



Committee and Date

Council

27 September 2012

Item

**20**

Public

**REPORT FROM THE COUNCIL LEADER AND HEAD OF PAID SERVICE IN RESPECT OF SAFEGUARDING**

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**1. Summary**

This report for the Leader and Head of Paid service is provided in respect of the required annual review of Children and Young People's Safeguarding activity across the Council. It reports on progress, activity and performance as at end quarter 1 2012/2013 and on developments underway since the start of this financial year.

**2. Recommendations**

That Council considers the content of this report noting that the Safer and Confident Scrutiny committee will continue to receive quarterly reports on safeguarding performance.

That Council receive a further report in September 2013.

**REPORT**

**3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

The impact of a failure to protect vulnerable children or adults would be considerable for the service users, their families but also the Council. Major reputational damage could follow. The likelihood of this happening may increase at times of significant organisational change and changes in personnel.

We have reduced the associated risks by protecting safeguarding services from major cuts or organisational change. We have addressed the need to retain experienced staff through a range of measures including supervisory arrangements and workplace improvements which have been effective.

We are improving both the Safeguarding Children Board and the Safeguarding Adults Board to ensure that multi agency working is coordinated and effective throughout the Shropshire Council area.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

There are no significant financial matters to consider. The Safeguarding Group has met its savings targets for the current financial year. Safeguarding activity must be considered a priority area and therefore resources provided at levels that enable services to be delivered in line with statutory requirements.

Specific extra investment is being made through the early intervention grant to offer advice and support to front line organisations dealing with vulnerable children.

#### **5. Background**

The Children Act 2004 introduced specific statutory requirements relating to the roles of the Director of Children's services (DCS) and to the Lead Member for Children's Services (LM). These are outlined in Sections 18 and 19 of the Act and in the associated Statutory Guidance.

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/statutory%20guidance%20on%20the%20roles%20and%20responsibilities%20of%20the%20dcs%20and%20lmcs.pdf>

The DCS and LM are responsible for the functions of the children's services Authority and are described as being key to driving change to secure better outcomes for children and young people.

As well as direct responsibility for the Council's safeguarding services it is expected that they will build and sustain effective partnerships across a range of organisations in order to improve outcomes and ensure that children are properly safeguarded.

The Lead Member has a number of responsibilities in relation to safeguarding which include corporate parenting responsibilities for the children in the Council's care.

It is expected that the DCS reports directly to the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) who in turn reports with the Leader to Council on the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements

The Director of Peoples Services has become temporarily also the Head of Paid Service but this is only until April 2013 and arrangements for his permanent replacement need to be resolved before this time.

#### **6. Activity and Performance 2011/2012**

The recommendations from the announced Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children (February 2011) have all been thoroughly addressed.

Ofsted recommended that the essential role of partners in preventative work be supported and protected. A 'Back to Basics' review of early intervention services has been completed which has full and positive engagement from statutory and voluntary agencies and schools. This is addressing the arrangements for early assessment and support.

Health Services have addressed the recommendations around designated nurse capacity and therefore are able to train independent contractors - for example, dental practitioners and pharmacists. They have also improved the information sharing arrangements between hospitals and community services.

Social care services have significantly enhanced their auditing arrangements and are following up the findings swiftly. An example is the focus on the engagement of practitioners and managers at all levels taking part in audit activity and the development of a learning dissemination tool. Multi-agency safeguarding practices are also considered and this has led to some positive and attentive work with, for example - adult services such as community substance misuse; maternity services and probation in safeguarding work.

Performance is embedded at the front line which has resulted in significantly improved outcomes in relation to both child protection and LAC. Our performance indicators (2011-2012) show a number of improvements (see Appendix 1).

The timeliness of our performance in respect of initial and core assessments is very good. The level of re-registration of children on child protection plans remains low and we currently have no children subject to safeguarding plans for two years or more.

These improvements have been achieved as a direct result of excellent social worker recruitment and retention activity and the commitment of managers to the provision of sound supervisory arrangements. The co-location of teams in Mount McKinley House has had a major positive affect on communication and work practices and has been much appreciated. Given the competition nationally for qualified and experienced social workers and managers it is vital that we maintain good working conditions and competitive rates of pay.

The Unannounced Ofsted Inspection of contact referral and assessment arrangements (October 2011) resulted in positive findings. There were just three areas for follow-up: the arrangements for dealing with referrals to the children's disability service, the implementation of improvements to the electronic recording system and the full use of the revised auditing arrangements. These have been actively addressed with improvements in all areas.

We have now developed quality assurance measures for child protection plans to focus on the qualitative aspect of our services (also outlined in Appendix 1). This is another tool for ensuring that expected outcomes are identified and achieved and that children and young people are listened to.

Corporate parenting responsibilities are regularly promoted given the importance of services to children in Shropshire's care. Ann Hartley, Lead member chairs the Corporate Parenting Panel which works closely with and includes the Children in Care Council. A core group of members attend and support the development work. One of the main areas of focus currently is the arrangement of work placements and apprenticeships for our young people looked after. IROs are required to produce an annual report for Corporate Parenting Panel which contributes towards the Local Authority's quality assurance and performance management. The IRO service is a county wide service which enables the IROs to have a panoramic view of the work undertaken with our children and young people

who are cared for by Shropshire Council. They are well positioned to comment on the quality of service and to identify themes or gaps with a close watch always being kept on issues of safeguarding.

The Family Justice Review (November 2011), recommends that all *'local authorities should review the operation of their Independent Reviewing Officer service to ensure that it is effective. In particular they should ensure that they are adhering to guidance regarding case loads. The Director of Children's Services / Director of Social Services and Lead Member for Children should receive regular reports from the IRO on the work undertaken and its outcomes. Local Safeguarding Children Boards should consider such reports.'* In Shropshire, a review of the Independent Review Unit is currently underway to consider the effectiveness of the service as a whole and the outcome of the review is expected in October 2012.

Members are involved in the statutory monthly visits to our three children's homes and the commitment and standard of reporting has been commended by Ofsted.

LAC performance indicators demonstrate that our numbers of Looked After Children are relatively stable which is positive. Placement stability outcomes are good both in terms of number of moves and length of time in placement. This contributes to both the safeguarding of the young person as well as to their overall health, wellbeing and development.

## **7. Safeguarding Peer Review May 2012**

The Peer Review of Shropshire's safeguarding arrangements took place from 14-18<sup>th</sup> May 2012. The team was led by Lancashire's Director of Children's Services and consisted of a number of senior managers in social care, an elected Lead Member and officers with education, health and police backgrounds.

The key issues identified confirmed the areas that the Council and its partners are addressing. The review has assisted renewed focus and impetus in relation to the developmental activities.

The review determined that there is a need for a vision and direction for Children's Services which is clearly shared across the Council and its partners and which is visible and understood at all levels.

The main issues identified were as follows:

- Although the threshold for intervention was appropriate the arrangements for schools and others to access support and advice were not always straightforward.
- There is a need to develop a simple and clear continuum of support that is known and understood by partners.
- The arrangements for handling referrals and information in respect of domestic violence need to be revisited.

- There is a need for better deployment of health visitors and school nurses to allow them to engage effectively with more vulnerable children.
- The arrangements for interviewing children and young people who have gone missing from placements made by other Local Authorities need to be more robust.
- The Council's Scrutiny Committee arrangements for safeguarding need to be reviewed to ensure there is sufficient focus on this area.
- Work needs to continue to ensure an effective approach to improving outcomes for children suffering from long term neglect and to avoid drift.
- The Council needs to ensure that the Call Centre IT system and Care First are linked in order to avoid the duplication of work and the recording of all contacts.
- There is a need to embed the performance management role of the LSCB as well as look at the structure below the main board to ensure that there is no duplication.

All recommendations **are being** addressed through the Peer Review action plan (attached at Appendix 2)

## **8. Development of the Shropshire Children's Trust and Safeguarding Children Board**

During 2011 – 2012 the Shropshire Children's Trust has been reconfigured and linked to the emerging Health and Wellbeing Board as well as to Area Fora. There is now a much smaller and strategic executive group with the key managers from the respective agencies.

This is supplemented by regular Area Meetings where members of the trust come together with front line Managers to share information and to look at priorities for development and areas of concern.

Similarly with the Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB), an independent Chair and lay Board members have been appointed. The level of representation at Board meetings by member organisations and the Board's subgroup structure has been reviewed to ensure it can effectively discharge its functions to challenge practice and put in place actions and strategies for improvement. At the Development Day at the end of 2011 our joint priorities for action were agreed and these have been subsequently been endorsed by the main Board.

The SSCB priorities are:

- Compromised parenting ( resulting from domestic abuse, parental mental illhealth and substance misuse)
- Communication
- Missing children

The Chair of the Board (Sally Halls) will attend the Children’s Trust on a regular basis to ensure a strong linkage between the two bodies. Sally will attend the Safer and Stronger Scrutiny Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2012 to report on the Safeguarding Board’s developments, its work programme and most importantly the development of its scrutiny and challenge role.

## **9. Conclusion**

Overall the direction of travel has been a positive one and services are all committed to on-going development and to the swift actioning of the peer review action plan.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Ann Hartley**

**Local Member All members hold corporate parenting responsibilities**

**Appendices 1 – Performance Child Protection and Looked After Children  
2- Peer Review Action Plan**