

CABINET
17 NOVEMBER 2016**WORCESTERSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD**
ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

Relevant Cabinet Member

Mr M L Bayliss

Relevant Officer

Director of Children, Families and Communities

Recommendation

- 1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families recommends that Cabinet:**
 - (a) receives the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2015/16; and**
 - (b) notes the progress of the work of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board.**

Background

2. The Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) 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. It was presented to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 31 August 2016 and to the Health and Well-Being Board on 13 September 2016. 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 the Independent Chair informed Cabinet, when presenting the WSCB's annual report 2014/15, that the 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 who are not safe are responded to robustly in Worcestershire.
5. The WSCB Annual Report 2015/16 will be presented by Derek Benson, Independent Chair appointed in April, 2016. Whilst this report focuses on the period up to the end of March 2016, the focus since then has been on:

- Monitoring of the work of the Children's Services Improvement Board
- Implementation of the Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan
- Supporting the embedding of the Family Front Door and Levels of Need (Thresholds) guidance
- Monitoring implementation of changes to the Early Help offer.

This is in addition to the Board's ongoing schedule of audits and monitoring of performance information, delivery of multi-agency safeguarding children training and other areas of development work to support practice improvements across the WSCB partnership.

Executive Summary of the 2015/16 Annual Report

6. 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.

Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy

7. 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.

Early Help

8. 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 0-19 prevention service (Starting Well) which integrated public health nursing services (health visitors and school health nurses) with wider parenting and community support. 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. The Board will continue to identify mechanisms for evaluating effectiveness of the wider Early Help offer in Worcestershire.

Integrated Family Front Door

9. This year has continued to see further pressure on the 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 in March 2016. 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 role 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.

'Back To Basics' Improvement Programme

10. 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. The specific areas about which assurance will be sought in the coming year are outlined within the body of this report and will be subject to ongoing monitoring and scrutiny, although it is not possible to say exactly when the Board will be fully assured.

WSCB Learning & Improvement Framework

11. The Board has a range of processes in place for consolidating learning which include Child Death Reviews, Serious Case Reviews, case reviews, Multi-Agency Case File Audits and Safeguarding Conversations. The Board recognises its need to develop and improve its Learning and Improvement Framework to ensure that findings from audits and case reviews are not just disseminated but are used by partner agencies to improve frontline practice.

Analysis of information produced by partner agencies

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

- Completion within time scale of return interviews when children go missing
- Waiting times for treatment from CAMHS
- 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.

Serious Case Reviews

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

Child Death Reviews

14. 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.

Multi-Agency Case File Audits (MACFAs)

15. The Board is pleased to note some evidence of practice improvements from the 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. Learning from MACFAs undertaken during the year has informed a number of the Board's priority work streams for 2016/17:

- a) Voice of the Child/Child's lived experience (limited evidence of the child's views being used to inform assessments or decisions)
- b) Review of safeguarding arrangements for disabled children (some evidence of delay where there were concerns about neglect of disabled children)
- c) Professional Curiosity and Think Family (just under half of all cases reviewed had a combination of domestic abuse, parental mental ill-health and parental drug/alcohol use but this was not always known to professionals at the time)
- d) Child Sexual Exploitation and missing children (in those cases reviewed multi-agency safeguarding practice was judged 'inadequate' or 'requiring improvement').

Audits

16. 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.

Consultation with young people and parents

17. The Board is pleased to report that the views of young people and parents informed the Board's decisions about its strategic priorities for 2016/17. The Youth Advisory Board for Safeguarding (YABS), a group of young people with experience of services, presented the views of 2445 young people to Board members at their Development Day in January 2016.

Conclusion

18. The Board is pleased to report that during 2015/16 it fulfilled its statutory functions. A new structure has been implemented which has enabled clearer oversight from the Board to the sub-groups. Funding has been sustained at the current level for a number of years in spite of competing financial pressures for the partner agencies.

19. 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 Worcestershire 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.

20. Whilst recognising that strategies are in place to improve frontline practice, the Board 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.

21. 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.

Legal, Financial and HR Implications

22. Not applicable.

Privacy and Public Health Impact Assessments

23. The lack of assurance about the robustness of the child protection system has significant public health impact. However, this report does not contain specific proposals which can be screened for public health impact. As improvement work continues there will be further opportunity for this.

Equality and Diversity Implications

24. This report does not contain specific proposals which can be screened for equality and diversity implications. However the Annual Report 2015/16 identifies the need for early help services to be sufficiently targeted at those children and families who most require them. Inevitably this will mean that some families who have previously been accessing early help or support may not do so in the future. Any detailed equality impact assessments have been carried out in relation to the changes to early help services.

Supporting Information

- WSCB Annual Report 2015/16 – available electronically. A hard copy will be made available in the Members' area and in County Hall Reception

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

County Council: 01905 763763

Worcestershire Hub: 01905 765765

Specific Contact Points for this report

Sue Haddon, WSCB Business Manager

Tel: 01905 843316

Email: shaddon@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Children, Families and Communities) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda papers for the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 31 August 2016

Agenda papers for the meeting of the Health and Well-Being Board held on 13 September 2016