

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

11 SEPTEMBER 2019

WORCESTERSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

Summary

1. Derek Benson, Independent Chairman, has been invited to present the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2018-19 (attached as Appendix 1).

Background

2. The Independent Chairman of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) 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 September 2018 Derek Benson informed the Panel that Ofsted feedback was evidencing progress by Children's Social Care, albeit there was much work still to be done to reach the point where children in Worcestershire receive a consistently good service. The Board recognised the high level of focus and effort that would be required, with ongoing support from partner agencies, to continue to deliver further improvements.

Key points from the WSCB Annual Report 2018/19

5. During 2018/19 Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board had a particular focus on a number of priorities including:

- Implementation of Neglect Strategy
- Protecting children and young people from exploitation
- Seeking assurance and promoting effective early help
- Voice of the child
- Critical friends to the Children's Social Care Service Improvement Plan (SIP)
- Establishment of new arrangements for the Safeguarding Partnership

- Consolidation of findings from Serious Case Reviews into learning which leads to improved practice

6. The WSCB approved its Neglect Strategy in December 2018. The aims of the Strategy are to develop shared definitions and language, and a consistent approach to screening across the Partnership with examples of appropriate responses at different levels of need. The revised pathway for responding to neglect concerns, spanning early help through to child protection, and a toolkit for use by frontline practitioners in direct work with families are to be launched at targeted events in June 2019.

7. WSCB has a Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Strategic Group as one of its sub-groups and a CSE Operational Group which reports directly to the Strategic Group. During the year the focus on CSE has expanded to include other forms of exploitation and contextual safeguarding. 'GET SAFE' is the Worcestershire partnership title for the identification and management of multi-agency support and protection for children and young people at risk of **G**ang-related activity, **S**exual **E**xploitation, **T**rafficking, Modern day **S**lavery, **A**bsent and Missing, **F**orced Marriage, Honour Based Violence and Female Genital Mutilation, and Criminal **E**xploitation. After some significant delay a CSE Problem Profile was produced by West Mercia Police and this, along with the CSE dataset, now needs to be broadened out to include other areas of the GET SAFE (exploitation) agenda. Towards the end of the year an outline GET SAFE Action Plan was drafted and work is currently being undertaken with Partners to agree the detail.

8. A key development during the year has been the publication of the revised Early Help Pathway identified as a gap in last year's annual report. The Board's Improving Frontline Practice Group was a helpful mechanism for consultation with Partners and it supported circulation of communications through the WSCB newsletter, core training programme and Practitioner Network meetings. It was clarified that co-ordination of delivery of the Early Help Strategy action plan would sit under the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership sub-group of the Health and Well-being Board. Based on audits undertaken during the year it is possible to provide only limited assurance that partner agencies fully understood the threshold for intervention by Children's Social Care and there was found to be significant variation in the quality of referrals being made to the Family Front Door. However, during the year changes were made to referral processes which separated out early help and social work services, with online referral forms providing more guidance for referrers about what is required. It is anticipated that these changes will lead to improved quality of future referrals and support practitioners in distinguishing between the different levels of need.

9. Voice of the Child is one of the practice issues considered in the Board's Multi-Agency Case File Audit (MACFA) process with auditors asked to specifically consider how effectively the 'voice' of the child was sought, recorded and considered by the partner agencies involved. Audits undertaken during the year found that practice is variable in terms of listening to and giving consideration to the views of children and young people. WSCB has adapted a series of prompt questions for practitioners to consider when seeking to understand what a day in the life of a baby, pre-school child, primary age child or teenager looks like. The 'A Day in My Life' prompts form part of the Neglect Toolkit but could be used in all aspects of

direct work with a children or young people. The Board consulted with pupils from middle and secondary schools and feedback informed development of the tools.

10. The WSCB has been updated at every Board meeting on the Service Improvement Plan performance indicators and also on outcomes from Ofsted monitoring visits. Meetings with Critical Friends were discontinued during the year after the Board agreed that progress was being evidenced and Board members were able to provide ongoing scrutiny and challenge through the Board and its sub-groups.

11. The three named Safeguarding Partners (Chief Executive of Worcestershire County Council, Chief Constable of West Mercia Police and Accountable Officer for the Clinical Commissioning Groups) have been represented by their respective Board members in discussions regarding the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. A proposal was presented at an exceptional Board meeting on 21 January 2019 followed by a period of consultation. The proposed changes were approved at the Board meeting held on 13 March 2019. There will be a period of transition until the new Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) is fully implemented on 1 September 2019.

12. Work has been completed by the Serious Case Review and the Improving Frontline Practice sub-groups of the Board to develop a summary of key messages from three SCRs completed during the year. A communications plan to ensure dissemination of learning and key messages was developed and presented to the March Board meeting. This communications plan has now been implemented with multi-agency learning events planned for June and July 2019.

13. This year has continued to see further pressure on the Family Front Door with the number of Contacts up by 13% compared with last year. Other increases related to the number of looked after children (up 5.5% compared to last year), the number of open S17 assessments (up 54% compared to last year) and the number of S47 (child protection) assessments (up 14% compared to last year). The number of Plans have reduced this year with Child in Need Plans down by 14.5% and Child Protection Plans down by 2.4%.

14. Three cases were presented during the year for consideration of a Serious Case Review (SCR) but none were found to meet the criteria. Two SRCs which were commissioned last year were completed during the year, however it was evident that one of the cases did not meet the criteria and was subsequently down-graded to a case review with the agreement of the National Panel.

15. During the year 38 Child Death Notifications were received representing an increase of 52% compared with last year. The Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) reviewed 23 deaths during the year and modifiable factors were found to be present in 10 of the deaths. Modifiable factors included lack of parental supervision, maternal smoking and obesity, and fatal road traffic collisions involving inexperienced teenage drivers. National data for 2018/19 is not yet available for comparison purposes. An analysis of 'sudden unexpected unexplained deaths' was undertaken relating to children under 2 years old. It found that there has been a significant rise in baby deaths with modifiable factors which included excessive alcohol consumption coupled with bed sharing and smoking. From September 2019 the process for Child Deaths Reviews becomes the responsibility of the two Child

Death Partners (Local Authority and Clinical Commissioning Groups). In Worcestershire Public Health are taking the lead on behalf of the Local Authority. The decision has been taken to develop a joint CDOP with Herefordshire.

16. The Board delivered core safeguarding training to 842 practitioners during 2018/19. This multi-agency training continued to be rated highly by attendees who report an improvement in knowledge and confidence after attendance. Post-training impact evaluations and audits also demonstrate that learning is transferred into the workplace and has a positive impact on children and families. 996 practitioners completed an e-learning course (down 28% compared to last year). There has been a year-on-year reduction in demand and this year the Board took the decision to cease providing e-learning from April 2019.

17. The Section 11 Audit is a self-assessment by partner agencies of the extent to which they are fulfilling their safeguarding responsibilities as defined in the Children Act 2004. Last year the Board conducted its Section 11 Audit using a new audit template which has been developed by a West Midlands working group. The S11 Audit is to be undertaken every two years. This year the Board can provide assurance that partner agencies continue to report progress is being made against outstanding actions.

18. The annual Section 175/157 Audit (schools and FE colleges) elicited a 100% return rate for the first time, recognised as a tremendous achievement, and provided assurance that there is a high level of safeguarding activity in education settings. Operation Encompass, where schools are informed the next morning about domestic abuse incidents, is welcomed by schools and should have a positive impact on the emotional support made available to children and young people.

Conclusion

19. 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 partner agencies and that safeguarding responsibilities are taken seriously. In addition, the Board's contributory partners have made maintained the same level of financial contributions despite operating within financial constraints.

20. As last year, much of the Board's attention has focussed on Children's Social Care as lead agency for safeguarding children. The Board has continued to be sighted on the work being undertaken to improve services for children in need of help and protection, including early help, through its comprehensive Service Improvement Plan. In addition, Ofsted have continued to monitor progress through quarterly monitoring visits. As a result of feedback received from Ofsted during the course of the year, which indicated that satisfactory progress was being made, and on the local authority's own Quality Assurance and Performance Information, the Service Improvement Plan has been reviewed and priorities re-focussed. The Board was satisfied with the regular updates provided from the Director of Children, Families and Communities and with commentary and analysis regarding performance information provided by the Assistant Director (Safeguarding). It acknowledges the tremendous effort made on the part of the senior management team to make tangible improvements. Partner agencies continue to have a part to play in ensuring that they also respond robustly to children and families, especially

where the threshold is not met for a Children's Social Care intervention but families require additional support through the provision of early help.

21. This is the final WSCB Annual Report. From 1 September 2019 the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board will no longer exist, to be replaced by the new Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership. The Board has continued to deliver its statutory functions pending formal handover to the WSCP.

Purpose of the Meeting

22. 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 and Families

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 - Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2018/19

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, Families and Communities) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.