

Extract Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.30am in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Thursday, 13 September 2018

4. Essex Safeguarding Children Board - update

Introduction

The Committee considered report (PAF/19/18) outlining the priorities and work of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB). The update included a summary of new statutory guidance which removed the statutory framework for local safeguarding children boards and some examples of previous work undertaken by the Board. The Annual Report for the Board covering the main areas of work carried out for the period 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018 had also been included.

The following were in attendance to introduce the update and answer questions:

Phil Picton, Independent Chairman, Essex Safeguarding Children Board.

Alison Cutler, Essex Safeguarding Children Board - Business and Performance Manager

Paul Secker, Director, Safeguarding and Assurance (from 11.30am)

Overview

The ESCB had a non-operational role to encourage the co-ordination of safeguarding activity and evaluating the work of safeguarding agencies. There was also a role to facilitate the provision of multi-agency safeguarding training.

The current work plan for the Board was to continue to work to the themes identified and pursued in the previous year.

Partner engagement with the Board was generally good with a strong desire to learn lessons. In discussion about attendance at Board meetings it was confirmed that Virgin Care had a growing health responsibility under new contracts awarded to them and they were regular attendees. It was also highlighted that City, Borough and district commitment to the Board was good compared to Mr Picton's experience elsewhere. There were also ongoing discussions about how the ESCB (and its successor body) and Safer Essex Board could work more closely together. Stay Safe Groups seemed to have been very successful in disseminating messages and receiving feedback to shape local learning events better.

The level and amount of change within the NHS was viewed as a distraction with structural changes sometimes breaking up some of the previously established information and communication networks. The Board were generally satisfied that NHS leaders were endeavouring to keep the connections but it was a risk that had been identified.

Measuring success was particularly difficult in partnership working where it could be difficult to find a correlation between actions and outcomes.

Members accepted this but queried whether there was a repetition of certain types of cases which could point to the same systemic failings. However, whilst there was some repetition it was stressed that this was part of a wider national picture.

New statutory guidance

New statutory guidance had removed the statutory framework for local safeguarding children boards. The guidance stipulated three statutory local partners (Upper Tier Council, Police and Health) who would determine the local governance structure in future for safeguarding children. It had already been decided locally to continue with the three separate safeguarding partnerships (Essex, Southend and Thurrock) but to encourage closer working between them.

It had been agreed amongst partners that funding for next year would be on the same basis to give some stability to the new arrangements. However, there had been a strong message that there would be no growth in funding.

The new statutory guidance advised that the Chairman of a successor body to the ESCB no longer had to be independent but the guidance did require an independent scrutiny function within the new governance arrangements and the precise local interpretation of how to implement that had yet to be finalised.

It was currently intended that all local schools would become designated agencies meaning that they would be obliged to co-operate and participate in the new local arrangements.

Schools and home-schooling

Members sought re-assurance that the ESCB was ensuring that all agencies were working with schools to address the needs of children with mental health and emotional wellbeing challenges. Members stressed that it needed to be more than information being available on websites and should mean closer working with the NHS. It was acknowledged that the Independent Chairman and the Board had a role to encourage the NHS to work more closely with schools and further discussion at the Health and wellbeing Board had also been encouraged.

A preventative Safeguarding Toolkit had been developed for schools and could be accessed by all schools. There was also training co-ordinated through each schools' safeguarding lead. All members of staff (teaching and non-teaching) should receive training and nothing had been highlighted to the Board to indicate that this was not happening. It was stressed that once schools had become designated 'relevant agencies' under the new arrangements they would be obliged to have a discussion at least on the toolkit. Further work being undertaken on teenage suicide would also help to further improve the guidance.

Safeguarding was not an issue for the majority of those young people being home schooled. However, a small number of cases do lead to serious case reviews being undertaken. It was admitted that children being home-schooled could be a potential weakness in the system due to children being out of sight. In addition, it was suggested that some schools were encouraging challenging children be home schooled instead and that was a concern. Mr Picton agreed to further consider the safeguards in place for home-schooled children. **Action: Mr Picton**

Conclusion

It was noted that the timing of the annual review of the work of the ESCB was now aligned with the publication of the ESCB Annual Report in late summer.

Mr Secker offered to provide detailed operational briefings on any issues raised by the Committee and this offer was noted and the Committee agreed to consider this further.

Thereafter the witnesses were thanked for their attendance and they left the meeting.