

Meeting:	Health and Wellbeing Board
Meeting date:	25 March 2015
Title of report:	Children's Safeguarding Update
Report by:	Head of Safeguarding and Review

Classification

Open

Key Decision

This is not an executive decision.

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

The purpose of the report is to brief the Health and Wellbeing Board of the outcome of the Department for Education Review and the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Local Government Association Peer Diagnostic as well as providing progress to date on the Ofsted Action Plan

Recommendation(s)

THAT the following be noted:

- (a) outcome of the Department for Education review (as detailed at Appendix 1) conducted on 15 and 16 December 2014;**
- (b) outcome of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Local Government Association peer diagnostic (as detailed at Appendix 2) conducted between 17-19 November 2014; and**
- (c) progress to date on the Ofsted action plan (as detailed at Appendix 3).**

Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options as the purpose of the report is to provide a briefing on children's safeguarding.

Reasons for recommendations

2. To enable the Health and Wellbeing Board to consider whether there is adequate progress in improvements in safeguarding services, in the light of external reviews and monitoring of progress against the improvement plan..

Key considerations

Department for Education Review

3. As reported to Health and Wellbeing Board on 16 October 2015, Ofsted carried out their inspection of children's safeguarding in May 2014 and judged safeguarding to be "requires improvement".
4. As part of the process of lifting the Department for Education intervention notice which was issued in 2012, the Department for Education carried out a review on 15 and 16 December 2014.
5. The purpose of the review was to establish whether the council had maintained its improvement since the Ofsted inspection.
6. As result of the review, the Department for Education have been broadly reassured as to the progress the Local Authority has made against the Ofsted Action Plan, and recognised the pace of improvement by the Council and partner agencies, and in particular the cross party political support towards the prioritisation of safeguarding vulnerable children in Herefordshire.
7. The Department for Education were particularly pleased to see progress with respect to:
 - Senior management team and lead members continue to be visible, approachable and supportive. This is valued by staff and partners.
 - There are open communications and lots of dialogue. People feel listened to, consulted and included in changes and new ways of working - for example the Children of Herefordshire Improvement and Partnership Programme.
 - Frameworki is improved, is more user friendly, and contains additional bespoke fields for capturing voice of child and child sexual exploitation intelligence.
 - There is increased management oversight, supervision and audit – all fully "on the agenda" now.
 - The offer for social workers is good. The support and mentoring for newly qualified social workers remains effective and well received. There are now opportunities for progression to senior social worker roles and the Academy for growing your own is well supported.

- Council commitment to the children's service agenda is clear.

There are areas which were identified which require further attention. These issues are in line with our own assessment:

- Evidencing the child's voice is improving but there is more work to do on embedding this across every partner organization as the norm.
 - Concerns remain over the internal Business Support function – some staff feel overwhelmed with “admin type” work, and are concerned that reduced administrative support will affect available time for reflective practice and training.
 - There are capacity issues with police partners, where presence is required across adult and children meetings/conferences/boards and attendance levels cannot be maintained.
 - There is increasing confidence in the figures, and the data being produced is much richer and more reliable – although some operational staff rely on management analysis rather than using the data themselves to drive better practice.
8. The Department for Education were keen to ensure that clear transitional arrangements were in place to step responsibility for driving improvement forward across from the Improvement Board, and that the recommendations of the Local Government Association peer diagnostic had been used to inform future plans. They were also keen to ensure that the process of recruiting to a new Independent Chair of the Board would not deflect from progress. As such, the Department for Education are positive that on receipt of such assurances that they will be recommending to the Minister to withdraw the intervention notice upon the local authority before the dissolution of parliament and the general election in May 2015.

Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Local Government Association peer diagnostic

9. As part of its approach to continuous improvement, the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board arranged for the Local Government Association to conduct a peer diagnostic. The diagnostic took place between 17-19 November 2014. Herefordshire was one of five pilot authorities to undertake a diagnostic.
10. The purpose of the diagnostic was to provide evidence that the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board were able to take over the function of the Herefordshire supporting and protecting children improvement Board (improvement board) should the Department for Education decide that the intervention notice could be lifted.
11. A copy of the letter outlining the recommendations from the Local Government Association is attached at appendix 2.
12. The key areas for improvement are:
- Developing synergy of plans across the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board, Children and Young People's Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure key priorities are shared and understood
 - Sharpen focus on outcomes for children and ensure the council and its partners know how the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board is making a difference

- Adopt the principles of the Children of Herefordshire's Improvement and Partnership Programme (CHIPP) in the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board's work develop a project management culture to support the Boards work
- Prioritise the priorities – identify key priorities to focus on and develop performance scorecards for each
- Strengthen the Business Unit to ensure capacity to deliver

13. The key areas of strengths are:

- Excellent progress since the peer review 14 months ago, in particular in the development of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
- Ambitious: to be good by 2016/17
- Strong cross party political commitment to the safeguarding agenda
- Clear prioritisation of children's agenda within the council
- There is a strong commitment to corporate parenting
- The Children's Integrated Needs Assessment provides a valuable tools to enable clear prioritisation
- Excellent progress in responding quickly to the challenge of Child Sexual Exploitation
- Regular meetings Independent Chair of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board and Chief Executive, Director for Children's Wellbeing and Cabinet Member for Children's

Ofsted Action Plan

14. Following the Ofsted inspection in May 2012, the council was required to produce an action plan to address the areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The first version of the action plan was presented to Cabinet on 1 October for comment prior to submission to Ofsted on 6 October. Ofsted have confirmed their satisfaction with the action plan and recognise that it provides a robust framework covering all the areas for improvement identified from their Inspection in May 2014, and the progress already made in response.
15. Work on the action plan is continuous and is delivered through the children's wellbeing transformation programme. A progress report is attached at appendix 3, together with a copy of the action plan (appendix 4).
16. Within the progress report, it is worth noting:
- Significant developments within Frameworki to support staff in undertaking their child protection work and improve performance reporting
 - Increased focus and capacity deployed to the children with a disability service
 - Development of the Child Sexual Exploitation strategy and operational response within Herefordshire and across the West Mercia Alliance
 - The implementation of a robust quality assurance framework
 - The development and implementation of the new Levels of Need guidance

17. All the above have been recognised as good practice developments in response to our Ofsted recommendations by the Department for Education and the Local Government Association Peer Diagnostic.

Progress since the reviews

18. The pace of progress since these review has not relented, and significant developments in response to the recommendations are in train, including;
- A review and restructure of business support functions, with increased capacity to support to the workforce. This will go live from 1st April 2015 from when it is hoped that we will have a more stable business support workforce. There have particular challenges in the interim phase with numbers of temporary admin staff supporting the child protection conference chairing processes, albeit performance to timescales has been maintained.
 - A contract to coordinate the development of our children's voice work, to ensure the new children and young people's plan is fully inclusive has been awarded. The objective of this service will be to develop and implement a system for collecting and analysing the views of children and young people on their needs and on their experiences of services. This intelligence on the "voice of the child" will form part of the local joint strategic needs assessment and will be used to inform the planning, delivery and improvement of a range of local services and to ensure that services meet the needs of children and young people.
 - The partnership agreement to fund the development of the Safeguarding Board's business unit, to incorporate the community safety partnership agenda and functions . This development will help to ensure Herefordshire Council's legal compliance with the Children's and Adult statute, provide the necessary assurance to support with compliance with recommendation 156 of the recent Ofsted inspection, support the development and implementation of an effective strategic approach in line with Safeguarding best practice principles that ensures the protection of Herefordshire's service users and carers and oversee progress of the improvement agenda for Children's Wellbeing Services.
 - The recruitment to a new Independent Chair of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board has taken place, and from 1 April 2015, Sally Halls will take over from Dave McCallum in this role. Sally is a highly experience Board chair, acting in this capacity for both Shropshire and Somerset.
 - It is also right to reflect on the Board's learning from the peer diagnostic, Department for Education review and the transition from the Improvement Board. A number of systemic themes have emerged, which are perhaps resonant with wider partnership experiences. These centre on the clarity of governance arrangements and the need to ensure the identification of cross cutting priorities without duplication of activity. Beneath this is the need to ensure appropriate challenge mechanisms are in place and the impact they are having is evidenced. Equally critical will be the need to demonstrate the impact of the boards work on the lives of individual children and young people, a challenge for all partnership working, to measure the impact of strategic activity in practice.
 - As part of the board's challenge role, there is more work to do in holding partner agencies accountable with respect to the outcomes of single agency inspection activity. Both West Mercia Police and Wye Valley Trust have been

through such processes and have received a number of recommendations with respect to safeguarding improvements required, and the Board needs to increase its scrutiny role to hold such organisations to account over the delivery of resultant action plans than has been the case. A part of this process will be reinforcing this aspect of the boards statutory function with partner agencies.

Community impact

19. The successful implementation of the action plan will bring about further improvement towards achieving the council's priorities of keeping children and young people safe and giving them a great start in life and enabling residents to live safe, healthy and independent lives; improving access to learning opportunities at all levels and improved outcomes for children and young people.

Equality duty

20. As the action plan continues to be implemented, equality impact assessments will be carried out where relevant to ensure that due regard is paid to the public sector equality duty as set out below:
 - "A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct ... prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Financial implications

21. The actions included in the plan in appendix 3 can be contained within the current year's budget. Each of the areas for improvement is being progressed within the context of the directorate's transformation programme, the Children of Herefordshire's Improvement and Partnership Programme (CHIPP). As the transformation programme develops, detailed financial planning will be taking place with regard to the actions and where appropriate further reports will be presented to cabinet or the cabinet member.

Legal implications

22. There are no legal implications.

Risk management

23. Risks associated with the failure to implement the action plan are:

- Reputation - should the council remain under an improvement notice. In particular, this has the impact of adversely affecting the recruitment and retention strategy and associated caseload management problems, which in turn have the potential to negatively impact on performance and quality of service for children and families. The council returns to a position where there are widespread failures to protect children and young people from harm.
- The Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board is unable to demonstrate to the Minister its ability and capacity to effectively govern the improvement of the multi-agency response to safeguarding children, to enable him to be sufficiently reassured to lift the improvement notice.
- These risks are being mitigated through the production of a robust transition plan to ensure that the improvement function imposed on the Local Authority by the Department for Education has been transferred to the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board, in full consultation with the Department for Education to their satisfaction. The independent chair of the Improvement Board will continue to act as a 'critical friend' to the Local Authority over the next six months to support and ensure continued focus on key improvement priorities.

Consultees

24. The views of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board and the Herefordshire Improvement Board have been included within the report and the action plan.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Department for Education letter

Appendix 2 Letter from Local Government Association in connection with the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board peer diagnostic

Appendix 3 Progress update on Ofsted action plan

Appendix 4 Ofsted action plan

Background papers

- None identified.