

28th November 2023

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2022 - 23

Ward(s) All
Portfolios: Childrens Services and Education

Report:

1. The Children and Social Work Act 2017, The Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Relevant Agency (England) Regulations 2018 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 guidance legislate for all local areas to publish Multi-Agency Safeguarding Children's Arrangements (MASA), led by three statutory agencies. Locally these are the Local Authority - Walsall Council, Black Country Integrated Care Board and West Midlands Police.
2. Walsall Safeguarding Partnership (WSP) has a combined Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangement of Walsall Safeguarding Children's Partnership (WSCP) and Walsall Safeguarding Adults Board (WSAB) and is required to produce an annual report which provides an assessment of the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements in working with adults and children.
3. Working Together 2018 (WT 2018) requires safeguarding partners to publish a report at least once in every twelve-month period and send copies to the Panel and the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care (WWCSC).
4. This annual review of effectiveness report sets out what the Partnership (and the organisations that make up Walsall Safeguarding Children Partnership - WSCP) have done, in the last year of operation, to keep children and young people safe.
5. The report covers the period from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. This report sets out to update the Children and Families Scrutiny Board, on the key headlines from the Walsall Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) Annual Report. The full report will be published in December 2023.
6. The Walsall Safeguarding Partnership (WSP) annual report provides an overview of multiagency safeguarding activity during the year 2022-2023 and reflects the efforts of partner agencies who have worked in collaboration to promote the welfare and safeguarding of the children and young people of Walsall. It also includes identified learning from reviews, including child safeguarding practice reviews, undertaken by the partnership and their impact to support improvements in practice. The WSP annual report recognises the progress that has been made in working together to keep children safe from harm, the challenges that have been met and the work ahead of us.
7. **Section 2/3 Introduction** Sets out the work undertaken during this period to strengthen the statements that underpin the WSP purpose, Vision and Ambition. This supports the work to promote the individual identity of the WSP.

8. **Section 4 Walsall at a glance** of the report provides an overview of Walsall's demography and whilst there has not been vast change to the population there was rising concerns about youth and violent crime and issues of disproportionality amongst the cohort of young people involved. This prompted the WSP, Safer Walsall Partnership and Youth Justice Board to work in collaboration to consider a strategic response to address the issues identified.
9. **Section 5 What is Safeguarding Children?** Summarises the legislation that underpins the WSP arrangements. The WSP has continued to demonstrate its ability to provide stable and effective leadership and a tenacious focus on safeguarding matters impacting children young people and their families in Walsall.
10. Acknowledgement is given to all partner agencies and particularly Health colleagues who have been steadfast during significant organisational change with the introduction nationally of Integrated Care Boards in September 2022. During this challenging time, Health agencies have maintained their commitment to both regional and local partnership working to safeguard children.
11. **Section 6 Improvement Areas Identified from 2021-2022 Annual Report**
 - a. **Review and restructure of the Safeguarding Partnership Arrangements.**

In 2020 Penny Thomas, Independent Chair, Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership, undertook a review of the effectiveness of WSP arrangements with a view to look at the strengths, limitations, opportunities, and threats of the joined-up arrangements.

A review and proposed restructure of the WSP was agreed, with implementation commencing in quarter 4. The WSP has been realigned with a separation of functions to provide greater focus of the children and adults agenda respectively through the additional appointment of a Chair.
 - b. **Full Section 11 to be completed utilising the West Midlands Audit Tool.**

There was a delay in the launch of the regional tool which resulted in the full section 11 audit being scheduled for completion between April and June 2023-2024
 - c. **To deliver the proposed forward plan for practice development activity, informed by partnership learning.**

Section 12 Workforce learning and Development sets out the improvement work undertaken to strengthen the multiagency learning offer and activity undertaken across the business year.
 - d. **Continue to progress the All-Age Exploitation Strategy and Child Neglect Strategy as key priorities and measure their impact through the outcome framework.**

Work within the respective sub-groups has been undertaken over the last 12 months to strengthen arrangements for Neglect and All Aged Exploitation as detailed in Section 7 Progress Against Priorities of the annual report.

e. Strengthen the Think Family approach.

Section 9 /a. Performance data and Family Safeguarding Model of the annual report details how post pandemic the Strengthening families approach continues to deliver positive outcomes for children and families. It is worth noting that since the introduction of Family Safeguarding there has been a significant reduction in the number of children becoming subject of a child protection plan and entering care. Where children are entering care, they are being supported to return home to their parents more quickly.

f. Additional scrutiny work to be commissioned in 2022-2023 to explore if it is possible to identify any changes or improvement in practice as a result of previous Serious Case Review recommendations and actions.

Jane Wonnacot was commissioned by the WSP to identify the extent to which these actions have had a positive impact on practice. The evaluation was commissioned in June 2022 with an agreement that the focus would be on three specific practice issues that had been identified from a previous review W6 and issues that also emerged as themes in more recent cases:

- Working with neglect
- Child Sexual Abuse within the family
- Working with learning disabled parents.

The finding of the scrutiny work identified there is ample evidence of both partnership and single agency activity focused on improving practice in the areas of neglect and child sexual abuse. Audits show that this is beginning to have an impact on referrals and assessments and focus groups were able to describe changes to practice. This included school staff referring to training that had focused attention on the voice of the child and social workers feeling more confident in working with child sexual abuse.

There was minimal evidence of changes or improvements in work with learning disabled parents.

The outcome of this review is to be considered in work to be progressed on the revision of the Child Sexual Abuse and Neglect strategies.

Adults safeguarding will give specific focus to work to improve practice with learning disabled parents.

g. Additional scrutiny work to be undertaken in relation to robustness of the functioning of the MASH, application of Right Help Right Time Guidance and use of single agency Early Help to meet need at the earliest opportunity.

A review of the front door arrangements was completed in October 2022 to consider the functioning and robustness of MASH following the merge of the

Early Help hub and MASH in 2021, creating one front door. This was informed by a data analysis of pre and post merge contacts received to the front door which highlighted key areas of focus for the review.

A range of audit activity has been completed at part of the review, including scrutiny of application of thresholds in line with the RHRT guidance across the partnership and at the front door, to ensure timely and appropriate responses to children's needs in Walsall. The audits considered the quality, appropriateness and timeliness of referrals to the front door and the subsequent decision making within MASH, ensuring the right help and support was offered to children, young people and their families at the right time. Whilst there was assurance of robust, appropriate and timely decision making at the front door, inclusive of partnership screening and consideration of family history, it did highlight some further work required with the partnership in terms of early intervention and appropriate application of threshold.

In response to these findings, the RHRT training was updated, with more focus on early identification of need and exploring what help and support is required at the earliest opportunity across the partnership, with a particular focus on level 2 single agency Early Help. In addition, a RHRT training refresher was introduced. Bespoke training has been delivered to GP's and A&E, and a pod cast focusing on RHRT is being developed for West Midlands ambulance service and other 'Blue Light' services. 'Time to Talk' sessions within localities continued to be held every 8 weeks, bringing partners together who coordinate and support with the development and delivery of Early Help to children, young people and families in Walsall, providing opportunity to build locality knowledge, strengthen partnerships and enhance understanding around key priority areas to continue to support early identification and early intervention. Domestic abuse practitioners (DAP) were introduced within localities to offer early intervention and support families at level 2 single agency early help, who are experiencing domestic abuse and parental conflict.

The Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) in November 2022 provided additional scrutiny of the front door arrangements and effectiveness of the partnership, and reported;

"Children who need help and protection receive a coordinated and effective multi-agency response at the 'front door' in Walsall. Senior leaders ensure that there is a culture of continuous and shared learning across the partnership, which is successfully disseminated to staff. This helps to support identification of risk and needs for children, at the earliest opportunity, and promotes improvements in services for children and their families".

h. Re-establish capacity within the Business Unit and further the children and young people's engagement agenda.

Section 8 Business Unit Review of the annual report details the work undertaken to progress this action. In summary following the departure of the Permanent Business Manager and Quality Assurance Manager interim appointments were made to enable the partnership to continue business as

usual but also take the opportunity to undertake consultation, review and development work with the Business Unit and WSP members. The review of the business unit capacity has commenced, and further work is to be progressed to review all job roles.

12. Section 7 Progress against Priorities.

13. The WSP identified three priorities for progression, Neglect, Self-Neglect and All-Age Exploitation this was reinforced by the outcome of the JTAI outcome published in February 2022.

14. Neglect

15. This is the second year of Neglect being progressed as a priority for the partnership. Steady progress has been made in improving the multiagency arrangements with work being undertaken to review and relaunch the neglect strategy and the implementation of the Graded Care Profile 2.

16. Adult self-neglect is also a priority for the WSP and work has been undertaken to ensure the 'Think Family' approach underpins the areas of practice identified in the Adult Self Neglect Strategy.

17. All aged Exploitation

18. WSP remain committed to an All-Aged Exploitation (AAE) approach to tackle the issues in the borough of risk and vulnerability to exploitation experience by young people and adults with care and support needs across the Borough.

19. The AAE sub-group has reviewed and implemented its multiagency arrangements. The commission of the Exploitation Hub has provided invaluable in person and direct support to residents to work on solutions to address issues of gang affiliation, related activity, and wider links between criminal offending behaviour and exploitation. The Hub is also working with schools, parents and carers to raise awareness of the signs of exploitation and what to do if they are concerned about their child.

20. Members will be reminded of the positive comments received from the Joint Targeted Area inspection in November 2022. The JTAI report summarised the following as key strengths and impacts from local arrangements to identify and respond to exploitation.

"Risks to children from sexual or criminal exploitation are recognised well at the front door. The daily Exploitation Triage meeting is a well-attended multi-agency meeting that explores effectively the risks faced by children when they are reported as missing. Information is shared effectively in order to help professionals' understanding of risks and actions, which helps inform decision-making. "

"The chair of the Exploitation Triage meeting rotates between its core members, which is inclusive and indicative of confidence in the commitment and capability of the participants in the meeting. This ensures that responses to child protection are a shared responsibility across all partners."

21. Whilst the work around adults' exploitation is less progressed with very few referrals being received by the partnership, the WSP is working with partners to increase identification, referrals, and response across the multiagency workforce. Work continues to improve the performance and quality assurance arrangements. The commission to produce a strategic needs assessment will be taken forward in 2023-2024 and will be instrumental in strengthening the understanding of the prevalence of exploitation in the Borough and enable more targeted multiagency response to address the issues.

22. Child sexual abuse

23. Nationally child sexual abuse referrals have seen a significant decline. WSP has had a focus on child sexual abuse since 2019 and has worked with the Centre of Expertise to develop the CSA multi-agency Strategy 2020-2023. In quarter 4 of the business year the WSP Executive Group were presented with information which suggested that further work needed to be undertaken around Walsall's identification and response to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). The CSA strategy will be subject to review through 2023-2024 and will consider any crosscutting issues for the adult safeguarding agenda.

24. Section 9 Performance Data - Children in the Safeguarding System

25. The WSP Performance data and Quality Assurance activity of all children in the safeguarding system has told us the following:

- There were 299 contacts directly for Early Help Support. The largest proportion of contacts received in March 23 came from children and young people aged between 10 and 15 years old.
- 49% were relating to female children and the largest proportion of contacts were for children and young people from a white ethnic background.
- The Rate of referrals per 10,000 is 481 which is a decrease from 496 (2021-22). It is lower than the statistical neighbours (624), England (534) and West Midlands (503) averages.
- The number of referrals per 10,000 resulting in no further action (3) has decreased from 2021-22 (4) this is the lower than England average (8) and statistical neighbour average (10) but similar to West Midlands (3).
- 90% of Walsall's assessments in 2022-23 were completed with 45 working days, this is similar to 2021-22. Our performance is now higher than those of our statistical neighbours (80%) England (84%) and West Midlands (82%) averages.
- 84% of ICPC's were completed within 15 working days of a strategy discussion and performance is the same as in 2021-22 and is higher than our statistical neighbours (83) England (79) and West Midlands averages (82).
- Seen a reduction of 396, 372 of whom are 12 and under becoming subject of a plan.
- children who enter care following a child protection plan is reducing from 25.4% in 2019-20 to 17.9% in the 12 months to 31st December 2022
- 12 and under, this has reduced from 27.7% to 19.5%.
- the number of children entering care after a period of CP planning has reduced by 232 children, 202 of whom are 12 and under
- Neglect and emotional abuse continue to be the highest categories at initial assessment (36% and 47% respectively).

- Emotional abuse is significantly higher than England (38%) Statistical neighbour (40%) and West Midlands (44%) averages.
- Data relating to children in care (CiC) and care leavers is mainly positive, however where there are slight declines in performance relating to stability of children in care and this continues to be monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board

26. **Section 10 How feedback from children and families has informed our work and influenced provision.**

27. There was positive contribution to the annual report this year, but there remains more work to do to ensure a robust and embedded arrangement across the partnership, to consistently ask, listen and act on the views of children and their families.

This will continue to be a golden thread integral to the WSP strategic plans.

28. **Section 11 Opportunities to Learn and Improve**

29. Multi-agency audits provide an important view into the effectiveness of our safeguarding system and has identified some positive practice and possibly highlighted how factors such as workforce challenges can impact on the effectiveness of multi-agency working. This further illustrates the crucial role that partners across the system, but particularly as part of Performance and Quality Assurance process, play in identifying, addressing, and mitigating these factors.

30. Multiagency audits (MAA) - During 2022-2023, the MAA audits focused on three themes including self-harm, neglect and exploitation with the latter being a theme twice in the year. Exploitation was a focus for WSP due to the preparations required as part of the JTAI inspections and all three are strategic priorities.

As detailed in Table 1 in the annual report, overall, the grading of multi-agency practice has largely remained consistent during 2022-2023 with 85% being graded as good or requires improvement. Positively, this figure increased to 100% in Q2 when self-harm was the theme. However there has been, a 15% increase of cases rated inadequate when compared to 2021-2022.

31. Learning from Case Reviews

Through 2022-2023, 7 cases were heard at Rapid Review with 6 deemed not meeting threshold to progress onto a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR). One case was referred for consideration and was notified to the National Panel and Ofsted as a Serious Child Safeguarding Incident. This case progressed to a LCSPR and will continue to progress through 2023-24.

32. There were two alternative reviews and 1 tabletop review for a child sexual abuse incident. Four of the cases that did not meet criteria identified child neglect as a key theme. WSP approved the commission of an Independent Reviewer to complete a Thematic Review, which will focus on barriers to

effective implementation of the Neglect Strategy in practice. At the time of writing the review had not concluded.

33. Walsall also has responded swiftly to local, national learning arising from the Solihull review and the circumstances into the sad and untimely death of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson.

34. How the learning was shared

The WSP continue to develop new ways of cascading the learning arising from MAA and case reviews.

- a. The outcome of reviews are promptly applied and featured in WSP learning and training material.
- b. All learning from reviews is disseminated across the children and adult's workforce through 7-minute briefings. This is a well-known approach based on a technique adapted from the FBI!
- c. 7-minute briefings are sent out in WSP newsletters, prior or post publication of reports, at practitioner events, and policy or procedure development and launch events.
- d. Practitioner events are held in person and virtually, these are well received by multiagency practitioners. The events are recorded ensuring wider accessibility and sustainability of learning in the system and across the multiagency workforce.

35. **Section 12. Workforce learning and Development.**

36. The partnership continues to approach its work with practices adopted during the pandemic however over the year we have seen a steady increase of in person meetings across the partnership substructure and in training and other learning events. The hybrid approach continues to be an efficient and welcomed approach for partner members to manage their commitments across the partnership.

37. Learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including training, on outcomes for children and families from Early Help to children looked after and care leavers.

Key Highlights

- 52 events either face to face or virtual have taken place.
- 1,504 attended virtual or face to face training.
- 920 completed evaluations which include post evaluation or Impact evaluations.
- 19 videos or webinars have been added to the website.
- Video recordings have been accessed 1,194 times.
- 1,123 eLearning modules have been completed – however, these are predominately by Walsall Council employees due to external partners being unable to access the Learning Management System.

38. One of the key areas for development in 2023-2024 is to develop and implement a framework to assess the impact of workforce learning on practice and its impact on 4th Partner (children and their family) outcomes.

39. **Section 13. What Scrutiny arrangements are in place and why these have been adopted? How successful have they been?**

40. The programme of independent scrutiny has existed through the appointment of an Independent Chair and Scrutineer Chairing and having oversight of the joint Performance and Quality Assurance (PQA) Subgroup and Operations and Scrutiny Subgroup. This was an active way for the Chair to gain insight and understanding into the quality of frontline practice.

41. The Independent Chair provides regular challenge to the system, and this is reflected in regular assurance reports to the Executives Group meeting.

42. Plans to split the adult and children's Operations and Scrutiny Group and appoint an additional Chair was enacted in quarter 4 with a gradual introduction to the changes to the partnership's governance and subgroup arrangements. This and more focussed response to independent scrutiny across the Partnership's activity is to be a key area for improvement in 2023-24.

43. **Section 14. Conclusion** How effective have our arrangements been?

44. Members will note the positive outcome of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to children and families who need help took place in November 2022. This provided the WSP with assurance that the partnership work was progressing well, and that practice is effective.

45. **Section 15. Strategic Plan 2023 - 2025**

The key priority areas identified for the WSCB in 2022 – 23 continue to be the main priority areas for further development and embedment for the Partnership in 2023/24. In addition, the Safeguarding Executive Group reached agreement that work to improve multi-agency oversight and management of child sexual abuse would be the 4th Priority. The review of the Child Sexual Abuse Strategy will consider any cross-cutting issues for the adult safeguarding agenda.

- Priority 1 - Neglect
- Priority 2 – Self-Neglect and Hoarding
- Priority 3 – All-Age Exploitation
- Priority 4 – Child Sexual Abuse

46. In addition, there is a programme of work planned to further strengthen the governance and leadership across the WSP substructure, to drive practice improvements, increase accountability and provide greater clarity of expectations for members of the partnership.

47. The summary plan sets out WSP ambitions and strategic priority areas of focus for 2023-2025 alongside summary actions that will help the partnership subgroups to devise plans to oversee activity that helps to keep children, young people, and adults, be and feel safe and protected from abuse and neglect.

Recommendations:

That:


1. The Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the content of the final draft WSP Childrens Annual Report 2022-2023 attached.



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PROOF 105611 Safe

Contact Officer:

Janet Russell - Interim Business Manager

 01922 658366

Janet.russell@walsall.gov.uk