

## **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 13 SEPTEMBER 2017**

### **WORCESTERSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17**

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#### **Summary**

1. Derek Benson, Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB), has been invited to present the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2016-17 (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 safeguarding arrangements for children and young people 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 West Mercia's Police and Crime Commissioner, to the respective Chairmen of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board and the Safer Communities Board, and it is circulated to lead officers in key partner agencies.

4. In August 2016 Derek Benson, 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 2016/17**

5. During 2016/17 Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board had a particular focus on a number of priorities including:

- Healthy relationships and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Early Help
- Integrated Family Front Door and Thresholds
- Young people at the point of transition (with a specific focus on sexual exploitation)
- Children with disabilities
- Strengthening of the Board's Learning and Improvement Framework

6. By the end of March 2017, the Board had fully implemented its two year Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy 2015-17 now replaced by a refreshed Strategy for 2017-19. In the main partner agencies have continued to demonstrate a high level of engagement in development of the strategies and in implementation of the action plans, however in its review of the Local Safeguarding Board in October 2016 Ofsted noted that the number of changes in strategic leads, namely Children's Social Care and West Mercia Police, had impacted on pace in the area of CSE. Assurance has now been provided to the Board that there will be greater consistency of personnel going forward. A specific piece of work undertaken by the Board during the year was the implementation of the 'Whole School Approach to Healthy Relationships' framework and the Board will continue to seek assurance from schools regarding embedding of the framework and its impact. A self-assessment audit undertaken during the year indicated that the majority of agencies were meeting the CSE standards referenced, but where this was not the case action plans were in place to address any deficits. Whilst CSE remains a priority it is not yet possible for the Board to be fully assured about the ability of the system to respond robustly and consistently to CSE concerns in Worcestershire.

7. Throughout the year the Board monitored the early help offer in Worcestershire, paying particular attention to feedback from practitioners who have continued to express confusion about the early help offer and the pathway for accessing early support for children and families. Targeted interventions by commissioned early help providers continue to receive positive evaluations with low levels of re-referrals, albeit this relates to the much smaller cohort of children and families than those who need to access early help support from universal services. The number of recorded Early Help Assessments significantly dropped throughout 2016/17 whilst the number of referrals to the Family Front Door continued to rise. There remain questions about: the capacity of commissioned services to meet demand, the role of universal services in delivery of early help across the wider partnership and the inability of the system to effectively measure early help activity. The Board therefore concluded that there remain serious questions about the effectiveness of the local early help arrangements.

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. Throughout the year the Board received updates on the move to create a single 'front door' to manage all contacts and referrals to Children's Social Care. Following their inspection in October 2016 Ofsted inspectors expressed concern about decision making and management oversight in the Family Front Door. Inspectors also expressed concern that referring agencies were not routinely using the Levels of Need (Thresholds) Guidance leading to a high volume of inappropriate referrals and thresholds were not always being applied consistently during the daily triage process. The Board was already aware that the Levels of Need (Thresholds) guidance did not adequately address the early help pathway and that this was a gap. The Levels of Need (Thresholds) Guidance has since been significantly redrafted and will be reviewed again during 2017/18 to reflect the early help pathway when approved by the Board.

9. The Single Inspection of the Local Authority Children's Services undertaken in October 2016 by Ofsted gave services for children and young people in Worcestershire an overall grading of inadequate. The Board has been sighted on the Local Authority Children's Social Care Service Improvement Plan (SIP) which sets out how the required improvements will be achieved. The Board will continue to receive updates from the Director of Children's Services and the WSCB Independent Chair who sits on the Service Improvement Board.

10. In last year's annual report the Board identified specific risks in relation to:

- a) Completion within time scale of return interviews when children go missing (this has improved in that 48% of return interviews are now completed within time scale, however this still needs to improve and the Board's own audit of return interviews suggested that the quality of interviews is variable)
- b) Waiting times for treatment from CAMHS (this has improved with wait times and numbers of children on waiting lists both having reduced in 2016/17)
- c) Completion rates for Looked After Children (LAC) health reviews (the percentage of looked after children with an up to date health assessment has decreased this year from 72% to 62%)

Whilst some improvements have been noted during the year, performance in other areas of practice has declined. The Board is sighted on the Local Authority Children's Services Service Improvement Plan dashboard and will continue to monitor performance against targets over the coming year as part of its scrutiny role.

11. Six cases were presented during the year for consideration of a Serious Case Review but none met the threshold, decisions all subsequently endorsed by Ofsted. One reflective case review was commissioned and presented to the Board in March 2017. Key messages from learning will be communicated to the workforce during 2017/18.

12. During the year the Child Death Overview Panel in Worcestershire reviewed 36 deaths and noted that modifiable factors were present in 15 of them. Cumulative data in respect of babies whose deaths have been classified as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) suggests that parental smoking and co-sleeping are often significant factors. An audit undertaken in February 2017 of babies born between November and December 2016 found that in all cases a safer sleeping risk assessment form had been completed with parents, and where risks had been identified risk management plans were evident in 80% of cases which provides some assurance. 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.

13. The Board is pleased to note some evidence of practice improvements from its repeat Multi Agency Case File Audits (MACFAs), however multi-agency practice was not yet found to be consistently good and young people are not yet routinely being screened for risk of sexual exploitation.

14. Last year's annual report noted that the Board's bi-annual Section 11 Audit indicated good compliance by partner agencies with their safeguarding duties and a strong commitment across the partnership to safeguarding children. In September 2016 a dip sample was undertaken of agencies' ability to provide evidence to support their reported position in respect of using service user feedback to develop services. It was found that some original self-assessments had been over-optimistic and so in future Section 11 Audits the Board will request supportive evidence as part of the original audit process.

## **Conclusion**

15. The Board has concluded that at a strategic level there is a strong commitment to safeguarding children in Worcestershire. It has also received assurances that safeguarding arrangements are in place in most key agencies, however systemic failings in Children's Social Care leave children and young people vulnerable to harm.

16. Whilst demand for services continues to grow further assurance is required as to the effectiveness of the wider early help offer and of practitioners' understanding of their own agency's role in providing early help to the families with whom they work. The Board also needs to be assured that practitioners understand the thresholds for accessing statutory services from Children's Social Care. The Board has a key role to play in supporting practitioners to develop their understanding of early help and thresholds and both will be priorities in the coming year.

17. As of the end of March 2017 the Board had received assurance that strategies were in place to improve frontline practice, however it cannot yet be assured about the impact of these and therefore the child protection system remains a risk. The Board recognises the scale and challenge facing the Local Authority and remains committed to working with all partners to bring about the necessary change required to improve outcomes for children in Worcestershire.

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

## **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 2016/17

### **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.