

**Children's Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Agenda
Item No.**

13 April 2022

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Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Childrens Services and Education

Report:

1. Although this year has been challenging due to a pandemic, there continues to be evidence that children are safe in Walsall (data on page 8 of full report):
 - I. An appropriate reduction in referrals to MASH
 - II. Positive impact of Early Help services
 - III. Positive reductions seen in the number of children subject to child protection plans
 - IV. Positive increase of the number of families supported through the Family Safeguarding Model
- 2 Partnership focus on safeguarding has continued through regular meetings between statutory partners despite the challenges brought by the pandemic.
- 3 Attendance at multi-agency meetings has improved, particularly since they moved online. This virtual or blended approach allows for greater flexibility moving forward.
- 3 A successful bid to the TCE (Tackling Child Exploitation) Programme saw work with local colleagues begin to develop work in relation to community resilience and engagement and consider the role which the wider community can take in developing an effective, strategic all-age response to exploitation.
- 5 The CSA Strategy was updated and re-agreed by partners and an action plan developed.
- 6 The Neglect Strategy was revisited to bring a renewed focus.
- 7 Progress was made with the All-Age Exploitation pathway and included the development of an Exploitation Hub.
- 8 The multi-agency audit programme continued to obtain learning in order to improve practice and saw improvements in the case ratings.
- 9 During the year there were 5 multi-agency audits carried out, 4 were linked to the safeguarding partnership priorities and one (during quarter three) was in response to the
- 10 Parliamentary Under- Secretary of State for Children and Families request for assurance in respect of services to new-borns and infants

during lockdown . In respect of the latter, all the children had been seen by the relevant multi-agency professionals with good recording regarding whether this was face to face or virtually. All case files audited had relevant risk assessments in place and PPE was utilised appropriately as required for in person contact. There was consistent evidence of good information sharing across agencies. Needs identified during assessment were being met and children and their families were being supported. Where risks had escalated, there was clear evidence that the appropriate actions had been taken to respond and consider these in a multi-agency forum, leading to an initial child protection plan for one infant.

- 11 Work has taken place to embed the SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre) pathway, supported by SARC Lunch and Learn training sessions.
- 12 An independent review (by Penny Thompson, CBE) commissioned by the 3 statutory partners in Autumn 2020 to consider the first year of the new arrangements was a proactive and positive undertaking. The report commented on the committed and effective Safeguarding Partnership Business Unit and the openness, candour and self-reflection demonstrated by the partnerships leaders.
- 13 Approaching the end of the contract held by the previous Independent Chair (Liz Murphy) the statutory partners reflected on the independent scrutiny of the Safeguarding Arrangements and opted to re-appoint an Independent Chair. Recruitment took place in the early part of 2021 with the new post holder (Sally Hodges) commenced in April 2021.
- 14 **Areas for improvement or focus in 2021-22**
 - I. To implement recommendations made by Penny Thompson in her independent review of the Safeguarding Partnership Arrangements, including creating an Executive Group and reducing the number of partnership priorities to provide more focus and impact.
 - II. To consider and implement recommendations from the Wood Review.
 - III. Progression and sign off the All-Age Exploitation Strategy.
 - IV. Revision and continued delivery of the Neglect Strategy.
 - V. To review the participation strategy to ensure we effectively engage with young people and practitioners and improve our communication with partners
 - VI. Implementation of the ICON Programme across Walsall
 - VII. Strengthen the links between the Family Safeguarding model and Walsall Safeguarding Partnership

- VIII. Develop a positive and productive relationship between Safeguarding Partnership and the Safer Walsall Partnership
- IX. Due to Covid-19 there was limited inspection activity of the statutory partners during this year. Once this re-commences the Partnership will be sighted on and respond to the respective findings.
- X. Track the impact that learning from our reviews and audits have had by carrying out a range of assurance activities and engaging with practitioners.
- XI. To embed Impact Evaluations across the Partnership as part of management oversight and supervisions.

Recommendations:

That:

1. That Scrutiny note the content of the Annual Report

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