

Meeting:	Health & Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Meeting date:	4 February 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

To inform the Committee of the outcomes of the Department for Education (DfE) Review, the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (HSCB) Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Diagnostic and to update it on the progress to date on the Ofsted Action Plan.

Recommendation(s)

THAT the following be noted:

- (a) outcome of the DfE review (as detailed at Appendix 1) conducted on 15 and 16 December 2014;**
- (b) outcome of the HSCB LGA 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 an update on children's safeguarding.

Reasons for recommendations

2. To update scrutiny on the outcome of the recent LGA peer diagnostic, DfE review and progress to date on the Ofsted action plan.

Key considerations

DfE Review

3. As reported to health and social care overview scrutiny on 1 October, 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 DfE intervention notice which was issued in 2012, the DfE 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 DfE 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 DfE 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 LGA 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 DfE 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.

HSCB LGA peer diagnostic

8. As part of its approach to continuous improvement, the HSCB arranged for the LGA 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.
9. The purpose of the diagnostic was to provide evidence that the HSCB were able to take over the function of the Herefordshire supporting and protecting children improvement Board (improvement board) should the DfE decide that the intervention notice could be lifted.
10. A copy of the letter outlining the recommendations from the LGA is attached at appendix 2.
11. The key areas for improvement are:

- Developing synergy of plans across the HSCB, 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 you know how the HSCB is making a difference
- Adopt the principles of the Children of Herefordshire's Improvement and Partnership Programme (CHIPP) in the HSCB'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

12. 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 HCC
- 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 LSCB Chair and CX/DCS/Portfolio Holder and Chair and PCC

Ofsted Action Plan

13. 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 scrutiny 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.
14. 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).
15. 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
16. All the above have been recognised as good practice developments in response to our Ofsted recommendations by the DfE and the LGA Peer Diagnostic.

Community impact

17. 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

18. 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

19. 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

20. There are no legal implications.

Risk management

21. 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 HSCB 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 DfE has been transferred to the HSCB, in full consultation with the DfE 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

22. The views of the HSCB and the Herefordshire Improvement Board have been included within the report and the action plan.

Appendices

Appendix 1 DfE letter

Appendix 2 Letter from LGA in connection with the HSCB peer diagnostic

Appendix 3 Progress update on Ofsted action plan

Appendix 4 Ofsted action plan

Background papers

- None identified.