

28 March 2018

Dear Cllr Maddocks

Thank you for your letter dated 26 February following our presentation to the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee

I can confirm that our Business Plan will reflect that “capitalising on the range and depth of our experience as the second largest Board in the country” will be stated as an aspiration rather than a principle.

I would also confirm that we would be happy to provide a further update to you in October following the production of our Annual Report.

On the second page of your letter you raise three issues which I will address in turn:

Voluntary Agencies being ‘left in the dark’ after making a referral

Across the safeguarding system (both locally and nationally) there are a variety of agencies which receive referrals and your letter is not specific about which of these the voluntary sector representatives had in mind. Nationally, ‘referrers’ cite a lack of response as an issue across the safeguarding system, particularly in circumstances when they continue to work with a family and feel uncertain about what may be happening. This is a difficult issue to progress and is suitable to be raised locally in the multi-agency ESCB Stay Safe groups. I will ask for this issue to be added to their agendas for further discussion.

I have had a detailed conversation with Paul Secker. Paul is clear that we should be emphasising to referrers, whether they are a voluntary organisation or not, that they should go back to the agency to whom they made the referral (in the case of Children and Families, this might be the Hub or the Assessment and Intervention team) and explain that they have had no further contact since the referral, ask them what happened to the referral, and what was the outcome of the referral. If they are dissatisfied with the response, or they have not been given any clarity, then they should escalate the matter to a manager within the agency they have referred to. It is Paul’s understanding that the Children and Families Hub does in fact monitor their responses to agency referrals.

The Possible Void in Service and Increased Risk when Children fall below the 'Significant Risk' Threshold or live in Uncooperative Families

You have highlighted the area of safeguarding work recognised nationally as carrying the greatest risks for children. Where significant harm is likely, formal Social Care assessment processes intervene well to create a safe environment for children. Few serious cases of harm occur when that threshold has been reached.

However, in the less serious levels of Child in Need and Early Help, professionals need the consent of parents or carers to intervene or pass information to others. Some families become 'skilled' at managing the support offered, so they avoid Social Care involvement or require a great deal of support from a number of services without crossing any one threshold for a more serious intervention. In cases like these multi-agency approaches, such as 'Team Around the Family' (TAF), Early Help Plans and Shared Family Assessments are used. However, these still need a willing family and consent to be fully successful.

Such approaches also need to be overseen by a 'lead professional' often drawn from a school or other agency. Not surprisingly some schools emphasise that they do not feel resourced to take on such work, however they are often best placed and have the best information to support the child. It is notable that this schools-led approach is endorsed by the recent Green Paper on Mental Health which expands the involvement of schools: "*we want to put schools and colleges at the heart of our efforts to intervene early and prevent problems escalating*". (p3). Hopefully this will give schools greater authority and resources to provide safeguarding support. The Green paper is available at:

(https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664855/Transforming_children_and_young_people_s_mental_health_provision.pdf)

Within the Board's multi-agency training programme, we take the opportunity to highlight good practice approaches to working with uncooperative families. For example, we are currently running courses entitled 'Working with Resistant Families and Disguised Compliance'. Courses are open to all partners including the voluntary sector.

The Representation of the Voluntary Sector in ESCB

On the last page of your letter, you raise the issue of voluntary sector representation on ESCB and suggest that it is not represented on the Board. At its meeting in June 2017, ESCB decided to move away from its large Board meeting of 40-50 members to its current structure, i.e.

- a strategic ESCB Executive meeting (12-15 members),
- four 'quadrant' ESCB Stay Safe Groups (enhancing local networks and joint working) and
- an Essex-wide ESCB Safeguarding Assembly (80 – 100 participants) to inform and challenge the ESCB Executive members about the reality of operational safeguarding.

Before this change the voluntary sector was represented with two members in the large Board meetings and also in some Stay Safe meetings. Now the voluntary sector, whilst not sitting on the Executive, is represented in the all of the strengthened Stay Safe meetings and also at the ESCB Assembly. Whilst the means of engagement for the voluntary sector at the 'top table' has changed, their opportunity to influence operational safeguarding has been clarified.

As we implement the national changes replacing LSCBs with statutory 'Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements', we will evaluate the success of our new model and consider whether we have appropriate membership at all levels. In doing this we will review whether the Voluntary Sector is adequately involved and take your comments into account in doing that.

Hopefully the above paragraphs have sufficiently clarified the issues you raise. On reflection, I wonder if in any future scrutiny of Safeguarding Boards, I or another representative, should be present for the whole session. Then any issues raised by other 'witnesses' can be explained by all sides enabling Councillors to probe more effectively and perhaps to get an immediate response to queries.

Please come back to me if you have further questions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phil Picton', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Phil Picton
Independent Chair
Essex Safeguarding Children Board