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| Report on | Risk Assessment Initiative in Childcare Settings |
| Reporting Officer | Fiona McClements |
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| Is this report restricted for confidential business? | Yes | |
| If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon | No | X |

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| 1.0 | Purpose of Report |
| 1.1 | To inform Members of a risk assessment initiative delivered to childcare settings across the district for which Council is the health and safety enforcing authority. |
| 2.0 | Background |
| 2.1 | Council Environmental Health Departments in Northern Ireland are responsible for the enforcement of Health and Safety legislation in a range of childcare settings such as private day nurseries and crèches; playgroups; certain after schools groups and other funded childcare providers for the under 5s. Council does not however have any health and safety enforcement remit over nursery units attached to schools or with private childminders. |
| 2.2 | Health and safety inspections of childcare establishments carried out by Council Environmental Health Officers within Northern Ireland over the last few years have established that some premises are not meeting their legal duty in relation to risk assessment. In some cases, where Council officers have conducted investigations into incidents involving children in such premises, the failure to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment has been identified as a key contributing factor. |
| 3.0 | Main Report |
| 3.1 | <p>As part of managing health and safety in childcare premises, the risks to health and safety must be controlled. In order to do this, childcare settings need to think about what might cause harm to people (employees, visitors and children attending) and decide on whether they are taking reasonable steps to prevent that harm. This is known as risk assessment.</p> <p><i>The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (NI) 2000</i> requires every employer to carry out a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to employees and to others who may be affected by their undertaking. Employers with five or more employees are required to record the significant findings of the assessment.</p> <p>A risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork, but rather about identifying sensible measures to adequately control the risks. Many childcare providers will already be taking steps to protect their staff and the children in their care, but risk assessment will help in deciding whether the management have covered all that they need to.</p> |

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| | <p>One of the recurring issues identified by officers during inspections is that although many childcare settings already carry out and record routine checks of the environment, facilities, equipment, resources etc., the completion of such checklists on their own do not satisfy the legal requirement for risk assessment, as they are regarded as a control measure.</p> |
| 3.2 | <p>Risk assessment in childcare settings is important for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It prevents accidents, injuries, ill health and associated costs; • It will help establish whether childcare settings are doing enough to manage health and safety or if they need to do more to safeguard children, staff and others who may be affected by their undertaking; • It increases staff morale and motivation; • It's the law |
| 3.3 | <p>In order to address poor risk assessment within childcare settings MUDC EH depts. decided to write to all day nurseries and playgroups to raise this important issue and to provide relevant guidance to assist managers to complete or review a risk assessment.</p> <p>To achieve this, a small task group with representation from a number of Councils, chaired by MUDC's Principal Environmental Health Officer (Health and Safety) produced a health and safety guidance pack specifically for childcare establishments to assist proprietors and managers in carrying out a risk assessment or reviewing an existing assessment for their premises.</p> <p>Within the MUDC area the pack was sent to 90 child care settings and it contained:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information on the key steps to carrying out a risk assessment; • a sample risk assessment for a day nursery; • a risk assessment template; • guidance on preparing a health and safety policy; • guidance on carrying out a COSHH assessment; • information on accident reporting; and • Recommendations on animals being brought into childcare settings. <p>The childcare settings also received an electronic copy of the pack to facilitate them in tailoring the template to be site specific for their premises. Information on how to access general guidance on risk assessment and other health and safety topics was also signposted.</p> <p>A letter accompanying the guidance pack asked childcare settings to undertake the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To complete a risk assessment, if they had not already done so. • Review any existing risk assessment in light of the guidance and templates. • Write down the results of the risk assessment to enable review at a later date • Obtain proprietor or management committee signatures on all risk assessments • Implement the findings of the risk assessment • Communicate the risk assessment by bringing it to the attention of all staff. • Ensure that a copy is kept at the premises and available for examination. <p>Child care settings were reminded that risk assessments are working documents and should be reviewed on an annual basis or sooner, for example, after an accident, a change in working procedures or the introduction of new activities or equipment.</p> |

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| | The childcare settings were informed that officers from the health and safety team are available to assist with any further queries and that risk assessments will be examined in detail at their next scheduled health and safety inspection. |
| 4.0 | Other Considerations |
| 4.1 | <u>Financial & Human Resources Implications</u> Financial: N/A Human: N/A |
| 4.2 | <u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u> N/A |
| 4.3 | <u>Risk Management Implications</u> N/A |
| 5.0 | Recommendation(s) |
| 5.1 | It is recommended that Council note the content of the report. |
| 6.0 | Documents Attached & References |
| 6.1 | A copy of the Health and Safety guidance pack can be obtained from the Environmental Health Department and will be uploaded onto the Council website in the near future. |