

		AGENDA ITEM 5
		SSC/06/10
Committee:	Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee – Safeguarding Sub-Committee	
Date:	22 December 2010	
<u>Updated Stage 1 Report</u>		
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Purpose of the Item

To confirm the updated Report (which shows “tracked changes” from the Report discussed at the Committee meeting earlier this month), and support its approval by the Committee at its next meeting.

SAFEGUARDING SCRUTINY: REPORT ON FIRST STAGE OF WORK UNDERTAKEN BY SAFEGUARDING SUB-COMMITTEE

Background

In 2009, the Committee carried out a major scrutiny of safeguarding services provided to children and young people in the county. This was done in the light of a number of adverse inspection reports and the County Council's own recognition that services were not of an adequate standard.

In the summer of 2010, the Committees set up a Safeguarding Sub-Committee, with the following membership:-

Councillors Terri Sargent (Chairman), John Aldridge, Anne Brown, Margaret Hutchon, John Knapman and Colin Riley and Mr Richard Carson (one of the school governor representatives). Due to illness, Councillor Hutchon subsequently stood down and was replaced by Councillor Theresa Higgins.

The Committee agreed that the body be a standing sub-committee rather than a time limited task and finish group, so that it can continue to work for as long as the Committee deems appropriate.

The Sub-Committee's original stance was that it would look at six 'Pillar Lines of Enquiry'; such work to be done as the various Service Improvement Plans progressed. These Pillars are:-

- confident leadership
- an organisation fit for purpose
- effective partnerships making the difference
- high quality front line practice
- measuring what counts
- becoming an employer of choice

However, the Sub-Committee was aware that a joint inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Ofsted was being undertaken in the summer of 2010 and agreed that it would not commence its work in detail until the inspection report was published.

The report was published on 6 August 2010. Regrettably, it found that the overall effectiveness of safeguarding services remained as Grade 4 (inadequate).

Clearly the Sub-Committee could not ignore this finding and it therefore changed its scrutiny approach. Although the Pillar Lines of Enquiry would still be taken into account, it was now vital to ensure that the correct processes and procedures were in place to enable not only the County Council but also all the other agencies involved with the safeguarding of children to move forward from the inadequate rating. This was crucial to the future safeguarding of Essex children.

The Sub-Committee has always regarded this as the first stage of its work, with follow up work being undertaken at the appropriate time (a) to talk to front line staff

and service users, to ensure that theory is being converted into front line practice and that services to Essex children and families can demonstrably be shown to have improved; (b) to talk with witnesses from other statutory agencies and the third sector; and (c) to monitor the progress on the issues raised in this first stage of its work.

Process for first stage of scrutiny

The Sub-Committee has used the concerns and Areas for Improvement raised in the joint CQC/Ofsted report as its starting point. It has also referred to the Improvement Plan prepared by the County Council and signed up to by other agencies. A number of meetings have been held, in the form of witness sessions, and the Sub-Committee thanks all concerned for their honesty and willingness to answer the many questions put to them. Notes from the witness sessions are attached to the final version of this report. Witnesses seen were (in order):

- Malcolm Newsam, then interim Director of Schools, Children's and Families (SCF) Directorate
- Paul Abraham. Assistant Director for Performance and Organisational Intelligence, PCPR Directorate
- Caroline Ellner, ICS Support Adviser, SCF Directorate
- Jean Imray, Interim Director for Improvement, SCF Directorate
- Paul Fallon, Independent Chairman of Essex Children's Safeguarding Board (ECSB)
- Nicola Park, ECSB Business and Performance Manager
- Wendi Ogle –Welbourn, Director for Commissioning, SCF Directorate
- Sheila Bremner, Chief Executive, North Essex PCTs
- Stewart Macarthur, children's issues day to day lead, joint appointment between County Council and Essex PCTs

The Sub-Committee held most of its meetings in public. One session, when the new SWIPE computerised system was explained and reviewed, was held in private, due to the personal nature of some of the information being revealed.

Finally, the Sub-Committee was kept up to date with national developments occurring during this six month period, such as the review being led by Dr Jean Munro, the closure of the Contact Point database and information about Serious Case Reviews. The Munro Report should be published during the first half of 2011 and is likely to have major implications for safeguarding services across the country. The Sub-Committee will, of course, reflect and comment upon those implications in due course.

The Sub-Committee reported back to the Committee at each monthly meeting and this Stage 1 Report was endorsed by the Committee at its meeting on 6 January 2011.

Fundamental issues arising so far

A list of findings and recommendations is set out later in this Report. However, there are some fundamental thoughts from the Sub-Committee which underpin everything else it says.

(a) Future inspections

Both unannounced and announced inspections will be taking place in the near future. For the benefit of Essex children, families and staff it is imperative that the County Council must not fail and be classed as inadequate again.

(b) Sharing the blame

The County Council has fairly been criticised for its poor performance. However, safeguarding of children is a multi agency responsibility and criticism for previous low performance should rightly be shared around all the agencies concerned. All agencies accept this. There is still an inaccurate but widespread public perception that County Council 'Social Services' alone is responsible for every shortcoming.

(c) Measuring quality and quantity

Quantitative issues are relatively easy to measure. Some of the results prove a lot; some very little. Amongst all the Key Indicators there appears to be very limited ways in which to measure the quality of services provided. The Sub-Committee has not yet been convinced that sufficient attention is given to qualitative measures, either locally or nationally, although it accepts that this is a difficult subject to measure. It is aware of work being done locally on Performance Indicators and will follow this up in Stage 2 of its work.

(d) Are we being successful?

So far the Sub-Committee has looked at processes and procedures. These must be in place and applied by all agencies to underpin any successful system. However, they cannot of themselves tell you if you are actually being successful and actually helping children and families. The Sub-Committee has not yet seen sufficient significant evidence at this stage to say that the safeguarding process is 'successful' and seeking such proof will be an important component of the second stage of its work. This will need to be handled extremely delicately as far as speaking to service users is concerned.

(e) Is the will to improve in place?

On the evidence received, undoubtedly and reassuringly **YES**. Lead Members and officers accept that the position has been inadequate in the past and have evidenced a determination to work together and improve it dramatically. This acceptance is crucial if progress is to be made.

The bigger picture in the last six months

Due to the nature of this scrutiny, the Sub-Committee has been investigating a fluid situation. The County Council has had to submit regular reports to an Improvement Board and through that Board to the Government. The Cabinet Member has updated the Cabinet on the position and the Committee has received regular monthly updates

from the Chairman of the Sub-Committee. These have all helped keep the issue in the limelight.

The Sub-Committee has also had to acknowledge the realism of the financial situation faced by all agencies, with funding decreasing over each of the next four years. Any proposals put forward must take this into account.

Findings and recommendations

These have been spilt into four categories:

- overarching , involving all agencies
- Essex County Council
- Health Related issues
- Essex Children's Safeguarding Board

The other major agency involved in safeguarding is the Police. As it is not mentioned in the joint report no discussions have been held with the Essex Force. Such work will, however, be carried out during a later stage of the Sub-Committee's work, as will discussions with other agencies and the third sector.

OVERARCHING ISSUES

Findings	Recommendations
The use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has increased. The introduction of Multi Agency Allocation Groups (MAAGs) has helped this and frontline practitioners such as School Head Teachers and General Practitioners, who have hitherto been sceptical, now feel that the CAF plays an important role in safeguarding.	(1) That the remit of the Sub-Committee be amended so that (a) it can follow through reviewing how agencies use the CAF; and (b) it can check the effectiveness of any such arrangements.
The Sub-Committee welcomes the bringing together of the previously separate agency plans into one Joint Improvement Plan. It also welcomes the proposal to bring together Commissioning Plans into a single document, under one team.	(2) That this issue be followed up further by the Sub-Committee with continued high level dialogue with the main players
All agencies now seem to accept their responsibility for previous shortcomings in safeguarding children.	

COUNTY COUNCIL ISSUES

Findings	Recommendations
Further unannounced and announced inspections will inevitably take place shortly – probably during the winter of 2010/11 and the summer of 2011, respectively. The Sub-Committee believes that's there is every indication that staff are prepared for these visits and is confident that significant improvements will be evident.	
An Improvement Notice is still in place. There is no indication yet when it will be removed. Removal of the Notice will be an important psychological development in moving safeguarding forward.	
The leadership of the SCF Directorate has been on an interim basis for some time. Whilst the Sub-Committee understands the reasons for this, it welcomes the recent appointment of a new Director on a permanent basis and looks forward to forming a close working relationship with him.	(3) That the new Director be asked to attend an early meeting to set out his vision for Members and, together with the Cabinet Member, be given regular opportunities to provide updates on progress, through attendance at Committee meetings.
The views of lead officers on the way forward are clear and unequivocal. These ideals now need to be tested at the local level to see if they are working 'on the ground'. The Sub-Committee will carry out this work as part of the second stage of its scrutiny.	() That Members should take the opportunity to meet front line staff and act as a critical friend on how theory is carried through into practice.
The Sub-Committee has seen revised structures which will come into operation during 2011. Whilst these have been explained, the Sub-Committee considers them to continue to be complex and difficult for a lay person to understand. These will be kept under review by the Sub-Committee in the second stage of its scrutiny.	(4) That the County Council should consider every opportunity to amalgamate those agencies with common aims/outcomes and seek to reduce the attendant bureaucracy associated with those services. () That the Sub-Committee satisfy itself that the structures in place remain appropriate and fit for purpose

	and that the agencies involved have sufficient staff in place to provide a suitable level of service.
The Sub-Committee is concerned at the lack of qualitative measures. It has no firm evidence to suggest that the changes made are benefiting the lives of Essex children and families. This will be the main focus in Stage 2 of the Sub-Committee's work and recommendations will be made to the Committee in due course.	
The Sub-Committee has been briefed on the new SWIPE computerised system and undertaken a Deep Dive study of the information it can provide. The Sub-Committee welcomes the improvements over the previous SWIFT system, which had become outdated. This should provide relevant and up to date data at a standard previously unavailable. The Council now has reliable data which it (and importantly the Improvement Board) can trust.	<p>(5) That the Sub-Committee, in its future work, should continue to challenge and confirm the improvements brought about by the new technology.</p> <p>() That the appropriate Cabinet Members be made aware of the Committee's work and invited to satisfy themselves as to the continuing robustness of the ICT systems the Council has in place.</p>
<p>The action taken during late 2009/early 2010 to substantially reduce the number of outstanding assessments was vital and is supported. It is important to keep assessments and workloads at a manageable level. Staffing continues to be a live issue given the differences and diversities across such a large county as Essex. Issues which the Sub-Committee would wish to draw attention to are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is funding still available to have sufficient staff in place? - is funding available for permanent rather than temporary staff? - the importance of strong and respected team managers being in post. - the size of caseloads per social worker. - specific recruitment issues in the 	<p>(6) That the County Council be encouraged to keep the safeguarding and looked after children case loads to no more than 20 per social worker.</p> <p>(7) That the County Council acknowledges the importance of the Team Leader/management role and the importance of retaining such staff.</p> <p>(8) That the County Council be invited to review recruitment and retention issues in the Tendring area.</p>

Tendring area (it was reported on more than one occasion that social workers are reluctant to move to and/or work in this area).	
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HEALTH RELATED ISSUES

Findings	Recommendations
PCTs are going through a compulsory exercise to split their purchaser and provider arms by 1 April 2011. The Essex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee has commented on all five proposals.	(9) That the County Council will need regular updates to both track progress and the level of funding available, in order to ensure that children's services are receiving the appropriate levels of resource.
PCTs in Essex have voluntarily agreed to streamline their senior management structures to have just two Chief Executives across the five PCTs (Sheila Bremner and Andrew Pike) The leadership on the children's services role resting in the hands of one Chief Executive is welcomed.	
The Health White Paper, if implemented in its current form, will replace PCTs with GP consortia in 2012. It is too early yet to comment on the implications of this change	(10) That the newly formed Health and Wellbeing Board should provide Members with regular reports on children's safeguarding progress and effectiveness. () That the County Council and the Essex HOSC receive regular updates on the proposed transfer of public health responsibilities from the health service to first tier authorities.
Children's services have been perceived as somewhat of a Cinderella Service in health. There is now an acknowledgement in the NHS that services need to be improved.	
There is a lack of integration between ICT systems used by Health and Children's Services. This is a national problem which Essex alone cannot resolve.	() That, given the technical nature of this work, these concerns be made known to the Health Authorities, the County Council's Transformation Support Unit and the Essex Children's Safeguarding Board.

There is concern at the numbers of Health Visitors/School Nurses in post and the reluctance of young people to enter the profession. This is a national rather than just local concern. The Sub-Committee is aware that the Health Authorities in Essex are considering how the service might best be operated in the future.	

ESSEX CHILDRENS SAFEGUARDING BOARD (ECSB)

Findings	Recommendations
The membership of the ECSB (about 30 persons) is felt to be too large – however, this is in line with requirements under current legislation.	(11) That the County Council should encourage the Government to consider the constitution of Safeguarding Boards, with a view to cutting down numbers of members.
The continuing appointment of a Chairman who is totally independent is welcomed. The increase in the number of workdays paid for (up from 30 to 45) is also welcomed and is felt to be sufficient in current circumstances. The workload on support staff is known to be substantial.	(12) That the County Council be invited to review the level of support currently made available to the Safeguarding Board and its Chairman, and its relationships with other agencies/Boards.
Members of the Board must (s) be of sufficient authority to be able to take decisions on behalf of their agency; and (b) have procedures in place to disseminate decisions to their Service and Departmental colleagues.	(13) That all agencies represented on the Board be made aware of these findings.
The Board Chairman is clear about the work streams to be followed and the timescales to be allowed for this work.	
There may be potential for the Children's and Adults Safeguarding Boards in Essex, Southend and Thurrock to be integrated, although this is felt to be a medium term rather than short term aim. The Sub-	(14) That, given the level of support for this proposal, the Community Wellbeing and Older Peoples P&SC be invited to work alongside this Committee to encourage its early implementation.

Committee and the Community Wellbeing and Older Peoples P&SC will keep this issue under review.	
Arrangements are now in place for an Executive Summary of the outcomes of Serious Case Reviews to be advised to Members.	() That the Sub-Committee be invited to consider a sample Executive Summary and make any comments on its style and content to the ECSB.
