

Family Safeguarding: progress in eighteen months

**Ward(s):** All wards

**Portfolios:** Councillor Wilson, Children's Services

### **1. Aim**

The aim of Family Safeguarding is to keep families together wherever possible, supporting children in children's social care where there is domestic abuse, substance abuse and mental health. It includes motivational interviewing, group supervision, shared record keeping and a parenting assessment.

The aim of this report is to provide an update on the implementation of family Safeguarding Model in Walsall.

### **2. Reason for Scrutiny**

This report is to provide an update for Members of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to enable them to fulfil their key responsibilities and duties in holding the council and its partners to account for its work in preventing and protecting children and young people from harm in Walsall. This report outlines the progress of family safeguarding and its impacts on children and their families over the last 18 months.

### **3. Recommendations**

- I. To support proposals for the ongoing implementation and development of the Family Safeguarding Model, both internally and across the wider partnership.
- II. To consider how Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee can support in making the model sustainable

### **4. Report detail – Know**

#### **4.1 Overall**

The Walsall Right for Children (WR4C) Transformation Programme, launched in September 2018, drives forward our Children's Services vision to ensure that the right children are in the right place with the right support for as long as it's needed to ensure that they are safe from harm, are happy and learning well. Family Safeguarding is an important part of delivering this transformation.

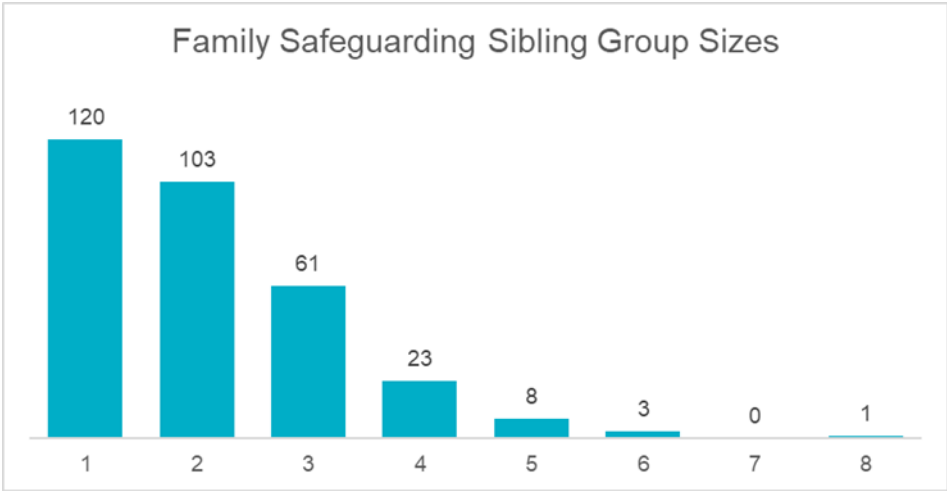
The Family Safeguarding Model was launched in Walsall on the 1 September 2020 and brings a whole-system change approach in Children's Social Care to tackle the impact of the 'trio of vulnerabilities' (domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental ill-health) on children's lives. Adults' and children's specialists work in a unified team to share

information, to provide support, and to prevent families reaching crisis stage. In each locality there is the funded establishment for a mental health worker, substance abuse worker and two domestic abuse workers (one for victims and one perpetrators). This provides better outcomes for children by keeping families together, addressing root causes, and preventing children from entering the care system. There is a wealth of evidence available externally which supports this.

The council and its partners have been given an initial investment by the Department for Education of £2.4M over three years (commencing in September 2020) to fund the adult specialist workers in the model, with a requirement to make this model sustainable by year 4 (September 2024).

Over the last 18 months we have moved from strength to strength both internally in terms of improved practice and externally in terms of improved partnership working.

As at 31/12/2021 we have worked with 654 children from 319 families under the Family Safeguarding Model go live. This has included 35 large families with sibling groups of at least four children.



We are increasingly linking in with other local authorities who use Family Safeguarding, extending our influence and improving our national profile. We have led on work informing other West Midlands Local Authorities, collaboratively with Hertfordshire (who developed the model) and have offered informal support to a further four local authorities nationally.

**4.2 Governance and oversight**

Local governance of the programme is through Walsall’s Safeguarding Partnership Board. This is underpinned by a detailed governance document. There are also clear links with the Safer Walsall Partnership, especially on the issues relating to domestic abuse and Walsall Together on issues primarily relating to health colleagues.

National governance of this programme is through a quarterly return to the Department of Education. This includes an overview of achievements, outline of risks and issues, milestones achieved and planned for the next quarter, and financial and performance data. Our returns have always met with excellent feedback and we have been commended on both our transparency and use of evidence to underpin progress.

The What Works Centre have also been commissioned to monitor our progress over the next five years using a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures

In June 2021 Hertfordshire conducted a peer review which looked at our outcomes and fidelity to the model, we received excellent feedback

#### Areas of excellence

- Practice observed was exemplary
- Clear evidence of effective and improving partnership working
- Listening to and working with children and parents was done routinely and positively

#### Areas for development (all subsequently tackled)

- Need to articulate the culture change explicitly
- Improve the frequency and oversight of group supervision
- Improve the preparation for and processes around the Public Law Outline (PLO)

Ofsted undertook a review in September 2021 and specific comments related to family safeguarding below;

*“Effective multi-agency group supervision, using the model of social work practice in the locality teams, provides comprehensive analysis of children’s progress. Constructive challenge ensures a shared focus on the children and their needs. This helps to progress children’s plans”*

*“The implementation of the strength-based practice model and specialist multidisciplinary professionals in the locality safeguarding teams and support teams have accelerated the developments and improvements in partnership working at both a strategic and operational level. As a result children and their families receive appropriate and skilled multi-agency wraparound support and services that significantly improve children’s circumstances and reduce risk”*

Locally, we have developed a detailed outcomes framework with underpinning Key Performance Indicators agreed with each partner and including equalities measures woven through. Detailed analysis is currently underway of outcomes and the initial findings for this can be found below.

### **4.3 Operational development**

The Operational workstream meets monthly and includes core partners who are part of the Family Safeguarding teams, as well as colleagues from Education, Early Help and School Nursing and Health Visiting. Initially the focus was on promoting understanding of family safeguarding, it has now moved into shared development of the partnerships around families.

We are running groups for parents around emotional self-regulation, attachment to their children, domestic abuse and drug and alcohol issues.

We have initiated and are leading work to improve the support for fathers, who are often marginalised and their support for their children can be a valuable aspect of their child's safety and development.

We are actively engaged with locality working leading some aspects with our close colleagues in early help, this further develops the partnership and shared support for families.

One area of significant effort is improving the support for perpetrators of domestic abuse. This is one of the most significant issues facing our parents. Whilst there are some helpful interventions for the victims, there is relatively little for perpetrators. This has the unintended consequences of further pressuring victims and not holding perpetrators to account. This work has been undertaken in close collaboration with the police, probation and the community safety partnership

#### **4.4 Locality working**

Our approach to locality working is driven by our wider service transformation Walsall right4children. The WR4C Transformation Programme, launched in September 2018, drives forward our Children's Services vision to ensure that the right children are in the right place with the right support for as long as it's needed to ensure that they are safe from harm, happy and learning well.

A range of services are colocated in the hub in Darlaston the west of Walsall. This includes Early Help, Black Country Women's Aid and the Department of Work and Pensions

The hubs are;

- Darlaston opened September 2021
- Blakenall likely to open March 2022
- Silver Court likely to open March/April 2022
- Birchills likely to open April 2022

#### **4.5 Impacts**

We have been measuring the impacts of the Family Safeguarding Model using data and asking people their opinions. The most significant and overarching outcome is that more families stay together safely. Some more specific expected outcomes listed below:

##### **a) Impacts on children and families**

##### **Headline data**

It remains early days in monitoring outcomes for children who have been specifically supported under Family Safeguarding, but positive results are starting to be seen across the system, particularly for children who are aged 12 and under.

There have been significant reductions in the number of children who are subject of a child protection plan or who are entering care. These changes started to be seen following the start of the Family Safeguarding training in October 2019.

## **Children subject of a child protection plan**

- The number of children who are subject of a child protection plan has reduced from 370 in December 2019 to 227 at the end of December 2021, a reduction of 38.6%.
- For children aged 12 and under, the number of children subject of a plan have reduced from 318 to 181, a reduction of 43.1%.

## **Children who have entered care**

- Between April 2019 and March 2020, 242 children entered care, of which 177 (73%) were age 12 and under.
- Between March 2021 and February 2022, 166 children have entered care, of which 112 (67%) were aged 12 and under.
- Overall the number of children who have entered care has reduced by 31%, but for children aged 12 and under the reduction is 37%.

## **Of the 654 children from 318 families worked with under Family Safeguarding:**

194 (29.7%) from 100 families have had a closed episode. Of these, only 24 children have been re-referred with seven (from three families) having a further Family Safeguarding episode. Most of those who were re-referred were either not assessed or closed following assessment.

305 children have been subject of a child protection plan while open to FS:

- 66 (21.6%) of these stepped up from CiN
- 24 became CP on or shortly after assessment
- 215 started Family Safeguarding while already on a CP Plan or after having stepped down from CP
- 146 are still open on a child protection plan

159 (52%) children have had their child protection plan ended:

- 85 (53%) stepped down (61 stepped down to CiN and 24 no longer at risk of significant harm)
- 15 (9%) ended for other reasons

Families consistently stated that family safeguarding was more participatory, supportive and empowering than their previous experiences of social services. They have welcomed Motivational Interviews (albeit often after some initial reservation) and the multi-agency nature of the support. Almost without exception, the parents and carers told the evaluators that their quality of life had improved as a result of Family Safeguarding.

Locally we have established that parents have described the programme as “eye opening” and many are positive about the support they have received from the adult specialist workers

*"I had a better understanding of where I was"*

*"There was trust"*

*"Helped me consider ways to cope and get through stuff"*

*"It was an eye-opener"*

*"Working with the adult workers put things into perspective"*

*"There was a time when I was really struggling, having that support network helped"*

We have also emerging evidence to show that victims of domestic abuse engage more readily with IDVAs based with the family safeguarding teams than through other routes. We also have evidence that the number of repeat call outs to police is reducing too.

We also have a number of case studies which illustrate the impacts

*Dad is no longer with Mum, Mum had a new partner where there were reports of arguments and physical violence. Partner was not living with mum consistently. Initially support was offered and Mum was "minimising" saying thing like "It's not really abuse, doesn't happen often."*

*The social worker and the domestic abuse worker individually and together encouraged Mum to try an initial session around domestic abuse. At this initial session, there was work around the definitions and types of abuse. This was "eye opening" for Mum and was so different to what she expected, she said "I am so glad I changed my mind".*

*The main areas of learning for Mum were the setting of boundaries and impacts on children who may witness or be aware of domestic abuse.*

*One of the impacts is primary aged children who can internalise when stress and stop talking. The social worker, domestic worker and Mum identified a child in the family where this was happening. The social worker did some direct work with the children and the domestic abuse worker supported Mum. Now the child chats all the time.*

This demonstrates the collaboration between social worker and domestic abuse practitioner, which would not be possible without family safeguarding. It also demonstrates the interconnectedness of parental and child issues, which can be managed so much better by multi-disciplinary teams.

We know that we have around half the numbers of children on a child protection plan compared to when we started family safeguarding. This means they get support in a less formal and intrusive manner. We know there are not repeat re-referrals, so it seems we are genuinely sorting things out, rather than not helping those who need it.

We also know there has been a 30% reduction in the number of children coming into care. We know that most children do better in their own families, when the families are supported well. This also has an added benefit of saving money.

## **b) Impacts on staff**

Family Safeguarding has been shown to strengthen information sharing and decision making, developing the skills and knowledge of practitioners, and minimising pressure for social workers through reduced caseloads.

This has been demonstrated by the staff experience locally, throughout the implementation most staff have been extremely positive about the model

*“There is a coherence and power in the model, especially the strength based approach”  
“From the earliest implementation people could see improvements for some children and their families”*

*“Group supervision allowed for in depth multi-professional challenge”*

*“The wider “learning lessons” rather than “criticising staff” when thing went wrong was hugely impactful”*

*“It actually saved time, having expertise “on tap”*

*“Staff learnt so much from each other using this approach that everyone’s practice improves”*

### **c) Impacts on the wider system**

There has been a significant and measurable improvement in strategic partnership arrangements which has contributed to the positive discussions about a children’s alliance. At a practical level this improved partnership working has led to day-to-day improvements working across organisations to support children and families.

We have also emerging evidence to show that victims of domestic abuse engage more readily with IDVAs based with the family safeguarding teams than through other routes. We also have evidence that the number of repeat call outs to police is reducing too.

## **4.6 Workforce development**

Despite COVID-19, our staff have had significant amounts of high quality training and development to underpin the changes in practice and culture. This is being increasingly supplemented with a range of practice development approaches, such as training the trainer and masterclasses. Recent topics have focussed on areas such as working well with interpreters and motivating teenagers.

At go live we had 13 of the 16 adult workers in post. All recruited on fixed term contracts. Over the eighteen months we increased our number of workers to 14 of the 16. Over the last six months a number of workers have begun to move on, partly to take up other opportunities and partly because of the lack of security of fixed term posts and secondments. Currently we have 11 of the posts filled and are working actively to both recruit and retain workers.

## **4.7 Communications**

We have recently refreshed our stakeholder mapping and have identified the valuable progress made in all areas of the system. We are particularly positive about improved links with health visitors and schools.

Whilst we continue to communicate regularly about family safeguarding, as we move to our second birthday we are increasingly talking about children’s services in general rather than family safeguarding in particular, since this is now \*how we do our business”

## 4.8 Sustainability

Children's social care invest a large amount of resource into safeguarding children. Since this resource is to provide a statutory function which will continue irrespective of other considerations. The focus of sustainability is on those non-statutory additional resources to support family safeguarding.

We were given 2.2 million from The DfE on a grant basis. This was in two distinct allocations

- One was for the start- up of the programme, especially programme infrastructure and personnel. These are non-recurrent expenses and we anticipate spending to be completed by September 2023.
- The second was for the costs of 16 adult specialist workers (mental health, drug and alcohol, domestic abuse victim and perpetrator). This was allocated on the basis of full funding for year 1 (September 2020-August 2021). 70 % funding for year 2 (September 2021-August 2022) and 50% funding for year 3 (September 2022-August 2023).

This funding runs along academic years (September to September) since it commenced at the "go live" point.

Below is a table outlining the shortfall in funding for those adult specialist workers, with the full costs being required in 2024/2025

	2021-2022 year 2	2022-2023 Year 3	2023-2024 Year 4	2024-2025 Year 5
<b>Funding shortfall</b>	- <b>77,786</b>	- <b>307,817</b>	- <b>662,833</b>	- <b>947,758</b>

We have worked hard as a partnership and have established much of the required resource and have plans for agreeing the remainder,

- Year 2 we are confident we have identified the resources for the shortfall
- Year 3 we have already identified almost all of the required shortfall
- Year 4 we have identified around half of the shortfall recurrently since the funding is along academic years not financial years,( in financial year 4 from April 2024 to September 2024 we have some DfE money to support adult worker salaries)

## 5. Reducing inequalities

Overall, the implementation of Family Safeguarding is likely to have a positive impact on equality. In order to demonstrate this, there will be a specific strand of the performance and outcome framework which will explore retrospective and prospective data to establish any differences in outcomes for families with a range of protected characteristics, including gender, disability, race and religion.

Evaluation in other areas suggest that fathers engage more positively with Family Safeguarding. The approach to domestic violence within Family Safeguarding includes active support for both victims and perpetrators. Since the service users are largely of one gender, male victims and female perpetrators may have a different experience of services. The use of interpreters will be monitored to ensure those for whom English is a second language will be actively included, we are offering bespoke training "the use of interpreters and motivational interviewing"



Family Safeguarding has a clear link to the impacts in the Marmot reports, as it will enable children to have a more positive start in life and maximise their capabilities.

## **6. Family Safeguarding links to Council Corporate Plan Priorities**

The Walsall Right for Children Transformation Programme contributes to a number of our Council Corporate Plan priorities:

### **a) People**

Throughout the programme, we have and will continue to work with children, young people and their families to ensure they have increased independence, improved health, and can positively contribute to their communities.

### **b) Internal Focus**

The programme is focused on a whole-system change, to ensure that within Children's Services we are as efficient and effective as we can be.

### **c) Children**

The primary objective of the programme is to ensure that the right support is in place so that children can have the best start and are safe from harm, are happy, healthy and learning well.

## **7. Decide**

To note the contents of this report and to support recommendations

## **8. Respond**

Any feedback and recommendations from scrutiny will be taken to the Family Safeguarding Partnership Board.

## **9. Review**

There is a clear governance structure for the programme which includes regular data monitoring and scrutiny, both within the local authority and across the partnerships (see the governance structure above).

## **Background papers**

- Second wave national evaluation of Family Safeguarding:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/932367/Hertfordshire\\_Family\\_Safeguarding.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/932367/Hertfordshire_Family_Safeguarding.pdf)

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