

SAFE RECRUITMENT IN SCHOOLS UPDATE

To: **Audit and Accounts Committee**

Date: **22nd September 2015**

From: **Keith Grimwade, Service Director: Learning, CFA
Neil Hunter, Interim Head of Audit**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **N/A**

Key decision: **N/A**

Purpose: **At the July Audit & Accounts Committee it was reported that a recent safe recruitment review of two schools had resulted in only one school receiving substantial assurance, with the other having been identified as having failures in relation to compliance with Council safeguarding policies / guidelines. The Committee asked for an urgent review on ways to improve the compliance of schools undertaking recruitment taking account of Council safeguarding policies and for a report to be brought to the September meeting.**

Recommendation: **Audit and Accounts Committee comments on and notes this update**

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1. Introduction

At the Audit & Accounts Committee, 14th July 2015, following discussions regarding safer recruitment in schools, it was minuted that;

The main serious concern for the entire Committee was the fact that the recent safe recruitment review of two schools had resulted in only one school receiving substantial assurance, with the other having been identified as having failures in relation to compliance with Council safeguarding policies / guidelines. On this basis, the joint review on ways to improve the compliance of schools undertaking recruitment taking account of Council safeguarding policies required to be brought forward and presented to the September meeting, with the lead officer to be asked to take immediate action in the interim. The Chairman indicated he would speak to the lead officer the next day.

This is a joint report from the Service Director: Learning, Children, Families and Adults (CFA) and the Interim Head of Audit.

2. Learning Directorate response

A letter was sent to all schools from the Executive Director: CFA on 24th September 2014 reporting on the results of the 2014 audit and highlighting the areas of weakness. All maintained schools and academies were asked to complete a Safer Recruitment self-audit that covered all areas of the recruitment process, as part of the Local Authority's (LA's) response to the findings.

100% of schools have now returned the self-audit. Schools reported that they found it a useful check list / reminder of what they should be doing. The LA is satisfied that the actions schools have put in place to address any areas of weakness are appropriate and will follow up the impact of these actions as part of the 2015/16 audit.

The letter also provided details of three area based workshops that took place in the second half of the autumn term for headteachers, school administrators and Governors to address the issues identified through the 2014 audit. These particularly related to the Single Central Record and the checks that are required. Other areas related to the management of records and notes made during shortlisting and interviews.

The workshops were attended by 96 delegates from a range of maintained schools, academies and Trusts. We targeted the schools' Business Managers and Administrators as they often undertake the checks and deal with the administration of the process.

The workshops generated a number of useful questions which, with the help of colleagues in Human Resources (HR), were put into a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document which was sent out to all schools.

All interview panels must include someone who has undertaken the Safer Recruitment training. All schools were urged to ensure at least one member of staff had attended the Full Day Training or Refresher training delivered by Governor Services.

Governing Bodies have a key role in ensuring that safe recruitment practices are followed. In 2014/15, 126 school staff and governors attended one of five full day courses delivered by Governor Services.

59 school staff and governors have attended one of five refresher courses (all delegates have previously attended a certificated course).

School governors were informed by the Service Director: Learning about the results of the audit via the termly Governor Briefings and urged to ensure that they hold their schools to account in this area.

Where the audit identifies concerns, such as in the case of one of the two reports the Committee received in July, the school receives a Warning Letter outlining the concerns. The LA checks who has undertaken training from that school and they are reminded of the need to have trained staff to sit on interview panels. A full safeguarding review is carried out at the school if that is deemed necessary.

Ongoing work

In order to improve practice further a number of additional actions have been implemented.

The Annual Child Protection Monitoring Report to Governors now includes three questions from the self-audit and records who has undertaken training.

The Safer Recruitment Model Policy has been revised and updated and will be sent to all schools with the results of the 2015 audit. All schools have received a copy of the Department for Education (DFE) guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' and Part 3 of the guidance relates to Safer Recruitment.

Safer Recruitment face-to-face training and Refresher training is available to all schools through Governor Services. There is online training available from the NSPCC, but this Authority has chosen to continue to provide face-to-face training which can often be more effective. The training has been reviewed in order to keep it relevant and up-to-date in line with local expectations and Keeping Children Safe 2015 (July).

The new Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. (OFSTED) framework now covers this aspect of safeguarding in Leadership and Management, not Behaviour and Safety. All Ofsted reports will be monitored by the LA for safeguarding (all schools, including academies and free schools) and any concerns will be followed up.

3. Internal Audit Update

Schools audits are an important area over which the Section 151 Officer and the Council's Audit & Accounts Committee should receive assurance.

Although schools have local management and Governing Bodies are responsible for ensuring that they have a robust system of internal control in place in their schools the authority needs to be aware of how well schools comply with legislation.

Internal Audit's role is through its Audit Plan to review and challenge key controls, to add value through the work it undertakes and to provide assurance on the internal control framework in schools.

Assurance for 2015/2016 will be given by:

Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS)

Checks to ensure that all schools made an SFVS return and chasing those schools that did not meet the deadline until a return is made.

Review of those returns for reasonableness.

Sample auditing of the returns each year, with specific targeting of those late or non-returners.

Thematic Audits

A programme of thematic audits in primary schools to cover in detail all high risk areas e.g. "Safe Recruitment in Schools including payroll controls", and "Purchasing and Payments".

Targeted Audit

Specific targeted audits on "Schools in Difficulties" in response to feedback from colleagues in the Learning Directorate and Schools Finance.

Internal Audit is establishing an integrated School Auditing Team by working closer with LGSS colleagues in Northamptonshire to develop a School Auditing Centre of Excellence.

As part of this refocusing Internal Audit will be reviewing the audit topics, programmes and reporting formats for schools. A half day workshop has been agreed for 'stakeholder' challenge of the audit programmes, with particular emphasis on determining those controls that must be fully complied with for a school to achieve a positive opinion.

In addition to this, from September 2015 an Internal Audit newsletter for schools will be provided. This will not only raise awareness of the Service but will also provide feedback on the audits completed, provide advice on good practice and cascade information to schools on the queries that the Audit Team receive.

It is also planned to provide a series of training workshops which will be targeted initially at new Headteachers and Governors. These will include advice on Internal Controls and Counter Fraud measures that should be in place in their schools.

Background Papers: None