

The Role of District Councils in Improving Outcomes for Children

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Every Child Matters
Change For Children



NON-STATUTORY
GUIDANCE

The Role of District Councils in Improving Outcomes for Children

Improving outcomes for children and young people

Every Child Matters, the Government's vision for children's services, was published in September 2003. It proposed reshaping children's services to help achieve the outcomes children and young people told us are key to well-being in childhood and later life.

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

This guide is intended to help district and county councils work together to deliver this exciting agenda, and has been produced in response to requests for further guidance on the roles and contributions both can make to delivering better outcomes for children. It will help partners as they identify their priorities for joint planning and action.

The guidance includes a summary of the most relevant legislation as set out in *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* (Annex A). It also contains a checklist for district and for county councils (Annex B). These are intended to help identify opportunities for working together to enhance further the contributions both make toward delivering better outcomes for children.

The guidance recognises that county councils face a complex challenge in developing their partnership arrangements, and that district councils may have limited resources with which to engage in the process. We have, therefore, focused in this document on those areas where both have most to gain from joint working.

District councils already deliver positive outcomes for children

As the *housing authority*, by achieving the *Decent Homes Standard*, district councils directly improve the health and life chances of children by improving the standard of housing, preventing

homelessness and by working closely with children's services agencies. For example, in advance of any decision to evict a family they ensure that such action does not impact adversely on the children. By adapting housing, district councils can help children with disabilities access basic amenities within the home, and also help families stay together when a parent or sibling has a disability. Also by providing supported accommodation for young parents and care leavers, supporting crisis centres and making provision for Travellers and meeting the housing needs of unaccompanied asylum seeker young people, they are protecting some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the district.

Cultural, leisure and learning opportunities provided by district councils ensure children and families benefit from local leisure centres, art, crèche and playgroup facilities, museums, theatres, holiday and out-of-school schemes, parks and open spaces.

As the *planning authority* they ensure road safety schemes and make sure all new developments are child friendly, with appropriate facilities for play in new housing developments, places for mothers to breast feed in new shopping developments and that families have access to health and social care services.

The *environmental health service* takes part in initiatives to promote health of children, particularly in relation to food hygiene and nutrition, and work in partnership with

education and health providers to reduce health inequalities and promote health improvement.

District councils help to deliver the roll out of Children's Centres and as a *licensing authority* and through their work on *community safety* help to safeguard children.

They also deliver benefits to ensure that children are protected from the effects of poverty and that family income is maximised.

District councils also engage directly with children and families, by employing parents and involving children and their families in the development of local services and activities.

They lead on the development of local strategic partnerships and community strategies which help to co-ordinate the planning of services for young people. They also have a role in scrutinising services, including cross-cutting reviews of services which impact upon children and young people.

The key to delivering better outcomes for children and young people is working in partnership within the children's trust arrangements.

The benefits of joint working

Partnership working, built on a shared understanding of priorities and good practice, will help both district and county councils deliver services more effectively. Equally, active engagement with the

children's trust partnership will ensure greater recognition of the impact district councils have on the lives of children and young people.

There are clear opportunities for developing these arrangements and many district and county councils are already working together to:

- Create a culture of openness and effective inter-agency working and raising awareness of *Every Child Matters* within their organisations, for example by identifying existing services and schemes which contribute to the well-being of children and young people;
- Contribute to the *Children and Young People's Plan* in its consultation and development phases;
- Participate in the establishment of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, and ensure that district and county councils are represented on the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership;
- Appoint lead officers (and lead members) for children and young people, promoting the role of elected members as community leaders concerned with the needs of all children and young people;
- Develop information-sharing protocols and creating effective networks at both officer and member levels;
- Develop consortia approaches to schemes and pool resources, for example by jointly planning the siting and building of new schools and housing;
- Improve joint working between housing services and social care;
- Review strategies, policies, business plans and contracts to improve safeguarding and promote children's well-being;
- Support efforts in the voluntary and community sector which improve outcomes for children and young people;
- Encourage joint consultation and engagement with children and young people about the services they want, for example through schools or youth councils.

Evidence from around the country shows how much district and county councils already contribute to the life chances of children, young people and their families. This guidance shows how district and county councils are developing new ways of working together, and supports the key message: that full engagement from both partners is essential to delivering better outcomes for children and young people.

More detail is available from <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/>

Annex A: The legislation

The Government has legislated for changes in the way children's services work together. *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* explains how the Children Act 2004 forms the basis of a long-term programme of change and launched 150 local change programmes across the country.

Responsibilities of District Councils under the Children Act 2004

The Children Act 2004 places significant duties on county-level¹ authorities (generally referred to in DfES guidance as *local authorities* and in the Act as *Children's Services Authorities*) and on specific individuals. Under sections 1 and 2 of the Act, the local authority is required to have a Director of Children's Services and a Lead Member in place by 2008 at the latest as *the* accountable individual for local authority services to children. The local authority has a duty under section 10 to promote inter-agency co-operation

between named agencies (including district councils) which are involved with children and young people and contribute to their well-being. Those agencies (including district councils) are under a reciprocal duty to cooperate with the local authority. The duty to cooperate comes with budget pooling powers and is the key provision that underpins children's trust arrangements. Section 17 makes provision for the production by local authorities of a key strategic document by April 2006 called the *Children and Young People's Plan*.

Guidance on the Children Act 2004 duties is available at <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/guidance/>.

Statutory guidance on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under section 11 of the Children Act was published in August 2005 (<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/>

¹ A county council in England, a metropolitan district council, a non-metropolitan district council for an area where there is no county council, a London borough council, the Common Council of the City of London and the Council of the Isles of Scilly. "County-level authorities" and "children's services authorities" are the same authorities. DfES guidance generally uses the convention of referring to them as "local authorities". However, this guidance refers to "county councils" where that is what it means and where the reference does not also cover other county-level authorities.

strategy/guidance/?asset=document&id=28266).

The guidance came into force on 1st October 2005. It details both how district councils already contribute to the lives of children and young people and what is expected of them, including:

- Senior management commitment to the importance of safeguarding and promoting well-being;
- A clear statement of the council's responsibilities towards children, made available to all staff;
- Clear lines of accountability for work on safeguarding and promoting well-being;
- Using the views of children and young people to help shape services;
- Safe recruitment procedures for those coming into contact with children and young people;
- Appropriate training for staff;
- Effective working relationships within the council and with other agencies to safeguard and promote well-being, and to share information effectively.

The senior management commitment to safeguarding is to be demonstrated by the appointment of one or more safeguarding champions, reporting directly to the Chief Executive who should have a sound working knowledge of the legislation. These individuals will be key to effective communications with staff, ensuring training needs are identified and met,

effective working relationships are promoted and that managers are held to account for the contribution of their services to safeguarding and promoting well-being. Further information on safeguarding will be available in the forthcoming guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children: Making safeguarding everyone's business*, publication date to be notified.

Front-line district council staff may come into contact with children and young people in many ways, including reception staff, housing and housing benefit staff, leisure staff, parks and maintenance staff etc. Arrangements should be put in place so that staff know what action to take if they have concerns about the safety or welfare of a child. These arrangements should include: contact details for advice or referral; fostering a culture of openness and shared communication where concerns can be aired; and building safeguarding and promoting well-being into the business planning processes of teams, and where appropriate, the work objectives for individuals.

Where contractors provide services for children and young people on behalf of a district council e.g. management of leisure centres, equivalent safeguarding procedures should be put in place.

Youth Matters

In July 2005 the *Youth Matters* green paper was published. This builds on *Every Child Matters* with its themes of safe and positive activity. Real communication and engagement (including decision-making) with young people is key to providing safe and positive activity. Local authorities will be required to ensure that young people can access adequate activities and facilities in their leisure time. District councils will inevitably make a major contribution to this provision and will need to work closely with county-level authorities to ensure that a comprehensive 'local offer' is available and publicised.

Pending successful piloting, district councils will also need to accommodate the introduction of the youth opportunity card, which aims to increase participation of young people in positive activities through subsidising the activity cost to the young person. Eligible activities will need to include those provided by district councils.

Annex B: Brief Health checks

For District Councils

- Have you clearly identified a senior manager with responsibility for championing safeguarding and promoting welfare of children? Are elected members and managers aware of what these responsibilities mean for them and committed to deliver?
- Have you taken part in events and meetings briefing you on the *Every Child Matters* agenda and helping you build networks and understanding of the support available to you?
- Have you, with other districts in your area, ensured that there is effective district representation within the children's trust arrangements at county level?
- Have you identified priority areas for joint district-county planning as part of the process of preparing a Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) by April 2006?
- Does the draft CYPP address your priority concerns and have you asked staff around the district to ensure it meets their needs?
- Are you clear about next steps in implementation and are priorities in the draft CYPP feeding into budget and forward planning in your organisation?
- Has the Local Safeguarding Children Board been established in your area and is your district an effective part of that Board?
- Have you reviewed your own policies, procedures and practices for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children as part of delivering your services? Are there clear lines of accountability? Are staff well-informed about their responsibilities and do they know what to do?
- Are you taking action to address areas identified for improvement? Is service development taking account of the need to safeguard and promote welfare and is this informed where appropriate by the views of children and families? Are safe recruitment procedures in place? Is the LSCB helping you achieve your objectives, for instance by supporting sharing of expertise?

For County Councils

- Have you invited districts to informal events to build understanding and networks?
Do you have good contact with relevant senior officials in districts?
- Have you engaged districts to ensure they are effectively represented within your children's trusts arrangements?
- Do children's trust arrangements include an effective working network of district contacts at senior and operational level, who can contribute informally as well as formally?
- Have you ensured that any meetings districts are invited to attend are well focused on issues of relevance to them?
- Have you sought to identify district priorities for joint working, and areas where there are benefits to districts from better planning, and reflected these in shaping work on the Children and Young People's Plan?
- Do the districts in your area see clear benefits from participating in your children's trust arrangements?
- Are they aware of the support and help they can get nationally, regionally and locally in delivering the *Every Child Matters* agenda?
- Are Local Safeguarding Children's Boards up and running? Do you have effective participation in LSCBs by all districts in your area?
- Do the districts in your area see clear benefits from participating in LSCBs?

NB: these lists are not intended to be exhaustive.

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www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications and www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

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