

FIRST DRAFT

SAFEGUARDING SCRUTINY: REPORT ON SECOND 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 particular, the joint report by Ofsted/CQC drew attention to the following areas of concern:-

ADD PIECE FROM ORIGINAL INSPECTION REPORT

This Scrutiny Report remains available for perusal on the County Council's website (www.essex.gov.uk)

In the summer of 2010, the Committee 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. Councillor Dick Madden joined the Sub-Committee in July 2011 following his election to the Council.

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

The Sub-Committee issued its first Report at the end of December 2010 and this was endorsed by the Committee in January 2011. This looked at the senior management of the major agencies, structures; Key Performance Indicators underlying the matters which were the subject of the current Improvement Notice; and processes and procedures used across the county. During the course of the Scrutiny, interviews were held with senior staff from a number of agencies.

This Report also remains available for perusal on the County Council's website (www.essex.gov.uk)

Process for second stage of Scrutiny

The Committee agreed that the second stage of the Scrutiny should, whilst bearing in mind the comments made by inspectors in the adverse reports, particularly concentrate on issues relating to the quality of the service now provided. The first stage of the Scrutiny had given a reassurance that procedures had been reviewed thoroughly and that many revised and improved practices had been put in place, not only by the County Council but also by other agencies. The Committee now needed to be assured that the changes were happening 'on the ground' and that children, young people and families were benefiting from these changes.

This stage of the Scrutiny commenced in February 2011 and allowed an opportunity:

- To review progress on the recommendations made in the Stage 1 Report;
- To speak to agencies not previously covered, notably Essex Police;
- For Members to attend meetings of groups and panels set up as part of the revised structure: and
- To reflect on changes agreed by national Government.

As a result, the second stage Scrutiny covered a wide range of activities. On some occasions it was decided to deal with matters at full meetings of the Committee, so that all Members could participate. Some Sub-Committee members also met with front line staff and found this meeting particularly helpful. All comments made at that meeting were anonymised in the subsequent report made to the Committee. A number of issues raised have been picked up and are pursued in this Scrutiny Report. Where appropriate, other matters have been raised separately with the senior management of the SCF Directorate.

The matters covered in stage 2 were:

- outcomes from Stage 1 of the Sub-Committees work
- discussions with Essex Police/Essex Police Authority
- changed leadership and administrative arrangements for the Safeguarding Board
- ICT systems , including results of further Deep Dive exercise
- changes to Key Performance Indicators, to become based on more qualitative issues
- discussions with front line social work staff
- the implications of the Munro Report
- the outcomes of the Ofsted/CQC follow up inspection and a Peer Review
- the number of groups and panels supporting the safeguarding structure
- the externalisation of children's homes.

The Committee wishes to thank the following individuals who gave evidence during this part of the Scrutiny:

- Assistant Chief Constable Sue Harrison, Essex Police
- Chief Superintendent Chris Worrone, Essex Police
- Ms Linda Belgrove, Essex Police Authority (and lead member on safeguarding issues)

- Mr Paul Abraham (then Assistant Director for Performance and Organisational Intelligence)
- Ms Jean Imray (then Interim Director for Improvement, SCF Directorate)
- Ms Nicola Park (then Essex Safeguarding Children Board Business & Performance Director)
- Staff of SCF Directorate

A proposed way forward

Given the substantial amount of information gathered, the Sub-Committee held two private meetings in the summer of 2011 to pull together its thoughts and confirm its findings and recommendations. There are included below and were endorsed by the Committee in September 2011.

During the course of this Scrutiny, Dame Eileen Munro published her final report on child protection “A Child Centred System”. The Government had just commented on this by the time the Sub-Committee completed its Report. The Munro Report will have clear implications for staffing arrangements and social work practice in the future. At this stage, the Committee welcomes the proposals put forward by Dame Eileen which (in her own words) will “ help to reform the child protection system from being over-bureaucratized and concerned with compliance to one that keeps a focus on children, checking whether they are being effectively helped, and adapting when problems are identified”. This ties in totally with the Committee’s concentration on quality issues

The following findings and recommendations were agreed and will now be progressed:-

MATTERS RELATING TO A NUMBER OF AGENCIES

Findings	Recommendations
All agencies resources are limited and budgets will be restricted for years to come.	
The introduction of the 12 Multi Agency Allocation Groups (MAAGS) seems to have been successful and to have improved levels of joint working and good practice. This does need to be looked at in more detail to confirm that view. This matter has been included a specific issue in the Committee’s Forward Look for 2011/12. The use of the Common Assessment Framework will also be looked at the same time	
The increased use of joint training,	

bring together staff from a number of disciplines, is welcomed. There is some concern however about whether there will be ongoing involvement of staff from Academies. Many Essex schools now or will shortly hold that status and will be responsible for allocating their own resources.	
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SAFEGUARDING BOARD ISSUES

Findings	Recommendations
The Scrutiny Board has a new Chairman who has his own ideas on how the Board should develop and who has suggested activities where the Board and the Committee can work together to scrutinise practice.	(1) That the new Chair of the Safeguarding Board be invited to a meeting of the Committee to discuss all the matters included in this section of the Scrutiny Report.
The Safeguarding Board has set up a new structure (detailed in minutes of Committee meeting in July 2011). The Committee will need to keep this under review to ensure that it remains effective.	
The Committee still has serious concerns about the length of time taken to carry out Serious Case Reviews and also at the duplication of work and the number of different enquiries involved following the death of a child.	
There has been no further movement towards bringing together the separate strands of safeguarding work for children and vulnerable adults.	
The Safeguarding Board is the major body involved in undertaking joint training, but will it have sufficient funding to carry out this task given the pressure on all agencies budgets,	

POLICE RELATED MATTERS

Findings	Recommendations
<p>The Committee supports the view of Essex Police that using custody facilities in police stations for children who have been found after absconding from residential care is inappropriate. If no offences have been committed, the use of cells in police stations should never be countenanced. It is vital that nothing is done to criminalise young people who have absconded. The legal responsibility for looking after such children and keeping them safe at this point rests with the Police.</p> <p>The Committee considered options for catering for this small but vulnerable group of children. A specific proposal to use Leverton Hall was not felt to be appropriate.</p>	<p>(2) That the Safeguarding Board be asked to consider this matter, with a view to finding suitable premises in each police district area.</p>
<p>The Committee felt that there could be advantages in introducing a Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) system in Essex <i>expand on what this is.</i></p> <p>Essex Police would welcome such a change and it is believed that other agencies are likely to be amenable.</p>	<p>(3) That the agencies involved in safeguarding be advised of this view and invited to comment on the viability of introducing a MASH system in Essex.</p>
<p>Often a large number of Domestic Violence (DV) 1 forms arrive at Social Services from the Police at the same time. They then have to be dealt with immediately, removing staff from other work. Better procedures need to be put in place to regulate the flow of these forms on a more manageable basis.</p>	

HEALTH RELATED ISSUES

Findings	Recommendations
<p>Concerns have been expressed about cutbacks in the Health Visitor Service and a lack of experience</p>	

amongst current staff about child protection issues. Enquiries will be made of the PCT clusters to ascertain the numbers of staff currently in post; the type of work they carry out; how this work relates to that carried out in children's centres; and likely recruitment levels in the future.	
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COUNTY COUNCIL ISSUES

Findings	Recommendations
The Committee met the newly appointed SCF Director soon after his appointment to hear and discuss his vision for the Service. He will be asked to attend another meeting in the autumn of 2011 to bring Members up to date with his ongoing vision and to reflect upon his first year in post.	
The unannounced inspection by Ofsted/CQC and the peer review, both undertaken in 2011, raised no new issues and showed that much progress had been made. The Committee remains optimistic that the Improvement Notice will be removed once the next major inspection is carried out (due in late 2011). It did regret however the limited references made about scrutiny in the documentation prepared at the time and regards that as a very unfortunate oversight.	
The Council has been implementing its Quadrant based operating system of working. Now this has been underway for some time the Committee needs to consider how it is working and evaluate its successes and shortcomings. This will be included in the Forward Look for 2011/12.	
The Committee continues to have concerns about the complexity of the substructure underpinning the	(4) That the sub structure be reviewed by the Committee and the functions of all bodies clarified and

<p>safeguarding arrangements. It believes that there is a duplication of work and wonders about the usefulness of some bodies and how they 'benefit' children.</p> <p>Equally it does feel that some bodies , such as the EARP and JAP carry out useful roles and have helped to raise quality standards and good practice across the Service.</p>	<p>their role justified.</p>
<p>There seems to be very limited knowledge amongst staff of the role (and indeed the existence) of the shadow Health and Well Being Board. Some of that Board's work will be involved with children's services</p>	<p>(5) That details of the role and membership of the Health and Well Being Board, and its legislative basis, be included in the next edition of the SCF Directorate's Communications Plan.</p>
<p>The work of the Health and Well Being Board is being scrutinised by the Essex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) and that scrutiny function does not need to be duplicated by this Committee. Any comments in relation to safeguarding can be passed to the HOSC.</p>	
<p>The Committee will seek clarity on the level of experience new social workers require before being allowed to work on safeguarding cases.</p>	
<p>The Committee has overseen two Deep Dive studies into the SWIPE ICT system. This shows a clear improvement over the previous ICT system which had reached the end of its usefulness. A further such exercise will be carried out towards the end of 2011 for a further guarantee that it remains capable of providing appropriate information.</p>	
<p>The Committee welcomes the introduction of the new Key Performance Indicators across the Council, which now cover qualitative as well as quantitative data,</p>	

Concerns have been expressed about the robustness of the VPN system. As this has implications across the whole Council the concerns will be passed to the Head of ICT Services for attention.	
The ongoing role and number of Family Support Workers (FSWs) has been raised. Further information needs to be sought before any views can be expressed by the Committee. FSWs could offer a value for money opportunity for early intervention in cases.	
It is now time to review the role of Children's Centres and evaluate their operation.	(6) That, following approval of a scoping document, a scrutiny of Children's Centres take place at the Committee meeting in November 2011.
The Council's proposals for 2011/12 include the externalisation of its residential children's homes. A separate Task and Finish Group has been set up to monitor this work.	

The Committee is satisfied that much progress has been made and that the Council and other agencies now offer a much better safeguarding service to children, young people and families than they did in 2009. It now awaits two major events:

- the full inspection of children's services in Essex; and
- legislation and guidance on the implementation of the Munro Report.

The Sub-Committee will reconvene once the position on these issues is clearer and determine whether there needs to be a stage 3 scrutiny and, if so, what it should cover.