

FAMILY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: 21 April 2022

The role of Director of Children's Services – Test of Assurance

Report of the Executive Director of Adults Social Care and Children's Services and Deputy Chief Executive: Cath McEvoy-Carr

Cabinet Member: Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson

Purpose of report

Statutory guidance on the role of Director of Children's Services (DCS) requires the Council to carry out a "test of assurance" when the responsibilities of the DCS change. Given the forthcoming departure of the current DCS, Cath McEvoy-Carr, it is timely to advise elected members of the agreed interim arrangements.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended:

- 1. To scrutinise the updated information in this report about the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the manner in which the postholder(s) discharges the responsibility of statutory Director of Children's Services**

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the priorities in the corporate plan in relation to Tackling Health Inequalities, Thriving and Living and Learning.

Key issues

1. Statutory guidance requires local authorities to review the role of the Director of Children's Services when changes take place that could have an impact on the focus on outcomes. From a governance perspective, it is important that elected members are assured about the future arrangements.
2. In February 2020, the Council received the test of assurance pertaining to the role of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services (DCS), and it was satisfied with the arrangements.

3. Cath McEvoy-Carr, the current DCS, is leaving the local authority in May 2022 and interim arrangements have been agreed for the DCS position following her departure. The arrangements are that her duties will be shared between the two current Service Directors in Children's Services, with one of them named as the DCS as required for statutory purposes. They will be supported by two experienced and knowledgeable senior management teams. This will provide continuity and stability.
4. The integration and governance arrangements referenced in the last report ([click here](#)) largely remain in place. As a further assurance, the requirements of the DCS role as detailed in the background section of the last report have been assessed and no unmanageable risks emerged from that process.
5. In relation to Cath's other leadership roles in the Council regarding Adults Social Care and Public Health, arrangements are in place for the leadership of both, through Neil Bradley and Liz Morgan, respectively.

Background

Statutory guidance requires local authorities to review the role of the Director of Children's Services when changes take place that could have an impact on the focus on outcomes. From a governance perspective, it is important that elected members are assured about the future arrangements. This committee has previously received these test of assurance reports and has been satisfied with the arrangements.

Cath McEvoy-Carr currently fulfils the role of DCS in her capacity as Executive Director for Adult Social Care and Children's Services and the Deputy Chief Executive. She has oversight of Children's Social Care; Education and skills; and Adults social care. Cath will leave the local authority in May 2022, and the purpose of this report is to brief elected members on the interim arrangements that have been agreed for the fulfilling of the DCS role.

Audrey Kingham (Senior Service Director and Director of Education and Skills), and Graham Reiter (Service Director for Children's Social Care) will be joint DCSs and will share the role between them. As there has to be one nominated DCS for statutory purposes, that will be Graham Reiter. The requirements of the DCS role as detailed in the background section of the last report have been assessed and no unmanageable risks emerged from that process. These arrangements will provide continuity and stability going forward.

Audrey and Graham's scope of responsibilities will be narrower than Cath's and will enable them to focus specifically on the needs of Children's Services and the various partnership arrangements that support it. They both have experienced senior management teams working to them who are knowledgeable about the requirements of the DCS role as well as the corporate priorities of the Council.

Cath leaves Children's services in a strong position having had a positive inspection of social care services, demonstrated significant improvements and leadership in the field of special educational needs and disabilities, and improved performance of our schools.

The links with elected members will be retained through these new arrangements, for example through reports to cabinet, scrutiny, corporate parenting, as well as partnership boards. In addition, there are regular meetings with the lead member for Children's Services and a comprehensive briefing is shared with him every month which provides updates on priorities, inspections, service developments, quality of practice, performance data and complaints. These arrangements will

continue.

Appropriate representation on key partnerships is secured through these interarrangements as Audrey and Graham are both long-standing members of the multi-agency Safeguarding partnership, the Children and Young People's strategic partnership, and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities partnership board.

With regards to Cath's leadership duties outside of Children's Services, arrangements are in place for the leadership of Adults Social Care through Neil Bradley. The links already established between Children's Services and those areas will be maintained through the aforementioned partnership boards and the Council's Executives group. In addition, the joining up of the Adults and Children's safeguarding partnerships will help retain links with health services and Northumbria Police.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are no background documents for this report.

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy	Ensuring effective leadership for children's services remains a national and local priority.
Finance and value for money	The management arrangements described in this report include financial management support for the DCS to ensure the effective management of limited resources.
Human Resources	The role of DCS is being shared and the lead has been identified for statutory purposes. Appropriate appointments have been made to cover those areas now outside of the DCS' scope.
Property	No immediate implications.
Equalities	
(Impact Assessment attached) Yes	No N/A
This report does not propose a change requiring impact assessment	
Risk Assessment	Elected Members are asked to assure themselves that they are satisfied with the new interim arrangements.
Crime & Disorder	The role of the DCS is central to the protection of children from criminal abuse or exploitation, and preventing young people who have had difficult childhoods from becoming involved in criminal activity. The post of Domestic Violence Coordinator rests in Children's Social Care, giving the DCS easy access to staff who can tackle these issues.
Customer Considerations	Arrangements for listening to the views of children and young people are central to the work of Children's Services.
Carbon reduction	No immediate implications.
Wards	All

Report sign off

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Deputy Chief Executive	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

Report Author: Alan Hartwell (Senior Manager Performance and Systems Support)

Phone: 07876131410

Email: Alan.Hartwell@northumberland.gov.uk