



Task & Finish Group Report

**Safeguarding Arrangements
for Children in Herefordshire**

Safeguarding Arrangements for Children in Herefordshire—draft Review Report

1 Background

- 1.1 On 27th July 2011 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned a Task and Finish Group to undertake a review of Safeguarding Arrangements for Children in Herefordshire, and agreed a scoping statement for that review. The reason for the review was to understand the current awareness of the safeguarding arrangements in Herefordshire specifically in relation to the roles and responsibilities of councillors and to understand the function of corporate parenting

The agreed terms of reference of the task and finish group were:

- To consider the arrangements for Looked After Children in Herefordshire in relation to partnership working in education, health, Youth Offending Service and social care
- To consider the arrangements for 16/17 year old homeless young people

The full Scoping Statement for the review is set out in Appendix 1, together with a list of elected Members who served on the Group.

- 1.2 Between September and July 2012 the group carried out research and convened meetings, interviews and a site visit to gather as much background information and seek as many views as was required to make recommendations. The Group were provided with a background information pack, set out in Appendix 2.

2 Overview

- 2.1 This review was designed to ensure that officers, members of the council and partner organisations understood their role and responsibility as corporate parents in ensuring that children in Herefordshire are safe and that they have the opportunity to meet their milestones and achieve comparably with targets set nationally in safeguarding children, with a particular focus on looked after children
- 2.2 The outcomes that are expected from the report include:
- That the safeguarding board is made aware of the recommendations of the review
 - Information about Safeguarding is available to members by way of regular briefings
 - Consider what priorities looked after children are being given by agencies

3 Introduction

3.1 **Herefordshire Children's Safeguarding Board**

The Safeguarding Board provides the multi-agency strategic leadership for safeguarding children in the County. The Board's work increasingly dovetails with the Herefordshire Safeguarding Adults' Board in order to ensure that robust safeguarding processes are in place across Herefordshire which adequately safeguard people from cradle to grave.

The Board's functions include:

- Multi agency policies and processes
- Training strategies and delivery

- Strategic planning
- Developing inter agency relationships
- Public and professional awareness
- Performance management and Quality Assurance
- Member agency compliance and holding individuals and multi agency work for looked after children to account

4 The National Picture for Looked after Children

- 4.1 Nationally the number of children in care has continued to rise over the last three years, this has inevitably led to many challenges for agencies and in particular for authorities who have a responsibility to find regulated and suitable accommodation, preferably within a family environment.
- 4.2 Since the death of Peter Connelly at the age of 17 months in the London Borough of Haringey in 2008 the numbers of children nationally coming into the care system has risen by 33% from 6,488 in 2008 to 8,684 in 2009/10. In March 2010 there were 832 applications made to the courts for care proceedings, the biggest number ever recorded.
- 4.3 Nationally authorities report that they continue to struggle to meet the rise and demand for foster placements and subsequently the number of children being placed in external agencies has also risen. Private and third sector organisations report an increase in requests for both foster placements and residential placements. Demographically the national picture of fostering is that there is an aging population of carers and the picture evolving is that numbers of foster carers are likely to reduce.

5 Local Picture

- 5.1 In the last year Herefordshire has seen a rise in the number of children being accommodated by the authority and entering into the care system. This number has gradually risen over the last two years from 150 to 215, this is in line with the national picture. Herefordshire's number of looked after children is average and comparable to statistical neighbours
- 5.2 The number of foster carers nationally has reduced. Locally, Herefordshire has also experienced this trend, seeing the numbers of carers drop from 79 households in 2009 and in 2010 to 75 households at the beginning of 2011. In 2011 the service worked hard to prevent a further fall in the number of foster carers and to increase the numbers through a specific 'invest to save' project. The number of foster carer households has recovered, and currently sits at 84, bucking the national trend
- 5.3 As a result of the rise in the number of looked after children and the challenge in increasing fostering households the number of external agency foster placements has continued to rise. There are currently 37 children in external agency foster placements. Whilst this remains an area of concern, the number has reduced from 45 in April 2011. Considering that this number has reduced at the same time that the number of looked after children has increased demonstrates that the invest to save project to increase foster carer households has been successful
- 5.4 The average cost of the independent fostering resource also rose from £844 per week in 2009 to £1,004 in 2010. There was a subsequent review and decision to join the West

Midlands framework for fostering and this has seen the cost of fostering placements reduce to an average of £850 in 2011.

6 Children aged 16-17

- 6.1 The Care Leaver Regulations came into force from April 2011. This guidance relates generally to young people aged 16+ to 25 and who have ceased to be looked after or who at the age of 16/17 have been identified as a 'child in need' of a service.
- 6.2 The research for this specification related particularly to the key issue of whether a homeless 16/17 year old if found to be in need of a service would need to be accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act
- 6.3 Research findings from the Southwark ruling and the new care leavers regulations have concluded that this is a complex matter. To achieve good outcomes for young people it is considered that a working together ethos with general principles and good partnership working with housing colleagues will be required.
- 6.4 It is clear from the regulations and ruling in the Southwark case that where a young person aged 16/17 presents as homeless a joint assessment should be undertaken by Children's Services and housing. Where it is determined that the young person is 'in need' the Southwark case would argue that being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act should be applied. This decision is taken in conjunction with the views of the young person, what their wishes are and their life ambitions/opportunities
- 6.5 In Herefordshire the numbers of young people presenting themselves as homeless had continued to rise following the ruling in the Southwark case. In Herefordshire this review established that the looked after children's service had developed a good working relationship with housing colleagues and have now launched a 16+ service for care leavers and those young people between the ages of 16-17 who have met the threshold for a service. It is evident that in the last year the numbers of young people aged 16-17 entering the care system have begun to reduce. The data available acknowledged that in most cases referred the newly developed family support worker in the 16+ service was able to work with the family and young person, and find a solution that allowed the young person to remain within the family home, demonstrating that the relationship between early intervention through the family support worker to be successful

7 Interviews

- 7.1 The Review Group undertook a number of interviews and Group discussions throughout the course of the Review, and the list of witnesses is attached as Appendix 3.
- 7.2 On the 15th September 2011 the Review Group interviewed members of the Referral and Assessment Team, Safeguarding and Vulnerable Children and received a presentation on a case regarding an unborn child. This was as an example that demonstrated the co-operation between agencies. A number of issues were highlighted during the discussion:
 - The Multi-agency team worked to ensure that the mother and the unborn child were kept in the optimum health. This included work with both the drug and alcohol related teams. The family as a whole was considered when looked at by substance

misuse services. GP's had an obligation to report concerns over child protection, and followed the multi-agency protocols. This was also true of teachers, and additional guidance on the issue had been provided by Ofsted. There was an increased willingness amongst the Police to utilise their powers in this area, as staff were trained up in the safeguarding matters.

- That co-location of Children Service's teams, health professionals and the police would help to both speed up processes and prevent any cases from being missed. A police officer would be located in the Children Services team from October 2011, and the intention would be to site the Public Protection Team and the Child Abuse Team in one building.
- That early intervention by the children provider services was delivered by co-located locality teams in the market towns and the City. These consisted of social care staff, psychologists, educational, youth services, health services and welfare officers who all shared the same office, supported by a local network of other agencies, such as Police Community Support Officers and midwives. Possible boundary issues between localities were removed by a single point of contact for the locality teams. Any safeguarding issue would mobilise the appropriate local team. The information and Assessment Co-ordinators ensured that information was shared about children, and liaised with the police and youth offending teams. Multi Agency Group Meetings took place every six weeks, but special meetings could be held at very short notice when required in order to review case work or to receive referrals for complex cases which needed support
- That reputational damage from over-reaction had never occurred as the Service had never been accused of over-reacting. The safeguarding processes were evidence based, and any complaints from parents had been dealt with through the appropriate legislation.
- That children would be sent back to the home environment by the Placement Panel only when it was deemed safe and appropriate. The panel took expert advice from specialists where needed, and the final decision was made by the Assistant Director - Safeguarding and Vulnerable Children, Children were supported by a multi-agency package when returned home.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

That:

- 1 There should be regular scrutiny of the activities of the Children's Safeguarding Board by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- 2 Co-location of Children Service's teams, health services and the police should be encouraged. Co-location of the Public Protection Team and the Child Abuse Team in order to prevent cases from being missed should also be put in place as soon as possible.**
- 3 There should be greater use of tele-conferencing systems in order to facilitate Strategy Meetings of the partner agencies.**

7.4 Looked After Children Team

On the 22 November 2011, the Review Group interviewed members of the Looked After Children (LAC) Team and received a presentation on a case regarding a 15 year old girl who had been taken into care in March 2011 following concerns about the behaviour of her 'stepfather' that first appeared in 2009. A number of issues were highlighted during the ensuing discussion:

- Communication between agencies was an area that could be improved, as the first referral period did not always meet the appropriate standards.
- Issues surrounding Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) referrals were being addressed but remains a serious concern. The service was provided by the 2gether NHS Trust and a specialist LAC post was being appointed.
- Social workers should not reasonably be expected to hold a caseload of more than 17, as they were statutorily required to undertake 13 days a years on each case, so a caseload of 20 would leave them short of 56 days in a given year. There was no national recommendation for caseloads. Five agency social workers were employed because of the number of cases that had to be dealt with. Three social workers cost the Council £111k, whilst three agency staff cost £174k. Whilst it was important to recruit social workers, it was important that the right individuals with the best skill sets were in place.
- That paperwork and caseloads were the biggest problems for social workers. A project to look at how the paperwork for looked after children could be simplified was underway.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

That:

- 4 That a realistic establishment of the costs of the Looked After Children Service should be set, to allow for staff recruitment and retention.**
- 5 All attempts should be made to simplify, rationalise and reduce the amount of recording in Frameworki**
- 6 That Frameworki should be reviewed, with regular reports to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.**
- 7 A review of Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMH'S) by the 2gether NHS Trust and the commissioning team should be undertaken to investigate how the needs of looked after children are being met by the service**

7.6 Senior Management

On the 14th May 2012, the Review Group interviewed the Director for People's Services and the Assistant Director Children & Young People Provider Services. The following areas were addressed: That;

- Concerns regarding the quality of safeguarding training had been raised, but had been addressed, and a revised training program designed. The Assistant Director Children & Young People Provider Services said that further improvements would be made to provide schools with the facility to train their staff.
- Where safeguarding cases had been closed, the information would not be shared with the child's school, as there was no system for passing such information on. Whilst it had been appreciated that this could potentially cause problems if a child moved between several schools, a more targeted service was being put into place as part of the common assessment framework (CAF) and through localities working. Schools were incentivised to attend these meetings, which took place every six weeks, and which would provide bespoke support services.
- It was considered that the legal support provided to the service was appropriate and provided by an experienced legal team. The Family Justice Review panel had announced a package of recommendations aimed at tackling delays in the family justice system which included a new six month time limit in care cases so delays were significantly reduced whilst enabling people to make their own arrangements for their children when they separate, and only use courts when necessary. These changes would be enacted this year. The interim period whilst the changes were brought in would prove challenging.

7.7 RECOMMENDATION

- 8 That following a number of incidents in the County involving children who had been placed with private contractors in the County from other local authorities without the knowledge of the Council or the Safeguarding Team, that the Council be strongly urged to lobby the Government in order to make it compulsory that all local authorities placing children outside their counties, should inform the local authority into whose area the child is placed.**

7.8 Independent Chair of the Children's Safeguarding Board

On the 3rd July 2012, the Review Group interviewed David McCallum, the recently appointed Independent Chairman of the Children's Safeguarding Board. The following areas were highlighted:

- That nationally there had been reluctance between agencies involved in safeguarding to co-operate to promote the welfare of children. This was reflected locally in a lack of clarity as to the extent of the problem. Improved multi-agency performance data was required to provide a more accurate picture of local performance.
- increasing numbers of children (higher than the national average) were subject to a child protection plan and LAC numbers had risen substantially, with a 300% rise in applications for care proceedings in four years. Despite the additional numbers, there had been a marked improvement in the management of child protection cases

by Children's Services. However, Agencies directly working in the child protection process were struggling with the weight of extra work, and if the increases were to continue, the levels of work would not be sustainable.

- Early intervention using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) was not fully embedded, and was seen more as a burden than a pathway to services to promote the welfare of children. In addition, each agency had its own short term targets and tended to priorities these above the safeguarding agenda. There was a collective will to work collaboratively to improve multi-agency safeguarding, but there was a need for greater mutual understanding between agencies.

8 VISITS

8.1 Moor House

The Review Group met a number of Foster Carers in Moor House in an informal discussion group.

8.2 CENTRE 18

The Review Group met a number of Looked after Children in Centre 18 in an informal discussion group.

8.3 Burghill School

The Review Group visited Burghill School and held an informal discussion with the Head Teacher, Mrs V Walker.

8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

That:

- 9 There should be regular briefings to all Members on safeguarding and child protection and that these briefings should be made mandatory for all Members. These briefings should be led by the safeguarding board and the directorate**
- 10 There should be absolute commitment to information sharing between all Local Authority multi-agency partners operating within the County with regard to children in care in Herefordshire, and that this commitment is implemented and effective**

8.5 Acknowledgement

The Review Group would like to thank the members of the public and Officers for their part in the Review.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That there should be regular scrutiny of the activities of the Children's Safeguarding Board by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- 2 That co-location of Children Service's teams and the police should be encouraged. Co-location of the Public Protection Team and the Child Abuse Team in order to prevent cases from being missed should also be put in place as soon as possible.**
- 3 There should be greater use of tele-conferencing systems in order to facilitate Strategy Meetings of the partner agencies.**
- 4 That a realistic establishment of the costs of the Looked After Children Service should be set, to allow for staff recruitment and retention.**
- 5 All attempts should be made to simplify, rationalise and reduce the amount of paperwork should be given to ways of rationalising the amount of paperwork that was involved in casework.**
- 6 That Frameworki should be kept under constant review, with regular performance reports to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.**
- 7 A review of Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMH'S) by the 2gether NHS Trust and the commissioning team should be undertaken to investigate how the needs of looked after children are being met by the service;**
- 8 That following a number of incidents in the County involving children who had been placed with private contractors in the County from other local authorities without the knowledge of the Council or the Safeguarding Team, that the Council be strongly urged to lobby the Government in order to make it compulsory that all local authorities placing children outside their counties, should inform the local authority into whose area the child is placed.**
- 9 The Children's Safeguarding Board should provide regular briefings to all Members on their responsibilities as corporate parents and that these briefings should be made mandatory for all Members.**
- 10 There should be absolute commitment to information sharing between all Local Authority multi-agency partners operating within the County with regard to children in care in Herefordshire.**

TITLE OF REVIEW:**Safeguarding Arrangements for Children in Herefordshire****SCOPING****Reason for Enquiry**

To understand the current awareness of the safeguarding arrangements in Herefordshire specifically in relation to the role's and responsibilities of councillors and to understand the function of corporate parenting

Links to the Community Strategy

The review contributes to the following objectives contained in the Herefordshire Sustainable Community Strategy, including the Council's Corporate Plan and other key plans or strategies:

Summary of Review and Terms of Reference**Summary**

It is important that officers of the council understand their role and responsibility in ensuring that children in Herefordshire are safe and that they have the opportunity to meet their milestones and achieve comparably with targets set nationally in safeguarding children, with a particular focus on looked after children

Terms of Reference

- **To consider the arrangements for Looked After Children in Herefordshire in relation to partnership working in education, health, YOS and social care**
- **To consider the arrangements for 16/17 year old homeless young people**

What will NOT be included

- **Specific arrangements of child protection**

Potential outcomes

To

- **That reporting to the board is achieved**
- **Information about safeguarding is available**

Key questions

To

- **Consider what the priority service is for looked after children in each agency**

Cabinet Member (s)

Councillor PM Morgan (Cabinet Member, Health & Wellbeing)

Key Stakeholders/Consultees

- **Children in Care Council**
- **Housing**
- **Health**
- **Education**
- **Youth Offending Service**

Potential Witnesses

- **To be considered at first meeting on 25th August**

Research Required

Benchmarking across authorities would be valuable in ascertaining the safeguarding arrangements in other comparable authorities

Potential Visits

To

- **Children in Care Council**
- **Housing**
- **Health**
- **Education**

Outline Timetable (following decision by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to commission the Review)	
<i>Activity</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
Collect current available data for circulation to Group prior to first meeting of the Group.	Care Leavers regulations Fostering Service regulations Report for first meeting on data
Confirm approach, programme of consultation/research/provisional witnesses/meeting dates	First meeting of the Review Group. September 2011
Carry out programme of interviews	
Present interim report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee, if appropriate.	December 2011
Prepare options/recommendations	
Present Final report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee	September 2012
Present options/recommendations to Cabinet (or Cabinet Member (s))	
Cabinet/Cabinet Member (s) response (Within 2 months of receipt of Group's report)	
Consideration of Executive's response by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.	
Monitoring of Implementation of agreed recommendations (within six months of Executive's response)	
Members	Support Officers
Councillors:	Councillor TM James (Chairman)
	Councillors WLS Bowen, Brigadier P Jones CBE, FM Norman and SJ Robertson
Lead Support Officers	Stephanie Clay, Head Of Service for Looked After Children Tim Fewell, Head of 11-19 Integrated Services
Democratic Services Representative(s)	David Penrose

SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILDREN IN HEREFORDSHIRE

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

The Centre for Public Scrutiny

- Safeguarding Children – Scrutiny Guide.

Department for Education

- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers
- Family and Friends Care: Statutory guidance for Local Authorities.
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards

SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILDREN IN HEREFORDSHIRE

WITNESSES

Referral and Assessment Team, Safeguarding and Vulnerable Children

Lynne Renton Head of Safeguarding
Tina McGrath Head of Locality Services
Debbie McMillan Head of Locality Services
Natasha Dunlop Assistant Team Manager, Referral and Assessment Team

Looked After Children (LAC) Team

Sarah Duerden Team Manager, LAC and Young People's Team
Steve Field Assistant Team Manager LAC and Aftercare
Hilary Jones Senior LAC Education Officer
Debbie Barnett Student Social Worker
Hazel Blankley Named Nurse Safeguarding Children

Senior Management

Jo Davidson, Director for People's Services
Kathy O'Mahony Assistant Director Children & Young People Provider Services

Children's Safeguarding Board

David McCallum, Independent Chairman of the Children's Safeguarding Board

Foster Carers

Looked After Children in Centre 18.

Primary School Teacher

Mrs V Walker, Headteacher of Burghill Primary School.