

## **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 10 SEPTEMBER 2015**

### **WORCESTERSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15**

---

#### **Summary**

1. Diana Fulbrook, the Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB), has been invited to present the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2014-15 (Appendix 1).

#### **Background**

2. On 11 September 2014 the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the WSCB's annual report for 2013-14. The Panel welcomed the improvements that had been made and was pleased that the Board was moving in a positive direction. Concerns were expressed about:

- Information sharing across agencies, particularly with schools. However, the Panel was reassured to hear about the development of the 'single view of the child' system which would shortly be available to all schools in the County.
- Whether arrangements for sharing information when a child moves schools were sufficiently robust.
- The robustness of safeguarding arrangements in non-LA controlled schools, including academies, free schools and independent schools.
- The cumulative impact of budget cuts across agencies.
- Ensuring closer working with the Adult Safeguarding Board, particularly in relation to transition arrangements.

3. 2014/15 saw continuing change amongst several agencies with downward pressure on resources. Despite this, safeguarding has remained a priority for member agencies and the Board has been able to focus on its priorities and to meet extra demands. Experienced social worker recruitment has remained problematic, reflecting a national shortage, and referrals to Children's Social Care have increased during the year, adding to pressures on the system with high caseloads. Some practice has improved but some remains problematic and by the end of the year questions were raised about the safety of the child protection system. Feedback from a recent Local Government Association (LGA) peer review reinforced the need to improve basic frontline practice and this is being taken forward by the County Council through the 'Back to Basics' Improvement activity. The Board has also not been able to assure itself of the effectiveness of early help and the Early Help Strategy is being reviewed to ensure that there is an Intervention and Prevention strategy that fully captures the role of all agencies in supporting families at an earlier stage. There is still inconsistent practice and whilst there is evidence of cascaded

learning, the question remains about the degree to which this influences practice changes.

4. Child Sexual Exploitation has been a particular focus for the Board in recent months, most notably the development of a victim pathway. The strategy has been considered by the scrutiny panel, signed off by the WSCB and endorsed by Cabinet. There remains much to do, most notably raising awareness with all partners and communities. During the year there was little evidence of a link to gangs, organised crime or any specific minority ethnic group, and there is also no indication that disclosures or reporting concerns have been ignored. The Board has been assured that in Worcestershire sexual exploitation exists on a relatively small and generally individualised scale, however, it is sensitive to the fact that as understanding and knowledge grows, this position may change.

5. In many ways the Board is better equipped to ask questions because of its improved level of data and range of available information including the voice of the child. It has implemented the recommendations from the Board Peer Review undertaken at the start of the year and is putting in place a new structure that will support the delivery of its priorities. New statutory guidance Working Together 2015 was published at the end of the year and the Board will be implementing any necessary changes. The most notable work is on the development of a Child Sexual Exploitation pathway and a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), although both have been slow to develop. Further achievements include extensive learning from audits and case reviews, increased levels of service user feedback and the continuing training and development of front line staff. The last Ofsted inspection was in March 2012, so an Ofsted inspection under a different framework is awaited.

## Key Issues

6. The key issues for the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board in 2014/15 included:

- Increased pressure on the social care system with more referrals and a rise in the number of looked after children
- Recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced social workers
- Management oversight and supervision of staff
- Impact of Early Help Strategy and the role of universal services in the early help offer
- Development of Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy and pathway
- Questions about the safety of the child protection system
- Development of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Implementation of a Service User Feedback Strategy
- Evaluation of the Suicide Prevention guidance for practitioners
- Learning from audits and case reviews in respect of children affected by the 'Toxic Trio' (parental drug/alcohol use, parental mental ill health and domestic abuse), vulnerabilities linked to children's emotional well-being, challenges in safeguarding adolescents
- Implementation of the Safer Sleeping policy
- Proactive monitoring through the Board's performance framework in respect of missing children, CAMHS waiting times and health assessments for looked after children

7. The WSCB Annual Report 2014/15 is to be presented to the Health and Well-being Board on 30 September 2015.

## **Conclusion**

8. The Board concluded that there is an improved body of evidence from data, audits, reports and learning during 2014/15 to demonstrate that safeguarding arrangements are in place but could not yet be assured of their effectiveness in respect of children in the child protection system. The quality and consistency of frontline basic practice needs improvement and more work is required in particular areas to ensure children are safe in Worcestershire. Increased pressure on the social care system means that the board cannot be fully assured about the effectiveness of early help arrangements, and it is clear that appropriate help needs to be offered to children and families at an earlier stage by a range of agencies in order to reduce the pressure of those requiring specific services in the social care system. Work continues on establishing the extent and nature of child sexual exploitation and on developing effective preventative measures. There continue to be multi-agency areas for improvement around consistent practice, communication/information sharing and 'Think Family'. However, overall there is a strong commitment by all Board member agencies to prioritise safeguarding.

## **Purpose of the Meeting**

9. The Panel is asked to:

- Consider any points which may inform future scrutiny work;
- Determine if it wishes to make any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families.

## **Supporting Information**

- Appendix 1 - [Worcestershire Safeguarding Board Annual Report 2014-15](#)  
(Hard copies circulated to Panel Members only.)

## **Contact Points**

### County Council Contact Points

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 and Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Officers, 01905 766619,  
[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's Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda and minutes of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel meetings held on 11 May 2012, 11 February 2014 and 11 September 2014
- [All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)