

Select Committee on Children's Services – 23 March 2011

Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services

Dudley Safeguarding Children Board Up-Date Report

Purpose of Report

1. To present to Select Committee an up-date in respect of safeguarding developments and the work of Dudley Safeguarding Children Board (DSCB) for 2009/10.

Background

2. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children requires effective co-ordination in every local area. For this reason, the Children Act 2004 requires each local authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).
3. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is the key statutory mechanism for agreeing how the relevant organisations in each local area will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in that locality and for ensuring the effectiveness of what they do.
4. The core objectives of the Local Safeguarding Children Board are set out in S 14(1) of the Children Act 2004 as follows:
 - To co-ordinate what is done by each person or body represented on the Board for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area of the authority
 - To ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each such person or body for that purpose
 - Protecting children from maltreatment
 - Preventing impairment of children's health or development
 - Ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
 - Understanding that role so as to enable those children to have optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully
5. The scope of Local Safeguarding Children Board's role includes safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in three broad areas of activity

- Activity that affects all children and aims to identify and prevent maltreatment, or impairment of health or development and ensure children are growing up in circumstances consistent with safe and effective care
 - Proactive work that aims to target particular vulnerable groups
 - Responsive work to protect children who are suffering or at risk of suffering harm
6. The Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board is chaired by the Assistant Director for Children's Services who is accountable to the Local Authority via the Director of Children's Services for the effectiveness of their work as Local Safeguarding Children Board. The Director of Children's Services will be held to account for the effective working of the Local Safeguarding Children Board by the Chief Executive and challenges where appropriate by their Lead Member
 7. Chief Executives are responsible for satisfying themselves that their Director of Children's Services are fulfilling their managerial responsibilities for safeguarding.
 8. Lead Members for Children's Services
 - Are politically accountable for ensuring that the local authority fulfils its legal responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people
 - Provide the political leadership needed for the effective co-ordination of work with other relevant agencies with safeguarding responsibilities
 - Should also take steps to assure themselves that effective quality assurance systems for safeguarding are in place and functioning effectively
 9. The Lead Member is a 'participating observer' of the Local Safeguarding Children Board
 10. Whilst the Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board has a role in co-ordinating and ensuring the effectiveness of local individuals and organisations work to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, it is not accountable for their operational work. Each Board partner retains their own existing lines of accountability for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children by their services.
 11. At the heart of the establishment of Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board is the desire to develop a shared sense of responsibility across all agencies working with children and their families and communities to keep children safe from harm.
 12. In order to achieve this Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board recognise the need to develop a more preventative and community-based approach to safeguarding children and young people with a strong emphasis on partnership, integration, information sharing, participation and accountability at all levels.
 13. There is now a statutory requirement (through the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009) for Local Safeguarding Children Board's to publish an annual report including achievements and challenges that still remain.

14. Local Safeguarding Children Board's must publish their first report by 1 April 2011. This will be presented to Select Committee in due course.

Up-Date in respect of national safeguarding developments

15. The new coalition government commissioned Professor Eileen Munro to undertake a national review of child protection in England in June 2010. Professor Munro published her second interim report in February 2011 as follow-on to her first report, which provided an analysis of the unintended consequences of previous reforms that had arisen in the child protection system. It concluded that professionals are, in particular, constrained from keeping a focus on the child by the demands and rigidity created by inspection and regulation.
16. Professor Munro's second report '*The Child's Journey*' makes a number of recommendations to improve effective protection from abuse and neglect, including:
 - Changes to the Ofsted inspection regime with wider inspections of safeguarding arrangements becoming unannounced
 - Adoption of the systems approach to Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and the ending of Ofsted evaluations of SCRs
 - Further review of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* guidance for multi-agency Working, separating out statutory guidance from professional advice
 - Strengthen the leadership role of Local Safeguarding Children Boards in monitoring the impact of practice, training and learning on the child's journey, as well as identifying and addressing emerging problems in the system.
 - Continued emphasis on the role of the Director of Children's Services continues as the key point of professional accountability for child protection services within the local authority and that this is not diluted or weakened.
 - Development of a minimum data set for child protection made up of a 'twin core' of nationally collected data and recommended standardized local data.
 - Recognition that early identification and provision of help is in the child's best interests and multi-agency services which deliver support for families such as Children's Centres are vital in promoting children's well-being. The review endorses efforts to improve family support services in the
17. The report also indicates a number of proposed reforms to social work training, practice and systems to alleviate the 'bureaucratic burden' on the profession and to re-focus attention to the child's journey through the system with an emphasis on the development of skills and quality of practice balanced with timeliness.
18. Professor Munro's full report is expected by the end of April 2011.

19. The government has also completed a review of the Vetting and Barring Scheme, developed in response to the deaths of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in August 2002 and the subsequent Richard Enquiry, published in June 2004. The review recommends that:
- A state body should continue to provide a barring function to help employers protect those at risk from people who seek to do them harm via work or volunteering roles
 - The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) should be merged and a single Non-Departmental Public Body or Agency created to provide a barring and criminal records disclosure service
 - The new barring regime should cover only those who may have regular or close contact with vulnerable groups
 - Barring should continue to apply to both paid and unpaid roles
 - Automatic barring should apply for those serious offences, which provide a clear and direct indication of risk
 - Registration should be scrapped - there should be no requirement for people to register with the scheme and there will be no ongoing monitoring
 - The information used by the state barring body (currently the ISA) to make a barring decision should be serious in nature
 - Criminal records disclosures should continue to be available to employers and voluntary bodies but should be revised to become portable through the introduction of a system which allows for continuous updating
 - The new regime should retain current arrangements for referrals to the state barring body (currently the ISA) by employers and certain regulatory bodies, in circumstances where individuals have demonstrated a risk of harm to children or vulnerable adults
 - The current appeals arrangements should be retained
 - The state barring body should be given a power to vary review periods in appropriate circumstances
 - Services relating to criminal records disclosure and barring provisions should be self-financing. We recommend the Government consults on raising the cost of the criminal records disclosure fee to cover the costs incurred
 - The new system will retain two offences; it will continue to be an offence for a barred person to work with vulnerable groups in regulated activity roles. It will also be an offence for an employer or voluntary organisation knowingly to employ a barred person in a regulated activity role
 - Finally, the Government should raise awareness of safeguarding issues and should widely promote the part everyone has to play in ensuring proper safeguarding amongst employers, volunteer organisations, families and the wider community.

Up-date in respect of local safeguarding developments

20. Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board continues to make progress in respect of its key priorities outlined in its annual report and business plan 2010-12 – shown as **Appendix 1**
21. There remain significant challenges in relation to child protection activity, with an overall rising trend in respect of the number of Strategy Discussions and higher numbers of children being made subject to a Child Protection Conference. As at 31st January 2011, 217 children were subject to an inter-agency child protection plan, which represents a 36% increase compared to the end of the same quartile in 2009-10.
22. As at 31st January 2011, 'neglect' featured in 50% of child protection plans. 'Emotional abuse' accounts for 27% of all child protection plans, reflecting an increased awareness concerning the impact of domestic abuse on children.
23. As at 31st December 2010, Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board had delivered 1900 multi-agency safeguarding training places to staff across the children's workforce, which is predicted to represent a 25% increase for 2010-11 compared to the previous year.
24. Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board published an executive summary of a serious case review in December 2010, the recommendations from which have now been implemented. A small number of 'case reviews' have also been conducted as part of its quality assurance framework and commitment to learning and continuous practice and service improvement.
25. Some of the other Boards achievements during 2010-11 include:
 - Continued development of the Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART) and evaluation of the use of the Barnardos Screening Tool
 - Development of specialist training in response to issues such as forced marriage, spirit possession, female genital mutilation as part of its safeguarding training programme
 - Contribution to the development of anti-bullying policy, guidance and resources for partner agencies
 - Development of revised strategies in respect of communication and engagement, e-safety, training & development
 - Appointment of new Lay Advisors to the Board and continued development of the Young People's Safeguarding Board (S4K)
26. Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board is currently reviewing its business plan. Key priorities identified for 2011-12 are likely to be:
 - A strengthened leadership role in supporting multi-agency learning concerning child protection practice and joint investigations in respect of child abuse & neglect

- Improving inter-agency responses to children & young people who are vulnerable to experiencing sexual exploitation, internal trafficking and serious forms of bullying
- Improving inter-agency responses to children who are likely to, or who have, suffered emotional abuse and neglect

Finance

27. The annual budget for the Board is approximately £212,000 (2010-11), including contributions from partner agencies, which fund the core expenditure and training programme of the board.

Law

28. The establishment of a Local Safeguarding Children's Board is a statutory requirement under the Children Act 2004, which places a duty on local agencies to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Equality Impact

29. The work of the Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board supports parents, families, communities and partner agencies in providing safe homes and environments, security and stability for all children and young people in the Borough. The Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board responds to the needs of vulnerable groups to minimise the incidence of child abuse and neglect to ensure that all children can maximise the opportunity to achieve positive outcomes.

Recommendations

30. That Select Committee receive and note this up-date and receive the annual report from Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board in due course.



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Key Priorities

Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board continues to make progress in respect of its key priorities outlined in its annual report and business plan 2010-12. These were:

- Consolidate inter-agency responses to domestic abuse where children are living within the household
- Improve early responses and assessment & intervention in respect of children suffering from emotional abuse & neglect, particularly where this relates to parental substance misuse, mental health or learning disability
- Improve service provision and inter-agency responses for a range of vulnerable children including those who go missing from home or care, those at risk of sexual exploitation, internal trafficking and children living with private fostering arrangements
- Improve safety of children & young people who are vulnerable to exploitation and bullying, including through the use of new technologies, such as cyberbullying
- Enhance training and development activity to include a review of safeguarding training strategy, implementation of actions arising from communication and public education strategy, and continued development of 'a learning from audit' approach
- Secure improved effectiveness of the Board in terms of safeguarding and undertake a programme of Section 11 and Section 175 audits to support agencies in fulfilling their duty to safeguard