

**14<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

**7**

**Title of the Report:** Family Safeguarding: the first four 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. It is a Department for Education funded partnership model, developed in Hertfordshire, which supports families with children of 12 years and under where parents have issues of substance abuse, mental ill-health or domestic violence, and the child(ren) are subject to Child in Need or Child Protection Plans.

## **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 grant-funded model needs to develop evidence to support sustainability.

## **3. Recommendations**

### **I. To note implementation of the Family Safeguarding Model**

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. 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 to fund the adult specialist workers in the model, with a requirement to make this model sustainable by year 4.

This model also seeks to achieve wider benefits across the system, with a reduction in crisis, attendance at accident and emergency, and repeat police call-outs.

- II. To have oversight of work undertaken to embed the Family Safeguarding Model across the partnership and work to make this model sustainable

This programme of work is overseen by the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Board. All provider and commissioning partners (Health, Police, Local Authority, Black Country Women's Aid and Change Grow Live) have taken part in a range of work streams (outlined below) to shape and develop Family Safeguarding. This has been reinforced by the signing of a partnership pledge to cement their commitment to implementing Family Safeguarding and working together to make this a sustainable model.

Underpinning the sustainability will be a clear use of data to evidence improvements in outcomes for families and reduction in costs across the system, such as reduced police call-outs and reduced numbers of looked after children. The approach to collecting this data and the specific measures have been agreed across the partnership. However, having only gone live on 1 September 2020, we are yet to see any measurable changes in many of the domains. We anticipate that, if we return in six months, we would have a clear overview of early impacts.

- III. To consider how Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee can support in making the model sustainable through support and challenge

National research shows that the break-even point for Family Safeguarding is reached after approximately two years. The initial investment in Walsall was largely from the Department for Education and was required to fund sixteen adult specialist posts, two project posts and six business support posts.

Some local authority areas that have previously implemented the model have achieved sustainability through sharing ongoing costs with partners. In others, the costs have been entirely borne by the local authority from the savings released. In Walsall, we are strongly committed to a partnership approach to sustainability.

## **4. Report detail – Know**

### **4.1 Overall**

We had a successful go-live on 1 September 2020, following a pause due to COVID-19. Currently, we have 13 of the 16 adult workers in post. The workforce had been trained in both the Family Safeguarding Model and in Motivational Interviewing. At the point of go-live, we simultaneously launched an electronic workbook which underpins the Family Safeguarding Model.

On 19 October 2020, there was a formal launch of the model which was attended by 250 people and was widely commended for including helpful information in an engaging manner. Councillor Wilson gave an introduction as part of the launch.

As at 1 December 2020, we had 52 families and 79 children open under the Family Safeguarding Model.

We continue to work with Hertfordshire, who developed the model and who are supporting us in our implementation, and we are increasingly linking in with other local

authorities who use Family Safeguarding, extending our influence and improving our national profile.

Staff implementing Family Safeguarding remain positive and team managers are engaged with fortnightly informal meetings about Family Safeguarding.

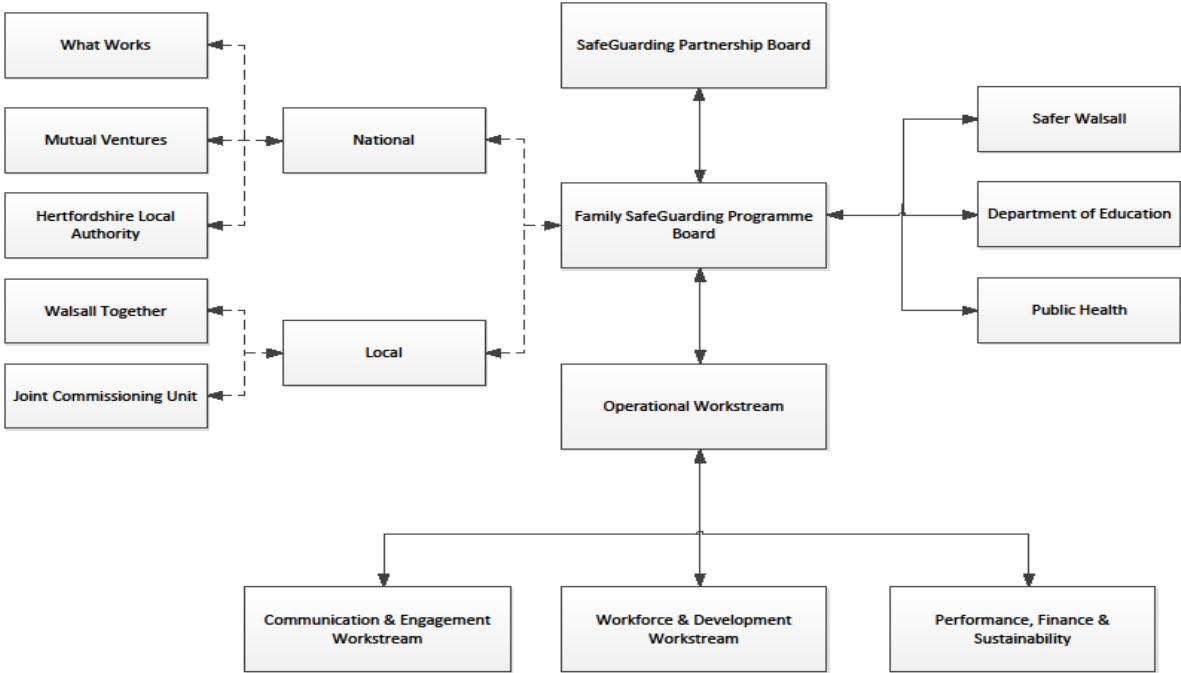
**4.2 Board and workstream arrangements**

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.

The Family Safeguarding Programme Board meets monthly for strategic debates about issues such as interdependencies and equalities with a range of engaged senior partners, as well as assuring the programme activities’ risks and issues.

Throughout the governance structure, there is active engagement from a range of partners, including those who directly employ the adult workers (such as Black Country Women’s Aid) and those who have wider influence and importance (such as the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group and Public Health). Front-line and operational partners are also actively engaged in the practical application of Family Safeguarding, including schools and Health Visitors.

Underpinning the Family Safeguarding Programme Board are four work streams which undertake the bulk of the programme activity (Operations, Communication, Workforce, and Performance). The programme structure is outlined 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.

Work has commenced on setting up virtual therapeutic groups for parents in the context of COVID-19. We anticipate informal discussions with families starting in December and more formal programmes commencing in January.

Policies and procedures have been reviewed by an external expert and went live on 30 November 2020. Guidance for both the workbook and practice has been refined and distributed. These documents will remain live and will be updated regularly and formally reviewed quarterly.

Additionally, there are clear links to the Walsall Right for Children Transformation Programme. Our 3-year transformation plan is focused on three strategic priorities to enable us to realise our vision and secure the associated benefits. These are:

#### **a) Reducing our demand**

- Stopping failure demand: when we are not the right organisation to provide help we currently end up being the default position. This leads to delay and not the right help for families with complex needs. Our transformation plan aims to redirect this demand through self-help and outlining clear roles and responsibilities of the partnership offer of support.
- Preventing escalation of demand (demand avoidance): helping the right families through a graduated response of evidence-based programmes, from targeted help to placement support.
- Avoidance of high cost help and support: strategic commissioning that provides the right, most cost-effective placements for our looked after children and the right packages of support for our children with SEND.

#### **b) Developing a highly skilled/stable workforce**

- Developing our profile as an employer
- Making the job do-able and enabling our workforce to do the right thing
- Supporting our staff with an effective workforce and wellbeing strategy
- Developing a clear career pathway and succession planning
- Having a clear recruitment and retention strategy

#### **c) Co-ordinating and influencing the establishment of a mature WR4C partnership platform to drive the delivery of the WR4C vision**

- Reducing our demand and preventing children, young people and families from needing costly statutory interventions will require a strong and mature partnership approach
- Connecting up transformation across Walsall in the interest children and families will be key including integrating services around our children and families where this makes sense for them: strategies, processes, adopting the same thresholds, removing duplication between partners and co-producing with families and the community

- This work will need to link with:
  - Walsall Together
  - Safeguarding Partnership
  - Walsall for All
  - Safer Communities
  - Resilient community
  - Youth Justice Board
  - Regional Violence Prevention
  - Troubled Families

#### **4.4 Performance and sustainability**

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.

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, with a strong emphasis on child outcomes and fewer partnership measures relating to parents.

National scrutiny of Family Safeguarding started in October 2020. We submitted a quarterly report to the Department for Education and, in parallel, Hertfordshire also submitted a report which evaluated our progress. The Department for Education and Hertfordshire gave us face-to-face feedback on 27 October 2020. This was extremely positive and there were no significant challenges. The summary from Hertfordshire about Walsall is below:

*“Walsall’s excellent start with their implementation has been maintained. They remain highly organised, with the agenda driven from the highest level. The DCS, AD and Independent Safeguarding Partnership Chair demonstrate committed leadership and have retained a positive engagement with the Partnership and workforce.”*

Locally, we have developed a detailed outcomes framework with underpinning Key Performance Indicators agreed with each partner and including equalities measures woven through. We have produced a simple dashboard for local authority data as it relates to Family Safeguarding and have a draft of a similar dashboard for February for partners. The detailed data gathering has commenced in January 2021.

We have designed a very simple, short quarterly survey of staff to understand both their experience and practices with regard to Family Safeguarding. We have an outline of approaches to elicit family and child opinions.

**4.5 Expected outcomes**

There have been two national evaluations of Family Safeguarding following wave one and wave two. The most recent report was published in October 2020. Below are a selection of the outcomes, with either the most robust evidence or applicability to the situation in Walsall. Overall, the most significant outcome is that more families stay together safely. Some more specific expected outcomes listed below:

**a) Outcomes for children and families**

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.

**b) Outcomes for 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.

**c) Outcomes relating to local authority**

The percentage reductions in new looked after children per 10,000 population pre- and post-implementation of Family Safeguarding range from 9% in Peterborough to 30% Hertfordshire.

**d) Outcomes for the wider system**

The qualitative consultations undertaken with local authority stakeholders revealed a shared view that Family Safeguarding is likely to have been responsible for a large proportion of the reductions in call-outs to police reported through this evaluation. The consultations with parents and carers undertaken by the evaluators also provided numerous examples of where police call-outs are unlikely to have reduced to the same extent were it not for the multi-disciplinary, restorative approach applied through Family Safeguarding.

**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.

We have 13 of the 16 adult workers in post. A breakdown is in the table below:

Type of worker	Number in post	Employing organisation
Domestic Abuse Victim	4	Black Country Women’s Aid

Domestic Abuse perpetrator	2	National Probation Service
Mental Health	4	Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
Substance Abuse	3	Change Grow Live (Beacon)

On 27 November 2020, we recruited a Clinical Psychologist, who is due to start in January 2021. We are currently advertising for the two remaining Probation Support Officers and have an interview scheduled with a clear development plan for current and future probation workers. Once these posts are filled, we will have our full complement of adult specialist staff.

We have developed a simple map of the skills and interventions offered by each of the adult specialisms, which was shared across the service to offer further transparency. We have recruited a Practice Development Manager with specific responsibility for partnership working. She will be linking in with a wide range of partners, including Health Visitors, schools and the police, to enhance collaboration across all partners who are involved with safeguarding children, and not just those who are part of the model itself.

#### **4.7 Communications**

We have a detailed communication plan, devised collaboratively with partnership support, which includes a comprehensive stakeholder approach.

The regular internal communication with staff continues, including written weekly updates in a general end of week update, and check-in with managers, as well as briefings to colleagues in Early Help and Education.

Around 223 partners attended one of several weekly general briefing sessions in August and September 2020. There have also been regular articles and contributions in a range of internal and partnership newsletters and wider briefings.

Around 250 people attended the successful two-hour virtual launch event. Subsequently, we have moved to bespoke partnership communication with presentations to 90 Head Teachers and 120 GPs.

#### **4.8 Financial information**

The last-minute pause of Family Safeguarding due to COVID-19 led to cost pressures, as people had already been recruited. This was escalated through Gold Command and contingencies identified. In parallel, we requested £86k from the Department for Education. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, we have not recouped this money, although it is possible they may reverse the decision if this remains a cost pressure going forward.

There has been detailed modelling work to predict the efficiencies and cost-avoidance of the Family Safeguarding Model. We have commissioned some bespoke modelling of cost and benefits from Hertfordshire, which should give us some indications of possible savings

## **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.

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.

The next milestones are the quarterly report to DfE in January 2021 and the reduction in the tapered funding from the DfE in September 2021.



## 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)
- Outcome framework
- Family Safeguarding Programme Governance
- Department for Education return October 2020

### Author

Helen Billings  
Family Safeguarding Programme Manager

☎ 65xxxx

✉ [helen.billings@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:helen.billings@walsall.gov.uk)