

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Friday, 22 May 2015, County Hall, Worcester - 1.00 pm

Minutes

Present:

Ms L R Duffy (Chairman), Mrs F M Oborski (Vice Chairman) and Mrs J L M A Griffiths

Also attended:

Mr J P Campion, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families
Steve Eccleston, Head of Protecting Vulnerable People, West Mercia Police
Diana Fulbrook, Independent Chairman of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board
Anne Duddington, Healthwatch

Gail Quinton, Director of Children's Services
Siobhan Williams, Head of Safeguarding, Children's Services
Suzanne O'Leary (Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager)
Alyson Grice (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

1 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from Rachel Jenkins and Charmian Richardson.

Members were reminded that, following changes agreed at Council on 14 May, Marc Bayliss was no longer a Member of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel. A new Member would be confirmed in due course.

2 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

Councillor Lynne Duffy declared an interest as a member of Warwickshire and West Mercia Police Joint Audit Committee.

3 Public Participation

None.

4 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 March 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 Child Sexual Exploitation:

The Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB), the Head of Protecting Vulnerable People, West Mercia Police and

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the Director of Children's Services had been invited to the meeting to provide an overview of WSCB's approach to tackling child sexual exploitation in the County.

The Chair of WSCB introduced Detective Superintendent Steve Eccleston as the Chair of the strategic CSE group on WSCB. She went on to outline the Board's strategic approach to CSE. She acknowledged that, given recent national headlines, there was concern about CSE and what it might look like in Worcestershire.

In August 2013 the WSCB had launched the Child Sexual Exploitation Pathway which set out a clear pathway for referrals and response to child specific concerns, with a clear focus on protection. More recently, the Child Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Strategy had been developed by a strategic group of the WSCB with links to the community safety partnership. This had been agreed at the Board's last meeting and covered:

- a) Prevention and Education;
- b) Recognition and Identification;
- c) Intervention and Support; and
- d) Pursue and Disrupt.

The action plan underpinning these priorities was now being finalised and would be considered by Cabinet in July.

There was an ongoing challenge in reconciling the data in relation to CSE and much effort was going into clarifying the numbers. To date, the evidence suggested that CSE did not exist in Worcestershire on the scale seen in other parts of the country, eg Rotherham. In Worcestershire it appeared to be more individualised and there was no indication that disclosure and reporting had been ignored. However, it was acknowledged that those involved in this work were very much on a journey and there was more work to do. The Board and other agencies were taking the issue of CSE very seriously.

The Head of Protecting Vulnerable People, West Mercia Police informed Members that the strategic CSE group (of which he was Chair) had developed a robust action plan to underpin the Board's Strategy, reflecting the complexities of the issue. Since August 2013 the focus had been on protection. However, it was acknowledged that agencies had been less strong on prevention and pursuing. The Police and Crime Commissioner had now invested resources in CSE and there was a need to

ensure that work was effectively joined up with other agencies. The action plan had been drawn up with input from colleagues in children's services, health, probation and other agencies and would be signed off at the WSCB's next meeting.

The Police had developed a 'CSE Problem Profile' for the period September 2013 to September 2014 which was included in the agenda papers. This would now be refreshed to give a full picture of the issue in the County and a better idea of what support and services were needed.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and the following main points were raised:

- Internet grooming was of particular concern. A Member referred to a recent incident in a Kidderminster school involving a particular social media site. The school was concerned about potential grooming using the site and had alerted parents and the police. A question was asked about how much partnership working with schools was undertaken. It was estimated that nationally approximately 30% of CSE occurred online and less than 3% was of the stereotypical type involving gangs. It was important to note that the Board had developed an electronic training package but that currently did not go far enough. A headteacher group linked to the Board would be involved in the further development of age appropriate material. Schools could not always easily identify which lesson to teach the topic in as it was not mandated within the National Curriculum. The Director of Children's Services reminded the Panel that this could be an issue at primary level as well as at secondary.
- It was suggested that parents were also important in promoting safety messages to children and it was important that they too were aware and well educated about the dangers. The Chair of the WSCB acknowledged that parents were important but further suggested awareness should involve all members of the community. To this end, a public awareness campaign was needed to help people identify CSE, know where to make referrals, have the courage to make those referrals, and have confidence that the issue would be dealt with. The issue was everyone's responsibility.
- In response to a question about voluntary sector

involvement, it was confirmed that no one voluntary sector organisation had been identified to take part in this work, although in other areas of the country Barnardo's had been involved. There was a need to look at how best to involve the voluntary sector whether this was in supporting victims or in a prevention role. This would be identified as part of the action plan. Members were reminded that there was a representative of the voluntary sector on the WSCB. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that where County Council services were provided by voluntary sector organisations, their staff would be included in any training programmes that were developed. The aim was to also reach those communities which were beyond the reach of the traditional voluntary sector.

- It would be important to ensure that those providing voluntary youth services, such as uniformed or church groups, were also on board. It would be important to get the message to all organisations working with children including those in minority communities, such as mosque schools.
- It was suggested that the Panel's discussion illustrated how complex and enormous the issue was. The message needed to be spread as wide as possible, starting with schools.
- A question was asked about whether children who had been bullied and were possibly suffering from low self-esteem, were more vulnerable to grooming and CSE. In response, Members were informed that there was no single profile or way of identifying which children were more vulnerable. Children from all backgrounds could be victims. However, it was important to note that often children did not see themselves as victims. Although the police were clear that this was abusive and a crime, it was often investigated without the support of the victim.
- Members were informed that the strategic group had met twice since April.
- It was confirmed that the action plan would be considered at July Cabinet and would come to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel before Cabinet.
- The electronic training package would be made available via the Board's website.
- The data included in the agenda report showed that 68 children had been referred to Children's Services for a CSE strategy discussion. A question was asked about how many cases of

6 Missing Children and Young People: Update

CSE this had led to and whether any arrests were made. It was confirmed that arrests had been made but these were often part of disruption tactics. For example, police might be aware of the possibility of CSE, but not have sufficient evidence to proceed, so may instead make an arrest in relation to drugs offences. This would not, therefore, show in data as a CSE arrest.

- In response to a question about whether there were 'hotspots' in the County, it was suggested that, where awareness raising was successful, there would be a rise in the number of potential cases identified.

The Head of Safeguarding (Children's Services) had been invited to the meeting to update Members on developments in relation to Missing Children and Young People in the County.

In March 2015, the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel had discussed Children Missing from Care and Members had agreed that they would wish to hold a fuller discussion at this meeting.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- The report referred to the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) which, since April 2015, had been undertaking return interviews for children who were reported missing in the County. It was confirmed that after the contract had been running for 6 months, a report would be prepared for the WSCB, followed by annual reports thereafter.
- In response to a question, it was confirmed that all children – both those looked after by the Council and those not – received the same treatment. All missing children were treated as high risk and cases were followed up with all necessary resources. There was no differentiation between cases.
- It was noted that there was a particular spike in cases in July 2014. Although no reason for this could be identified, it was suggested that there was sometimes an increase in missing children during periods of better weather.
- A question was asked about whether children who had recently entered care were more likely to go missing. It was suggested that this was not necessarily the case and it depended on why a

child had been brought into care. However, it was acknowledged that if a child had been unsettled at home, they may not immediately settle in care.

- Members noted that 2 children placed out of county had gone missing last year. It was suggested that there could be an issue when other police forces followed different protocols.
- Concern was expressed that one particular care home appeared to have had 13 children who had gone missing. It was confirmed that this was, in fact, 1 child who had gone missing 13 times.
- It was confirmed that the criteria for placing children in secure accommodation were very strict and this would only happen if social workers were not able to place a child anywhere else.
- It was confirmed that the County was now only seeing a small number of unaccompanied asylum seekers.
- It was suggested that it would be useful for the Corporate Parenting Board to be aware of the type of data analysis included in the monthly report. The Cabinet Member confirmed that he was currently reviewing how the impact of the Corporate Parenting Board was measured and he would consider this as part of that review.

The meeting ended at 1.40 pm

Chairman