

Name
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Agenda
Item No.

18th March, 2021

7.

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2019-20

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Children's Services and Education

1. Aim

Children who need help and protection deserve high quality and effective support as soon as a need is identified.

We want a system that responds to the needs and interests of children and families and not the other way around. In such a system, practitioners will be clear about what is required of them individually, and how they need to work together in partnership with others.

Whilst it is parents and carers who have primary care for their children, local authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, have specific duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.

The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 set out specific duties: section 17 of the Children Act 1989 puts a duty on the local authority to provide services to children in need in their area, regardless of where they are found; section 47 of the same Act requires local authorities to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.

The Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services in local authorities are the key points of professional and political accountability, with responsibility for the effective delivery of these functions.

These duties placed on the local authority can only be discharged with the full cooperation of other partners, many of whom have individual duties when carrying out their functions under section 11 of the Children Act 2004 (see chapter 2).

Under section 10 of the same Act, the local authority is under a duty to make arrangements to promote cooperation between itself and organisations and agencies to improve the wellbeing of local children (see chapter 1). This co-operation should exist and be effective at all levels of an organisation, from strategic level through to operational delivery.

(Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018, pg 6)

2. Recommendations

Consider if this report gives the committee the assurance they require regarding the partnership activity in relation to the safeguarding of children and young people.

3. Report detail – know

In the year, and in response to changes to statutory guidance, significant changes were made to strategic safeguarding partnership arrangements for children and young people; the details of these changes are set out in the report. Learning from ‘early adopter’ sites was used to inform the development of the arrangements in Walsall and the shared ambition of statutory partners for children and young people to become the 4th partner in the local arrangements is an indicator of the commitment to listen to and learn from children. A review of the new partnership arrangements will be completed in 2020-21 and this will provide an opportunity to evaluate the impact of the changes.

Walsall Council’s Children’s Social Care has during this period operationalised a locality based delivery model that has been informed by the views of parents/carers and is designed to promote stronger multi-agency working whilst at the same time, making best use of the community based assets including schools and the voluntary sector.

West Midlands Police have made changes in the year to the way they deliver their public protection services; these changes were designed to be more responsive to children who are victims of child abuse. The Clinical Commissioning Group has continued to work with primary care and other health providers in relation to a wide range of safeguarding issues. An example is the ‘Our Voices, Our Shoes’ conference that was co-produced and facilitated by young people and professionals. The Conference covered issues of substance misuse, gangs and exploitation, domestic abuse and living with mental health issues.

In support of the shared ambition to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families, Walsall Council made a successful application to the Department for Education to secure funding to implement the Family Safeguarding Model in Walsall. Family Safeguarding is one of three innovation projects within the Department for Education Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme. The model will enable specialist services to work more collaboratively with parents/carers on the issues that impact most on their parenting capacity and so support children to be cared for in their family.

Statutory partners made the decision that the governance of the Family Safeguarding Model would sit with the Walsall Safeguarding Children Partnership and an external evaluation of the Local Authority and Partnership’s readiness to implement Family Safeguarding Model resulted in Walsall being selected as the first area in the country to implement the model.

In this report, partners provide an overview of work completed to progress locally agreed priorities supported by their analysis of the impact of this work. Data shows that the work to implement a revised “right help, right time” framework has had a positive impact on children and families as more families who receive early help support are stepping down to universal level of need due to positive outcomes being achieved at the early help level of need. In addition, there is evidence of a better understanding and

application of statutory thresholds in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH); there is however, further work to do to ensure that partner agencies are referring those children who require a statutory safeguarding service to the MASH. There has also been a significant reduction in the number of child protection enquiries completed bringing Walsall much more in line with national comparative data. In addition, a focused inspection visit by Ofsted during this period found that the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was providing a timely and appropriate response to those children who require a statutory social work service.

Audit activity carried out during the year evidences the positive impact of multi-agency working for children and families however, partners have identified that, whilst there has been good progress over the last two years in relation to strengthening the quality of multi-agency working, there is further work to do to ensure that all children and families consistently receive a good and joined up safeguarding response.

The last few weeks of the period covered by this report saw the country go into national lockdown because of a global pandemic thus creating unprecedented circumstances for services as well as children and families. Partner agencies rose to the challenge of sustaining safeguarding services, whilst at the same time, responding to emerging need. Agencies worked together to risk assess and determine who was best placed to respond to the most vulnerable children and arrangements were put in place for partners to regularly meet to share information about the delivery of safeguarding services. Another strength of the Partnership's response to the pandemic was the arrangements put in place to communicate key messages to front line practitioners, supported by a comprehensive virtual learning and development offer.

Developing the response to neglect is a priority for the Partnership and to support the delivery of the aims of the neglect strategy, a discussion took place at the inaugural meeting of the Safeguarding Children Partnership in October 2019. This identified the need to review membership of the Neglect Steering Group, clarify the role/responsibilities of Neglect Champions and review the local learning and development offer. Progress has been made in developing a tiered training offer, a Neglect Champions Group has been established and the NSPCC have been involved in work to plan a local awareness campaign. Given much of the work that has taken place during the year has been developmental, there is yet limited evidence of the tangible impact of the Neglect Strategy on practice and outcomes for children and families and this is a recognised priority for 2020-21.

Like other partnerships, Walsall has recognised the need to respond to all forms of child exploitation and arrangements to discuss, on a multi-agency basis, children being criminally exploited were piloted in the year. In recognition of the need to strengthen the oversight and implementation of the Child Exploitation Strategy Delivery Plan, a focused set of actions were agreed in November 2019, including the development of a child exploitation pathway; the agreed actions were to be completed by end of March 2020. Whilst not completed by the end of March 2020, a child exploitation pathway is now in place. One of the challenges in safeguarding children who are being criminally exploited is to respond to them as *victims* of abuse; this can be complicated by the fact that these children can be coerced into criminal activity. Providing a victim/child centred response, along with improving the response to children who go missing from home/care, are areas of ongoing focus for partner agencies.

The statutory safeguarding partners have implemented the revised statutory arrangements to review and learn from serious child safeguarding incidents and an overview of the work completed is included in the report. Feedback from the National Panel has been used to refine the approach to completing Rapid Reviews. Whilst some of the learning from serious incidents lends itself to a specific action e.g. amending multi-agency procedures, much of the learning requires a continuous programme of practice or service development e.g. the Family Safeguarding Model will promote a “think family” approach between services that work with children and those that work with adults who are parents/carers. In future reports, partners will have the opportunity to more fully describe the impact of actions taken in response to the learning from serious child safeguarding incidents.

As required by statutory guidance, the report details the work carried out by young people to influence service provision. To use young people to “inspect” services brought an additional element of scrutiny to the partnership arrangements and this is to be commended, as are the young people who completed this work.

The report concludes with an evaluation of:

- how safe children are in Walsall
- the strength of partnership working and
- the extent to which the partnership is operating as a learning system.

This is an open and transparent evaluation and appropriately identifies the progress made as well as the ongoing areas of development in relation to either practice/service development or the partnership’s delivery of its statutory functions.

4. Financial information

The safeguarding partners agreed their funding contributions for 2019/20. This funding contributed to the costs associated with the implementation and ongoing development of the safeguarding partnership, including the arrangements for independent scrutiny and business support functions.

5. Reducing Inequalities

The co-ordinated provision of services, designed to address the protection of children and provides specific support for those who are at risk of significant harm.

6. Decide

1. Do you have any questions in relation to the content of the report or require any additional information?
2. Do you wish to receive the 2020-21 annual report once available?

7. Respond

This Annual Report is available on the partnership website and has been shared with the executives and chief officers of the statutory partners.

8. Review

The 2020-21 annual report will consider progress against the 2019-20 report.

In year, there is also a quarterly meeting of the performance and quality assurance subgroup, with additional quality review activities such as Multi Agency File Audits. The Practice Review Subgroup also meets to review cases of serious safeguarding incidents or those of local significance to draw out and disseminate learning for the safeguarding system. This is then reported within the annual report.

Background papers

Additional information is available via the Safeguarding Partnership website <https://go.walsall.gov.uk/walsall-safeguarding-partnership/>

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