

INTERNAL AUDIT WORK ON SAFE RECRUITMENT IN SCHOOLS

To: **Cabinet**

Date: **14 December 2010**

From: **Audit and Accounts Committee**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **N/A** *Key decision:* **No**

Purpose: **To advise Cabinet of the results of Internal Audit work on Safe Recruitment in schools and of the potentially unmitigated risk in this area**

Recommendation: **That Cabinet consider the Committee's findings.**

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Within its terms of reference the Audit and Accounts Committee is able report as appropriate to the County Council, Standards Committee or to the Cabinet on issues which require their attention or further action.
- 1.2 Safe recruitment audits have been taking place in Cambridgeshire schools since 2004. The audit approach is to review compliance with recruitment policy and guidelines in a sample of schools and over this period more than 70 Cambridgeshire schools (out of 246 plus 5 Pupil Referral Units) have been subject to review.
- 1.3 At its September meeting the Committee received a report on the latest of these safe recruitment audits. The Committee noted with extreme concern that for the third year running the Head of Audit and Risk Management had only been able to provide a 'moderate assurance' opinion on the adequacy of control with regard to Safe School Recruitment despite a number of reminder letters issued in previous years. The opinion of 'moderate assurance' indicates that whilst there is basically a sound system of control, there are some areas of weakness which put the safeguarding of children in schools at risk.
- 1.4 The Members noted the large majority of schools have acceptable practices and some improvement against previously reported audits was found; however, appointments were still being made in some schools before all relevant Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks had been received.
- 1.5 As part of the agreed management response to the audit report, the Executive Director: CYPs undertook to write to Head Teachers and all Chairs of Governors reminding them of the need to make all required safety checks when appointing staff / volunteers. A letter was issued on 25 October 2010 advising schools of their responsibilities in the strongest terms and asking them to bring to the attention of their governing bodies schools' own responsibilities for ensuring the safety of their children.
- 1.6 The Committee noted the letter at its November meeting. Discussing this matter further, the Committee considered that as this was the third time that a moderate assurance opinion had been given on this topic, and in view of the importance of this issue to the strategic objectives of the County Council, that the Committee wished to exercise its right to advise Cabinet of its concerns and of the risk in this area.

2. SAFE RECRUITMENT AUDIT IN SCHOOLS 2009/10: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- 2.1 A summary of the findings of this year's safe recruitment audit is given below. The conclusions of the review were drawn from visits to sixteen sample schools, undertaken between December 2009 and April 2010.

- 2.2 The review procedure was to conduct audit testing on five recent appointments in each school. Audit testing and review also covered the treatment of volunteers and other non-employed staff, as well as a review of the recruitment policy framework, the maintenance of the single central record and allied areas of safeguarding.
- 2.3 From the fieldwork undertaken, Internal Audit considered that the large majority of Cambridgeshire schools have acceptable recruitment procedures and practices, and exercise satisfactory controls to deter and prevent unsuitable persons from gaining positions of trust in the schools' workforce. In contrast to previous years, all schools visited demonstrated a clear and purposeful commitment to safeguarding and recognised the centrality of safe recruitment and employment in promoting secure and effective school environments.
- 2.4 However, for the third year in succession, a **moderate assurance** opinion on the adequacy of control in this area was given. This reflects the fact that there are continuing variances in how far current expectations are implemented. Whilst most schools have continued to move closer to best practice there are some isolated instances where there are still some fundamental shortcomings. It was, for example, disappointing to note in the sixth year of this audit that a number of schools have still not fully implemented the local authority's advice following previous audit reviews.
- 2.5 Most concerning are the regular instances of schools allowing employees to begin work without completing the required set of pre-employment checks. If findings are representative of the wider picture, this area continues to remain a significant risk. The Executive Director and his team have stressed the need for compliance on this issue to Head Teachers and governing bodies for several years and it is very disappointing to find that the message has still not been heard in some schools.
- 2.6 Key recommendations made and agreed by management relate to:
- a repeat of the Executive Director's annual letter on this topic
 - a strong message to schools regarding the timeliness of criminal records checks and Independent Safeguard Authority list clearance
 - a reiteration of earlier information regarding identity check documentation, expectations on references, gaps in employment, short-listing and safer recruitment training
 - development of the role of governing bodies in providing oversight of recruitment procedures in all schools
 - promotion of the newly formed Education Safeguarding Group as a forum for information sharing and co-ordination
 - consideration of how to identify best and worst practice, targeting full audit review and promoting good models as appropriate.
- 2.7 In discussion with the Executive Director this matter will be raised with Head Teacher groups. A further audit will take place in the spring term in order to assess the impact of these actions.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 Cabinet is asked to consider the Committee's findings.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

Resources and Performance

Finance

4.1 No significant implications.

Human Resources

4.2 The Human Resources function and Education Personnel Management offer advice to schools in this area.

Key Risks

4.3 The Council's Corporate Risk Register includes a risk regarding safeguarding vulnerable children. This report signals to Cabinet an unmitigated risk in this area.

Statutory Requirements and Partnership Working

4.4 There are stringent requirements attached to recruitment in schools for safeguarding reasons through provision in the various Children and Education Acts.

Climate Change

4.5 There are no significant implications arising from the recommendations.

Access and Inclusion

4.6 There are no significant implications arising from the recommendations.

Engagement and Consultation

4.7 There are no significant implications arising from the recommendations.

Source Documents	Location
Audit Report on Safe Recruitment in Schools 2009-10	Shire Hall Room 303