclusion: Councillor Dan Paskins
Strategic Director, Housing Health and Community: Michael Lawrence
Legal and Democratic Services: Lindsay Cane
Financial & Asset Management: Andy Collett, Acting Group Accountant
Human Resources: Anne Marie Scott, Business Manager

Background papers: None

Oxford City Council

CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE ON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN FROM HARM

1. Context

Oxford City Council want to work in a way that ensures that all children are safeguarded from harm. The promotion of children's health and welfare, including their physical, emotional, social and intellectual development is key to a range of services and policies the Council manages and promotes. Oxford City Council's Housing Service has a specific statutory duty under section 27 of the 1989 Children Act to help Social and Healthcare departments with their enquiries but this code of practice applies to all staff in all business units.

A set of principles relating to Children's Rights underpins this code. These include: -

- Treating children as individuals entitled to dignity and respect.
- Promoting effective partnerships amongst all those involved with children, including children's parents/carers, to improve children's welfare.
- Promoting the safety of children in all aspects of the Council's work
- Raising awareness of best practice in how to protect children from harm of all kinds
- Ensuring that activities and services are run so as to minimise opportunities for children to suffer harm.
- Making safety the responsibility of all members of staff
- Establishing effective and open procedures in responding to accidents, complaints or concerns so that they can be shared and dealt with promptly
- Adopting and applying safe recruitment practices for all staff.
- Co-ordinating child protection policies with the local Area Child Protection Committee in accordance with 'Working Together under the Children Act'.

2. Oxford City Council Policy Statement – Child Protection:

All activities and programmes provided by Oxford City Council will aim to create a safe environment for all children by:

- Following safe recruitment practices and incorporating staff awareness of child safety and protection issues into training procedures
- Ensuring that all children are in an environment that protects them and minimises opportunities for them to suffer harm;
- Ensuring that all children, their parents / carers and all workers taking part in activities run by or recruited by Oxford City Council are made aware of what is expected of them and what will happen if abuse is suspected
- Ensuring that there is an open environment, including mechanisms for parents, children and staff to voice concerns or make complaints and that these will be dealt with promptly and efficiently.

3 General Principles to achieve this aim:

Oxford City Council will give careful consideration to the following areas in accordance with national guidance:

a. Safe recruitment for new staff

Procedures in relation to selection, recruitment, vetting will be carried out through checks with the Criminal Records Bureaux and taken in accordance with written procedures established by the Human Resources Business Unit.

b. Safe recruitment for staff working for Oxford City Council in partnership with other agencies.

Staff who work in partnership projects will be expected to abide by this Code as well as that of the Agency where they are based. This Code has been written in consultation with the County Council and other appropriate Children's agencies.

c. Safe Services

Existing policies relating to Health & Safety and Risk Management will apply to work with Children. New policies will be developed in terms of

Supervision of children – ensuring there is proper and adequate supervision of children in accordance with Children Act guidance and regulations.

Supervision of staff – ensuring there is proper and adequate supervision of staff in relation to management of boundaries, clear communication channels and assessment skills. These will be built into the performance management and appraisal systems for supervision, appraisal and training needs analysis.

d. Dealing with Allegations of Abuse

The Corporate Secretariat Manager will be responsible for co-ordinating the Child Protection Code and monitoring its implementation. This post will be the Nominated Officer in terms of dealing with Child Protection concerns.

All concerns should be reported to the Nominated Officer and not dealt with by individuals. Where staff are unable to do this they must report such concerns to the Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager who will act as deputy Nominated Officer.

The Nominated Officer will be responsible for ensuring that any necessary action is taken when abuse is seen or alleged and that is

recorded appropriately. Named contacts within the Police and Social Services are to be identified.

e. Community Awareness of Child Protection Role

Oxford City Council will produce a leaflet and post to publicise the Code of Conduct and the importance of child safety and its willingness to work with other agencies as appropriate to support this.

The leaflets and posters will be distributed throughout City Council buildings and in places that City Council services are provided. Information will also be placed on the intranet and City Council web site.

4 Awareness of Abuse

Child protection enquiries (under S47 of the Children Act 1989) are likely to take place where the local authority has “reasonable cause to suspect that a child that lives or is found, in their area, is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm”.

All staff need to note the following definitions and pass on any concerns to the Nominated Officer.

Abuse may be described as:

‘An act, or failure to act, by the person responsible for the care of the child. It may involve cruelty, exploitation or neglect.’

Abuse takes many forms. Working Together provides key definitions:

Physical injury: This may be actual or likely physical injury to a child, or failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind danger, including cold or starvation, or extreme failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in the significant impairment of the child’s health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive.

Sexual abuse: Actual or likely sexual exploitation of the child or adolescent.

Emotional Abuse: Actual or likely severe adverse effect on the emotional and behavioural development of the child caused by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection. All abuse involves some emotional ill-treatment. This category should be used where it is main or sole form of abuse.

It is also vital that the staffs are aware of the possibility of third party abuse and report concerns appropriately.

Abuse can happen by anyone including staff members and volunteers and must be reported whoever the perpetrator.

The Nominated Officer will hold more detailed definitions of abuse for reference.

5 Reporting Allegations

If an allegation is made, or concerns are raised they should always be brought to the attention of the Nominated Person for child protection. A record should be kept of the facts surrounding the concern, what action was taken and why. This record should be used as a checklist as far as possible with the emphasis being on listening to what the child has to say.

Oxford City Council staff should not investigate allegations or interview children but should listen and record what is said or seen and refer it to the Nominated Officer. A copy of the standard referral form is attached. The Nominated Officer will then contact Social Services or the police who are trained to make enquiries, which will indicate whether further investigations are necessary. (If a serious incident has occurred which leads to a criminal trial, it is essential that there is no suggestion that witnesses, and particularly young children, have been lead to say what they did).

The check list will include:

- Name of the child:
- Parent's / carer's details:
- The child's address:
- Relevant phone numbers:
- What is said to have happened or what was seen:
- When it occurred:
- Who else was there:
- What was said by those involved:
- Where there is any actual evidence e.g. bruises, bleeding, changed behaviour:
- Who has been told about it:
- Who was concerned?
- Was the child able to say what happened?
- Whether the parents had been advised (this should normally be agreed following advice from Social Services / Police and should not be left for a decision by the staff member).

A pro forma for reporting all allegations, will be made available on the intranet, from Business Unit Managers or Corporate Secretariate.

6. Confidentiality

It is important wherever possible that parents are kept informed of what is happening and only breaching confidentiality without parent's knowledge if not to do so places the child at increased risk of harm.

7. Cross Referencing with other Policies

This policy will need to cross-refer to the following policies and codes:

- Confidentiality and Data Protection
- Health and Safety
- Recruitment Policies – especially in relation to Criminal Record Bureaux checks
- Specific Business Unit policies in terms of contact with children including trips and overnight visits
- Staff Supervision, Appraisal & Training – Human Resources

8 Key Contacts

Nominated Officer – Mike Newman, Manager, Corporate Secretariat
Deputy Nominated Officers – Anne-Marie Scott, Business Manager, Human Resources and Val Johnson, Business Manager, Neighbourhood Renewal

This document has been drawn up in consultation with Oxfordshire Social and Health Care Child Protection Services.

February 2005

A COPY OF THE STANDARD REFERAL FORM IS NOT AVAILABLE BUT WILL BE RECEIVED SHORTLY FROM THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE DIRECTORATE OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND ATTACHED IN THE FORM OF AN ANNEX.