

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 16 MARCH 2021

WORCESTERSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

Summary

1. Derek Benson, Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP), has been invited to present the WSCP Annual Report 2019-2020 (attached as Appendix 1).

Background

2. The introduction of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 placed a responsibility on the three safeguarding partners in each local authority area, these being the local authority, the local clinical commissioning group and the chief officer of police, to make arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area. As a result, the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) formally replaced the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) on 30th September 2019.
3. The three safeguarding partners are also required to publish a report at least once in every 12-month period detailing their progress. This report should include an update on a number of areas as set out in Chapter 3 of Working Together to Safeguard Children (July 2018) including how effective the arrangements have been in practice, evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies on outcomes for children and families from early help to looked-after children and care leavers, an analysis of where further progress still needs to be made and ways in which the partners have sought and utilised feedback from children and families to inform their work and influence service provision.
4. The report is made publicly available through publication on the Partnership website. In addition, it will be subject of scrutiny within both the NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group and West Mercia Police, and shared with all other relevant partner agencies. There is also a statutory requirement to share this report with both the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care.
5. The last published Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) annual report covered the period 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019. This first report of the WSCP therefore also covers the period April – September 2019 when the WSCB was still in place. This is to provide the continuity required in relation to the reporting on multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements in Worcestershire and to provide

the background and context against which the safeguarding partners began the new arrangements.

Key points from the WSCP Annual Report 2019/2020

Partnership arrangements

6. The new Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership arrangements have been designed as significantly more streamlined than the previous Board arrangements and have proved to offer a dynamic and effective means of decision making and oversight. This is supported by the very strong involvement across all WSCP sub-groups of the wider partnership agencies where their representatives' skills, knowledge and time are invaluable to ensuring an efficient and effective multi-agency child safeguarding system across the county.

7. Oversight and direction for the new arrangements is provided by the Executive Group, which is independently chaired. One of the main areas of focus for the Executive Group during 2020 has been to shape the partnership response to the challenges created by Covid. The Executive Group were able to track the responses of each of the agencies to the virus and the impact on their services as it progressed and identify and discuss any cross-cutting impact on those services and the effectiveness of multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements.

8. The partnership responded rapidly to emerging risk when concerns were raised over the national increase in the number of babies being seriously harmed during the Covid period as a result of the disproportionate impact restrictions were having on those with babies in the home. WSCP endorsed a "safeguarding babies" initiative and led communications to communities and professionals. The partnership moved quickly to identify those families with babies who may need additional support and put in place a comprehensive visiting and information campaign.

9. With the impact of the pandemic likely to continue well into the next reporting period, the Executive Group is focused on ensuring the continued development and effectiveness of our partnership response to the emerging threats to the safety of children and young people across Worcestershire.

10. Through the Executive Forum we have also created a working group of Police and Social Care staff to audit and analyse Domestic Abuse and referrals to our "front door" and a task and finish group working locally with West Mercia Police representatives on their Early Help strategy.

11. The Executive Group will also be focusing on the ability of the partnership to develop their services in a co-ordinated way, as competing demand on priorities, timelines of service improvement plans and organisational reviews within each agency will not always correlate with those of other partners. This is particularly important when considered within the context of emerging or increasing risks to our children and young people.

GET SAFE

12. 'GET SAFE' was introduced by Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board shortly before the transition to the new arrangements and has been further developed by the GET SAFE Partnership Group within the WSCP arrangements.

The GET SAFE programme is an innovative and child-focused approach to tackling the many forms of child criminal exploitation. It has brought together child safeguarding agencies from across Worcestershire to design and implement enhanced multi-agency processes for the identification, assessment, planning and response to this problem, based on a contextual safeguarding framework. The work has been informed by feedback from local young people who have been helped by these services and has had a positive impact on the timeliness and effectiveness of our collective response to children and young people at risk of exploitation within Worcestershire.

13. Although the GET SAFE programme has brought significant improvements, the partnership recognises there is still more to do in this complex area. In the coming twelve months we will continue to develop our understanding of exploitation in Worcestershire, and the knowledge and understanding within our multi-agency workforce and community services. We will strengthen our engagement work with young people to keep them safe and aware of the risks in their communities and online. This work will be supported by the Climb programme and Community Link Workers. We will continue to learn from what children and young people are telling us and develop a transition pathway for young people into adulthood where there is continued vulnerability.

Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group (QAPP)

14. As a partnership we are committed to service development. The role of the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group (QAPP) within the WSCP arrangements is to support this commitment by delivering a multi-agency programme of quality assurance through focusing on the three key areas of audits, service user feedback and key performance indicators. To capture service user feedback on their personal experience of the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements, QAPP has developed an online survey for families who receive a service in relation to child safeguarding. QAPP has also identified other opportunities for multi-agency service user feedback and as a result has included a question on the impact of multi-agency working to the service user feedback section of the case file audit template, and is using Child Protection Conference feedback as another opportunity to gather information.

15. QAPP has worked to strengthen links between the work of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) Group and its own audit work, checking that the learning from two recent serious case reviews has reached front line practitioners.

16. The data set used by QAPP identified changes in the volume and appropriateness of referrals from partner agencies into the Family Front Door during this reporting period. This has been used to inform the response of the Worcestershire partner agencies. The QAPP Group has mapped out key learning and development opportunities for the partnership and following the initial disruption to delivery due to Covid has resumed the training offer with courses being delivered through virtual platforms.

17. In the coming twelve months the QAPP Group will be focusing on the quality and application of the Levels of Need Guidance for contacts to the Family Front Door by promoting awareness of the threshold guidance and early help offer. We will ensure our multi-agency audit programme is consolidated following the

disruption due to Covid, and that learning is shared across the partnership. We will also use what children and families are telling us about our practice to inform improvements in our multi-agency safeguarding practice. Finally, we shall continue to develop our multi-agency learning and development opportunities in line with requirements as identified from audit activity and child safeguarding practice reviews.

Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) Group

18. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) Group oversees the management of rapid review processes and the commissioning of child safeguarding practice reviews within Worcestershire. The CSPR Group is also responsible for ensuring that child safeguarding practice reviews are completed to a high standard and within agreed timescales, and that the recommendations and learning resulting from these reviews are fully implemented.

19. This year the CSPR Group have conducted three rapid reviews under the new arrangements which has resulted in the commissioning of one child safeguarding practice review. This review is ongoing, the timetable having been disrupted by the restrictions resulting from the pandemic and the impact on partner agencies capacity and availability during the periods of greatest demand. The review has now resumed as a result of partners agreeing an innovative approach to multi-agency practitioner learning events which allows for wide partnership engagement, discussion and challenge using a virtual forum.

20. The CSPR Group now works closely with the Quality Practice and Procedures Group (QAPP) to share the learning from reviews to inform the multi-agency learning and development programme and then check that learning has reached those who work directly with children and families. This will remain an area of focus for the CSPR Group over the next year. In addition, the need to change the way in which we work as a result of the pandemic has provided us with an opportunity to explore how we can conduct certain aspects of the review process whilst minimising the impact on partners' time and resources via the use of remote technology. There is now an opportunity to make such efficiencies permanent where we are confident they do not impact on the quality of the review.

Head Teachers Education Safeguarding Steering Group

21. Since being introduced in September 2019, there has been only one change to our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements as originally published. This change was made in April 2020 when the Head Teachers Education Safeguarding Steering Group was incorporated into the arrangements as a sub-group of the WSCP. Although partners had always sought to involve the Education sector within the arrangements, this has strengthened the partnership links with schools and early years settings in Worcestershire and provided them with greater access to and involvement in the work of the partnership. The partnership believes this better reflects the vital role that education has in safeguarding.

22. The group works closely with the QAPP Group, for example by supporting audit activity, with the recent Section 175 audit of schools safeguarding arrangements an example of this. This achieved a 100% return rate and highlighted the very positive contribution schools are making to promoting early help across Worcestershire. An audit report on schools' attendance at strategy meetings has also been provided,

from which further advice has been provided to schools on their attendance and how they can contribute to strategy discussions.

23. In the coming year the Head Teachers Education Safeguarding Group will be promoting the use of school early help offers and early help assessments to ensure support and intervention for families at the appropriate level. The Group also aims to increase the frequency of the joint Education and Children Social Care Family Front Door auditing process to provide close monitoring of the impact of measures in support of this work.

Conclusion

24. This period has been challenging for all safeguarding children partnerships as the impact of the pandemic arrived at a formative time for the new partnerships and before new ways of working could be fully embedded. That said, it has also provided the opportunity of exploring new approaches to partnership working which we are now keen to make permanent within our arrangements. More regular, focused Executive meetings have improved the timeliness of decision making, conducting rapid reviews and other child safeguarding practice review events via remote conferencing facilities has increased accessibility for partners and simplifies the process of bringing representatives of multi-agencies together.

25. The wider Worcestershire Safeguarding Children partners have all, both individually and collectively, fully committed to making our safeguarding arrangements work in these most challenging of times. This has meant the WSCP has been able to continue to develop its own effectiveness whilst at the same time, and most importantly, work together to safeguard children and young people across Worcestershire.

Purpose of the Meeting

26. 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 Partnership Annual Report 2019/20

Contact Points

Alyson Grice/Alison Spall, Overview and Scrutiny Officers 01905 844962/846607
Email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Children's Services) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.