

## **WORCESTERSHIRE SAFEGUARDING PEER REVIEW**

### **Summary**

1. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families and Director of Children's Services has been invited to the Meeting of the Panel to discuss the recent Children's Safeguarding Peer Review.

### **Background**

2. In November 2015, Worcestershire County Council, as part of our desire to be a learning organisation invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to help facilitate a Peer Review on our approach to safeguarding children. The County Council has invited the LGA to conduct a safeguarding peer review before in October 2011.

### **What is a safeguarding peer review?**

3. Safeguarding peer review is an approach that helps councils and their partners reflect on current provision of services for children and young people; celebrate their strengths and identify their own areas for improvement. The main aim of the review is to stimulate local discussion and action about how partners can improve the impact of safeguarding services and become more effective in delivering improved outcomes for children and young people. The safeguarding peer review is not an inspection.

4. LGA safeguarding reviews focus on five key themes:

- Vision, strategy and leadership
- Effective practice, service delivery and the voice of the child
- Outcomes, impact and performance management
- Working together (including LSCB and Health and Wellbeing Board)
- Capacity and managing resources

### **Worcestershire themes**

5. Ahead of the review we identified key areas that the County Council wanted the reviewers to focus on. These included:

- Have we got the right structures, systems, processes and management focus to deliver children's social care services moving forward?
- Are the current strategies and plans for improvement having impact?
- A view on corporate support for children's safeguarding.
- The quality of front-line practice specifically focusing on how the front door is working.
- A view on the multi-agency partnerships and partners engagement with supporting the improvement of outcomes for children and families.

### **Who conducted the review?**

6. The review consisted of a team of external government practitioners working in the field acting as 'critical friends' to help us evaluate our strengths and weaknesses and our focus on priorities.

## Findings

7. The review team consisted of:

- Programme Manager, Local Government Association
- Chair and Review Team Lead, Director of Children's Services, Gloucestershire County Council
- Elected Member Peer, Yorkshire & Humber Network of Lead Members for Children and Young People's Services
- Safeguarding Peer, Head of Safeguarding, West Sussex County Council
- Safeguarding Peer, Independent Consultant, but recently Service Director for Children and Young People's Service Delivery, Suffolk County Council
- Education Peer, Independent Consultant with extensive experience as a headteacher and National Challenge Advisor
- Health Peer, Independent Chair for the Milton Keynes Local Safeguarding Children Board, with extensive experience in the health sector.

8. The reviewers spent time over a week with senior managers, front-line staff, members and partners to have open and honest conversations about our services and how we protect and support children in Worcestershire.

9. The reviewers concluded:

*In summary, the council can clearly demonstrate its commitment to improving outcomes for children and is realistic about the challenges it faces. It has the opportunity now, working with partners, to embed recent changes, support more integrated commissioning e.g. by testing whether early help services are sufficiently targeted, and drive further innovation whilst also focusing on basic safeguarding practice. The financial challenges are significant but emerging plans demonstrate the potential to tackle cost pressures and this, alongside, improvements in practice should improve the situation over time.*

10. The letter and detailed findings are attached as appendices, these include:

### **Key strengths**

- We have a committed workforce, who are keen to make a difference to children and families.
- We have an overall sound strategy and backing from the whole council to make any necessary changes within our service.
- From observations made during their visit, timely decision making at the Access Centre was found and there is good evidence of the rationale of decision making.
- There are many examples of how our work is having a good impact. For example, the POD social work model in our schools, our in-house social worker recruitment drive and the Stronger Families Programme.
- We have strong and committed partners and tangible examples of partner engagement.
- We have prioritised resources and there is a commitment within

our financial strategy to address cost pressures within Children's Services.

### **Key areas for consideration**

- Our social care practice is open to further improvement to help keep children safe moving forward.
- Our Family Front Door needs simplifying and there needs to be a clearer understanding of where the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub will fit in.
- We need to look at the difference between the Worcestershire-wide early help strategy and the council commissioned early help services.
- The Health and Well-being Board could do more to add a unique children's focus in their current strategy.
- Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) requires more pace and scrutiny, with some multi-agency areas slow to develop.
- We need to further develop consistent financial projections based on forecast demand and complexity.

### **Conclusion**

11. The Peer Review was a very productive exercise. It outlined some challenges for us when it comes to realising our aspiration of achieving excellent practice, most notably with front-line social care.

12. The review confirmed the Council's commitment to safeguarding children, the strong corporate support to achieve this and the high-level partnership buy-in. However, there is always more to do and while the very clear message is that our plans already in place are the correct ones and we have staff that are committed and capable of delivering these improvements our priority is to renew our focus on best practice.

### **Purpose of this Meeting**

13. The Panel is invited to consider the peer review findings and determine whether it wishes to do further scrutiny in this area or submit comments to the Cabinet Member.

### **Supporting Information**

Appendix 1 – Peer Review letter  
Appendix 2 – Peer Review detailed findings

### **Contact Points**

#### **County Council Contact Points:**

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#### **Specific Contact Points for this Report:**

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### **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Children's Services) there background papers relating to the subject matter of this

report are:

[All agendas and minutes can be found on the website](#)