

## **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**31 AUGUST 2016**

### **WORCESTERSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16**

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#### **Summary**

1. Derek Benson, recently appointed Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB), has been invited to present the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2015-16 (attached as Appendix 1).

#### **Background**

2. The Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board is responsible for publishing an annual report that provides a public assessment of the effectiveness of child safeguarding arrangements in Worcestershire. The report also recognises achievements and is realistic about the challenges that remain.

3. The report is made publicly available through publication on the Board's website. In addition, it is formally presented to the Chief Executive and Leader of the County Council, to the Health and Well-Being Board and to Cabinet. It is sent to Worcestershire's Police and Crime Commissioner, to the respective chairs of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board and the Safer Communities Board, and it is circulated to lead officers in key partner agencies.

4. In September 2015 Diana Fulbrook, then Independent Chair, informed the Panel that WSCB could not be assured of the effectiveness of local arrangements in respect of children in the child protection system. The quality and consistency of frontline basic practice needed improvement and more work was required in particular areas to ensure children are safe in Worcestershire.

#### **Key points from the WSCB Annual Report 2015/16**

5. During 2015/16 Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board had a particular focus on a number of priorities including:

- Implementation of the Board's Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy
- Early Help
- Integrated Family Front Door (incorporating the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub ethos)
- Children's Social Care 'Back to Basics' Improvement Programme

6. The Board can provide assurance that implementation of the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Strategy will continue to be a priority into 2016/17. Partner agencies have shown a high level of engagement in developing the Strategy, and also in terms of owning the supporting action plan. During the year there was an increase in the number of children being identified as being vulnerable to or suffering sexual exploitation, however it is too early for the Board to be fully assured about the ability of the system to respond robustly and consistently to CSE concerns in Worcestershire.

7. The Board has monitored the refresh of the Early Help Strategy '*Prevention and Intervention for Children, Young People and Families*' which includes a plan to commission a Starting Well service to be implemented by March 2019. The demand for Early Help Assessments has continued to increase but has not led to a corresponding reduction in referrals to Children's Social Care, placing yet more demand on the system. The Board is assured that local authority commissioned Early Help providers are undertaking effective work with families, but is concerned that demand for commissioned services currently outweighs capacity raising questions about the extent to which commissioned Early Help services are sufficiently targeted. As part of the wider Early Help offer universal services are required to respond to identified need by working directly with families to deliver support services to reduce escalation of need or risk.

8. This year has continued to see further pressure on the Children's Social Care system with increases in referrals, numbers of looked after children and numbers of children with child protection plans. The Board has received regular reports on the significant work undertaken during the year to develop the Integrated Family Front Door and the new Levels of Need document (Thresholds Guidance) was approved by the Board at the end of 2015. It is too early yet to have a sense of the impact of these changes but it is anticipated that children's social care services and commissioned Early Help services will be more effectively targeted at those children and families where need and risk are highest. The Board recognises the importance of partner agencies playing their full part in working together to offer support services to children and families, to share timely information and to make good quality referrals to Children's Social Care.

9. The Board has been sighted on the Children's Social Care 'Back to Basics' Improvement Programme during the year. Whilst a number of practice improvements have been noted, the pace of improvement has been slower than had been hoped for. In light of the issues outlined in this report and continuing evidence that the quality of social work practice remains inconsistent the Board cannot yet provide full assurance about the effectiveness of help and protection services.

10. From the information provided the Board has identified risks in relation to:

- a) Completion within time scale of return interviews when children go missing,
- b) Waiting times for treatment from CAMHS
- c) Completion rates for Looked After Children (LAC) health reviews.

Some improvements have been noted during the year and the Board will continue to closely monitor these issues.

11. No Serious Case Reviews were initiated during the year though a number of cases were brought to the Board for consideration.

12. The Child Death Overview Panel in Worcestershire found that less than a third of deaths had modifiable factors. Cumulative data in respect of babies whose deaths have been classified as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) suggests that smoking and co-sleeping are often significant factors. In the deaths of unborn or extremely young babies factors such as maternal obesity, smoking, alcohol and other environmental factors are often present in some combination. Stronger links with Public Health are developing and a communications initiative for the public will be considered in the coming year.

13. The Board is pleased to note some evidence of practice improvements from its Multi Agency Case File Audits (MACFAs), particularly in respect of information sharing in Early Help Assessments, application of the Think Family approach and inter-agency working where there are concerns about Child Sexual Exploitation. There is also evidence, however, that multi-agency practice is not yet consistent in all areas.

14. The interim report on the Section 11 Audit presented to the Board in March 2016 indicated good compliance by partner agencies with their safeguarding duties and a strong commitment across the partnership to safeguarding children. Agencies are also reporting an improvement in listening to their service users to develop services. Assurance has been provided about the use of flagging systems across the partnership to raise alerts about risk factors in families. Arrangements for safeguarding supervision for practitioners are in place and findings were shared with managers for further action to be taken where necessary.

## **Conclusion**

15. The Board concluded that the body of evidence from data, audits, reports and learning during 2015/16 demonstrates that there is a strong commitment to safeguarding children across the WSCB partnership and that safeguarding arrangements are in place. Demand for services across the whole system continues to increase and, whilst recognising that improvements have been made to some aspects of frontline social work practice, other practice improvements have not been achieved as quickly as had been hoped at the start of the year.

16. The Board is assured that strategies are in place to improve frontline practice, however it cannot yet be assured about the robustness of the child protection system and this remains a risk. Further assurance is required as to the effectiveness of the wider Early Help offer and whether it is sufficiently targeted, albeit it is recognised that the quality of provision by local authority commissioned providers is good. It is clearly important that children and families receive the right services at the right time. The impact of the Integrated Family Front Door and the revised Levels of Need guidance will be monitored, as will the need for all partners to play their full part in the provision of support services to children and families at the earliest opportunity to prevent escalation of need and risk.

17. Assurance will continue to be sought from partner agencies during the coming year as outlined in the body of this report.

18. The Board recognises that these are challenging times for partner agencies, many of whom are facing reductions in resourcing. In this climate of competing demands, however, there is evidence of some partners investing in their safeguarding services which is indicative of the strong commitment across the WSCB partnership to prioritise the protection of children.

## **Purpose of the Meeting**

The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- consider the information in the report
- determine whether it would wish to carry out any further scrutiny, and
- agree whether it would wish to make any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children, Families and Communities

## **Supporting Information**

- Appendix 1 - Worcestershire safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2015/16

## **Contact Points**

### County Council Contact Points

Worcestershire County Council 01905 763763

Worcestershire Hub: 01905 765765

Email: [worcestershirehub@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:worcestershirehub@worcestershire.gov.uk)

### Specific Contact Points for this report

Alyson Grice/Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Officers 01905 844962/844963

Email: [scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk)

## **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Children, Families and Communities) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.