

**REPORT TO:** Children, Young People & Families Policy & Performance Board

**DATE:** 13 June 2016

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, People & Economy

**PORTFOLIO:** Children, Young People & Families

**SUBJECT:** Regulation 44 Visits to Council Owned Children's Homes

**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To outline for members the statutory basis for Regulation 44 visits, the role of members in undertaking those visits, and the training and support that is in place for that role.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

- i) Members note the reasons for members undertaking Regulation 44 visits;**
- ii) Members confirm their commitment to the training and support ; and**
- iii) Members confirm their commitment to undertake Regulation 44 visits via a rota.**

**3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 Regulation 44 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2015 require each children's home to ensure that an 'independent' visitor visits the home at least once a month. The visitor must then compile a report of their findings which must be submitted to Ofsted within 4 weeks of the visit.

3.2 The focus of the visit is to ensure that all children within the placement are being appropriately cared for and their individual needs are being met. This is achieved through a combination of examining appropriate written records within the home, viewing any complaints, and interviewing children, parents and staff as they feel necessary to establish the standard of care being provided.

3.3 In Halton, the role of Independent Visitor has been carried out by Elected Members in their role as corporate parents and as owners of the homes. On the occasion that a Member is not available, an officer who is not responsible for the line management of the children's home has undertaken the visit. A rota of visits is

developed across the year for the two homes (Edinburgh Road and Inglefield) and a report template is provided to the visitor before each visit. A copy of the previous month's report is also issued so that the visitor can follow up on actions or issues that were previously identified.

- 3.4 Ofsted have recently inspected both our homes and have recommended that the visits need to offer a more 'rigorous and impartial assessment of the home's arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children in the home'. How the Local Authority has responded to this and other recommendations is followed up by Ofsted at subsequent monitoring inspections and failure to act on their recommendations may affect the subsequent Ofsted judgement.
- 3.5 In response to the recent inspections a number of steps are being taken. The first is request that members confirm their commitment to undertaking Regulation 44 visits as members of the Children and Families Performance Board in their role as corporate parents and as part of their scrutiny function. The commitment is for 1 visit each month to either Edinburgh Road or Inglefield via a rota. These visits can be done either by a member on their own or in a pair; in compiling the rota it would be helpful to know member preferences. However, dependant in the needs of the children who are resident, the registered manager may advise that to minimise stress and disruption to individual children that one visitor would be preferred and all members should be prepared to visit on their own.
- 3.6 The second is to ensure that members are trained appropriately and supported to undertake Regulation 44 visits. Action for Children has been commissioned to provide training for all members undertaking this role and to provide support in undertaking initial visits if required.
- 3.7 The third is to revise the template report for recording the visit to improve of the quality of scrutiny that is undertaken in line with the Ofsted recommendations. A revised form has been piloted and further feedback will be taken and further work undertaken in response by Action for Children.
- 3.8 Visits can be undertaken at any time and without notice. In the initial stages, members may wish for the registered manager to be present to assist with any questions they may have until such time they are more familiar with the setting and the role they are undertaking. If this is the case, this will need to be via prior arrangement with the manager to ensure they are available. However, it is important to get a true reflection of how the home is run and managed that the majority of visits are undertaken without notice. This is important as you review the actions of the previous Regulation 44 visit on each visit and you can satisfy yourself that appropriate action has been taken.

3.9 It is important that you speak to the children and young people and directly seek their views about their experience living in the home. At Inglefield, some of the children and young people have additional and specific communication needs; staff can support you with this but your observations of how the children and young people are and behave is a key part of seeing how they feel about their stay.

#### 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Local Authority shares parental responsibility for children in care and as a corporate parent we should actively promote and ensure they are able to meet their full potential.

#### 5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 None identified.

#### 6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

##### 6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

Children and young people who are in our care at Inglefield or Edinburgh Road should receive outstanding care from our service. Regulation 44 visits are an essential part of driving up quality and ensuring improvements are maintained.

##### 6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None identified.

##### 6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

None identified.

##### 6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified.

##### 6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None

#### 7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Failure to meet the standards for residential care may mean that Ofsted judgements on the quality and standard of provision decline; if a home is judged as inadequate, failure to make improvements quickly can lead to the home's registration being withdrawn and the service closed.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The service must be aware of and be able to demonstrate that it responds effectively to equality and diversity needs.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None.