

## **Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

### **Thursday, 10 September 2015, County Hall, Worcester - 10.00 am**

		<b>Minutes</b>
<b>Present:</b>		Ms L R Duffy (Chairman), Mrs F M Oborski (Vice Chairman), Mr P Denham, Mrs J L M A Griffiths and Mr I Hopwood
<b>Also attended:</b>		Mr J P Campion, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families Diana Fulbrook, Independent Chairman of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board Morag Edmondson, Healthwatch  Gail Quinton, Director of Children's Services Simon White, Interim Director of Children's Services Suzanne O'Leary (Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager) Alyson Grice (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)
<b>Available Papers:</b>		The members had before them:  A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated); and B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 June 2015 (previously circulated).
<b>206</b>	<b>Apologies and Welcome</b>	Apologies were received from Bob Banks.  The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. In particular she welcomed Simon White who would shortly be taking over as Interim Director of Children's Services.
<b>207</b>	<b>Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip</b>	In relation to Agenda item 6, Councillor Duffy declared an interest as a provider of post-16 services.
<b>208</b>	<b>Public Participation</b>	None.
<b>209</b>	<b>Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting</b>	The Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 June 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**210**      **Worcestershire  
Safeguarding  
Children Board  
- Annual Report**

The Chairman welcomed Diana Fulbrook, the Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) to the meeting. She had been invited to present the WSCB Annual Report 2014-15.

By way of introduction, the Independent Chair updated Members on areas of concern previously identified by the Panel and made the following points:

- In relation to information sharing across agencies and schools, it was confirmed that the 'single view of the child' system was now available to all schools. However, feedback had suggested that the system was tedious to access via Edulink. Headteachers were now receiving further training and this was being rolled out across the county. The system was not intended to be used for all children but was for use when a concern had been identified, allowing schools to check whether the child was known to other agencies.
- It was confirmed that when a child moved schools, responsibility for chasing paperwork was with the receiving school.
- A positive development identified in the annual report was the building up of representation on the Board from schools and other educational organisations. The Board now had a representative from an independent school and a high school representative from an academy. An issue remained about how the independent school representative would contact other independent schools in order to represent views across the sector. It was confirmed that, although strictly speaking, free schools were not academies, the two types of school were not differentiated on the Board.
- It was acknowledged that the cumulative impact of budget cuts across agencies had been felt by the Board, particularly in relation to availability of people to attend sub groups.
- It was confirmed that the Independent Chair had held several meetings with the newly appointed Independent Chair of the Adult Safeguarding Board and several common themes had been identified. She had also attended meetings of the Health and Well-being Board and the Community Safety Partnerships.
- A question was asked about where responsibility for safeguarding lay in relation to free and independent schools. It was suggested that there was an issue with the way the system was set up

in that these schools were independent of the Local Authority and it was up to the school to ensure that safeguarding procedures were in place. This would be monitored by Ofsted. The Director of Children's Services reminded members that all schools had to comply with the Local Authority's processes, policies and procedures but free and independent schools also had specific responsibility for ensuring children were safeguarded, something that would be tested via Ofsted or another external review. In response to a question about who would get the blame if something went wrong, the Director of Children's Services confirmed that this would be whoever had failed to comply with procedures.

- Members were reminded that the role of the Safeguarding Board was to coordinate the work of other agencies – not to undertake the work itself. In this way, the Board could be seen as part of the system of public accountability.

The Independent Chair went on to summarise the annual report, making the following main points:

- It was disappointing that the Board was not able to be assured about the safety of the child protection system in Worcestershire or the effectiveness of early help.
- The Board had identified the following five particularly vulnerable groups:
  - Children whose families were affected by the toxic trio of domestic violence/abuse, substance abuse and mental ill health;
  - Children in need, with a particular focus on those suffering neglect;
  - Children suffering poor mental health;
  - Socially isolated children, including those educated at home and young carers
  - Children involved in inappropriate relations, including child sexual exploitation (CSE).
- There had recently been a particular focus on CSE with the development of an action plan and strategy, both of which had been seen by the scrutiny panel.
- Members were informed about the development of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The plan was that agencies would be co-located in order to facilitate better communications. Progress had been painfully slow, but it was expected that police staff would have moved into the hub by the end of the month.

- It had been an active year with a programme of multi-agency training and efforts to build the school/educational representation on the Board.
- The year had also seen increased use of service user feedback, including the view of the child.
- In conclusion, although the report identified several areas for improvement, it was clear that partners remained very committed to this work.

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

- It was confirmed that communication between agencies was a common theme emerging from Serious Case Reviews and was something that the Board had looked into. The sharing of information between agencies was essential and Members were informed about a new communication system that the health service was setting up. Although effective communication systems were important, it was still up to the individual practitioner to decide who needed to know what.
- In relation to CSE, it was reasonable to expect professionals to know the signs to look out for, but it was clear that CSE was best prevented by having the maximum number of ordinary people also knowing what to look for. This depended on having people with knowledge and enthusiasm to train others. It was suggested that taxi drivers were well placed to identify such crimes and their training could be facilitated through the licensing system. Currently, a leaflet was circulated to drivers and, although this was a good start, it was suggested that more could be done to ensure proper training. Reference was made to good practice in Scarborough where compulsory training was a condition of obtaining a taxi license and drivers were trained by the police and the local safeguarding children board.
- In response it was acknowledged that this was a crucial issue that was addressed in the WSCB's CSE action plan. The police were planning to run a public awareness campaign later in the year, based on the successful campaign recently run by Warwickshire police. A district council group was being led by Kevin Dicks (Chief Executive of Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council) and this group was aware of the need to increase the amount of information given out to members of the public, in particular to taxi

drivers. An example was given of a hotel receptionist who recently contacted the police when she became aware of suspicious activity. Further training courses were being organised, but it would take some time for this to roll out across the county. It was confirmed that the Board was very aware of what was needed in this area.

- It was suggested that many parents who chose to home educate their children did a fantastic job. However a small minority who chose to educate at home, in reality undertook very little education, with older children often being used as child minders. It was suggested that these children were very vulnerable and were often moved across borders in order to evade the authorities. Although this was not a large group of children, it was suggested that there remained a hardcore of children who continued to miss out. The situation was made worse now that children were required to remain in education or training until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. An increase in pressure on the Department for Education was needed as some of these children were at serious risk.
- It was confirmed that this was an ongoing concern of the safeguarding board and had been of particular concern last year as the issue had arisen as part of a serious case review. It was further confirmed that this related to a small proportion of home educated children and the vast majority were well served. It was an issue that the National Association of Independent Chairs had raised directly with the relevant Minister who saw it as a clash between the rights of the child and the rights of the parent. It was clear that the Government felt that the rights of the parents won. The Independent Chair of the WSCB had written to the Minister to further raise her concerns about this but, it was clear that there was no appetite to change things.
- Concern was expressed about young people with poor mental health who missed out on their education due to their inability to attend school. In response it was confirmed that the Board continued to have major concerns both about the long waiting lists for children referred to CAMHS and about those children who did not meet the threshold for a CAMHS referral. In conversations with children, training in emotional resilience was highlighted as a need, including the ability to cope with bullying. Schools had also raised concerns about how to help children who did not meet the

threshold for CAMHS. The Director of Children's Services pointed out that emotional health and well-being fitted within ongoing work on the prevention and intervention strategy.

- It was confirmed that the safeguarding of children with learning disabilities had not emerged as a particular issue. Many children with learning disabilities were already known to social care and any issues would be picked up via this route.
- In response to a question about how the effectiveness of early help was measured and what issues were identified, Members were informed that a particular issue was whether early help providers were identifying an appropriate point for intervention. The ultimate test of effectiveness would be the reduction in demand for children's social care and this had not yet happened. The early help commissioned service was seen to have been taking over early intervention services. A new approach was to separate the commissioned service from the universal service, but there was a big job to be done to ensure all agencies were clear about various responsibilities. The commissioned service was different in each district council area and this had contributed to the confusion about responsibilities. Members were reminded that this work was being led by Hannah Needham.
- It was suggested that although on the whole the early help service was excellent, it was overwhelmed by the number of people requiring help. This caused delays and concern was expressed about those families waiting for support.
- The Cabinet Member reminded Members that the Safeguarding Peer Review had identified the need for greater clarity on the early help strategy and this work was now underway.
- The Director of Children's Services cautioned that there was a danger of creating a referral culture, whereby children were pushed into the system rather than offered help to overcome their problems. Although it was important to understand the thresholds, there was also a need for the WSCB and the Health and Well-being Board to get to grips with early intervention and look at a whole system approach, operating at all the right points. It was suggested that people often think that a referral to children's social care will make a difference, whereas in reality it would simply lead to an assessment. Children need

access to services rather than an assessment and this can often be achieved by professionals working together and coordinating their work rather than social work involvement.

- The Board's annual report was a very detailed document. It was suggested that it may be helpful to also have a high level summary report to communicate the key messages.
- In response to a question about whether safeguarding of children was better because the Board was in place, the Independent Chair reminded Members that the Board played a crucial role in encouraging partners to take collective responsibility for the whole. The Board facilitated energised discussions with all partners taking matters seriously, something which may not happen without the Board.
- It was suggested that it would be helpful for the Independent Chair to meet the Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel separately to discuss how the two bodies might work together more effectively.
- The Director of Children's Services suggested that it would be helpful to look at best practice amongst other Safeguarding Boards around the country, particularly those which had been judged as good.
- In relation to CAMHS, the representative of Healthwatch asked a question about how quickly the Board would expect to see action after it had identified issues with a particular service. The Panel was reminded that the Board included a representative of the Health and Care Trust and the Board's concerns would be fed back to the Trust through this route. The Board had also been reassured that concerns would be taken into account as part of the re-commissioning of the service. The Board had to accept these reassurances and then ask further questions at a later date if the situation did not improve.
- The Cabinet Member suggested that all agencies should be continually asking how effective they were. He reminded Members that young people could not be kept safe without partnership working and there was a need to understand partnerships and develop them. The Director of Children's Services suggested that it was a strength of the Safeguarding Board that there was a commitment to work together and respond to challenges.
- It was confirmed that the Scrutiny Panel could invite other partners to attend panel meetings if appropriate. Members were reminded that the

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police had attended a recent Scrutiny Panel meeting to discuss the CSE strategy and action plan. The Panel was also informed that the County Council's Chief Executive had regular meetings with the Chief Constable of West Mercia Police.

The Strategic Commissioner – Education and Skills had been invited to the meeting to update Members on the range of opportunities available for post-16 students.

He introduced the item by reminding Members that this was a live and pertinent issue. He went on to make the following points:

- There was currently lots of work underway in this area involving local businesses, colleges and 6<sup>th</sup> forms.
- Young people now had a very wide range of opportunities open to them.
- Members were reminded that, although all students were now required to remain in some form of education or training until at least their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, this did not mean that the school leaving age had been raised, as this education or training did not have to take place in school.
- There was ongoing discussion about whether 16 was the best time to hold key exams as it was no longer a key end point. The key indicator of the number of students gaining 5 A\* to C grades at GCSE was going to be replaced by 'progress 8' which would measure a student's progress in their best 8 subjects. At the same time, levels at key stage 2 were going and the way in which progress was measured was changing.
- With reference to the requirement to stay in education or training until 18, it was suggested that this would not be a major change as over 90% of students already did this. Evidence demonstrated that remaining in education until 18 led to better wages, better health and better social skills.
- Despite the new requirements, some young people remained not in employment, education or training (NEET). There were currently over 600 NEETs in Worcestershire, or 3.8% of the age group, a figure that was well below the national average. The proportion of young people recorded as 'unknown' was just below 5%.
- Since 2011 schools had been in charge of providing impartial careers guidance, and since



September 2014 they had also been required to have a careers strategy.

- Outcomes for Y11 leavers in Worcestershire had improved significantly in the last four years and 2015 provisional data indicated that approximately 63% of young people would achieve 5 A\* to C grades at GCSE. These improved results had raised the aspirations of young people and made post-16 opportunities more important.
- Members were reminded about the Connecting Schools and Business programme which linked to Open for Business and aimed to encourage greater involvement of businesses in the work of schools including governance and curriculum developments.
- In Worcestershire, over 50% of young people went to college post-16 rather than staying at school.
- The Employment and Skills Board (a sub-group of the Local Enterprise Partnership) was looking to act as a driver for businesses and post-16 opportunities including business engagement and entering the world of work. Members were informed about the LEP commissioned feasibility study regarding the possible development of a University Technical College in Worcestershire. No decision had yet been made but it was important to consider how best we were preparing young people for jobs involving STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths).

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

- Councillor Oborski declared an interest as Wyre Forest District Council skills lead. She went on to refer Members to figures on NEETs that had recently been circulated at a meeting with the Worcestershire Training and Providers Group. She agreed to circulate these figures to Panel Members following the meeting.
- Members were informed that, although the number of construction apprenticeships had increased in recent years, the construction industry had expressed concern about where they could send young people for the college element of apprenticeships.
- Concern was expressed about the suggestion that all young people should continue to take English and mathematics GCSE until they achieved a grade C or above. It was suggested that this was

unrealistic as some young people would never be able to achieve this. It was confirmed that the expectation was not that all young people would get a grade C but that some would simply demonstrate progression in these subjects. It was suggested that this was still a valid challenge as, until recently, 50% of young people left education without a qualification in both subjects. The new requirements mean that some young people will now achieve their GCSE in Y12 instead of Y11.

- It was suggested that there was an opportunity for scrutiny to look in more detail at how apprenticeships work in Worcestershire.
- It was confirmed that schools were aware of available apprenticeship opportunities as the lead officer was engaging with every school. Members were informed that there was real excitement amongst the business community about creating better links with schools and young people.
- It was confirmed that a Member Briefing would be held in October to inform Members about academic achievement in the County in 2015.
- It was suggested that the recent trend for schools to add a 6<sup>th</sup> form created a tension in that there was a financial incentive for schools to persuade as many young people as possible to stay at school post-16. This would restrict the amount of genuinely impartial guidance given to young people as, for some, college might be a better option. It may also lead to a dilution of the range of subjects as a small 6<sup>th</sup> form could not provide the same breadth of subjects as a larger college.
- As well as the financial argument, there was also the suggestion that the 6th form was seen as the pinnacle of the school, with the other years leading up to this. However, the school's careers guidance strategy would be inspected by Ofsted and, in reality, it was not just the school that was influencing young people. Parents were also very well informed as were young people themselves. Also, headteachers would always look to provide the best advice. In addition, it was suggested that the drop-out rate could be used as a useful performance measure as it was usually easy to see when something was going wrong.
- The Director of Children's Services reminded Members that school place planning and school organisation was a function that had been retained within the Local Authority core function. Place planning was a complex area that changed from year to year. It was suggested that this was

an area that scrutiny may wish to look at.

- It was suggested that advice and guidance post-16 was key as a lack of skills amongst young people was still a concern for businesses. Although much progress had been made, advice and guidance was not quite there yet.

It was agreed that the following should be added to the Panel's work programme:

- Careers guidance and how apprenticeships work in Worcestershire;
- School organisation and place planning.

Members were reminded that these issues might be best discussed in informal groups and the work could also include visits to providers.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am

Chairman .....