

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>26 February 2015</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Children's Safeguarding Update</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Head of Safeguarding and Review</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Key Decision**

This is not an executive decision.

## **Wards Affected**

Countywide

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the report is to:

1. To inform Cabinet of the outcome of the Department for Education (DfE) Review
2. To inform Cabinet of the outcome of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (HSCB) Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Diagnostic
3. To update Cabinet 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 enable Cabinet 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

### DfE Review

3. As reported to Cabinet on 11 September 2014, 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 has 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 was particularly pleased to see progress with respect to:
  - SMT 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 CHIPP programme
  - Frameworki is improved, is more user friendly, and contains additional bespoke fields for capturing voice of child and CSE 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 NQSWs remains effective and well received. There are now opportunities for progression to senior SW 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 the system 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 are 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 DfE was 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 is positive that on receipt of such assurances it 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

9. 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.
10. The purpose of the diagnostic was to provide evidence that the HSCB was 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.
11. A copy of the letter outlining the recommendations from the LGA is attached at Appendix 2.
12. 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 the council and its partners 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 to develop a project management culture to support the Board's 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 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 with LSCB Chair and CX/DCS/Portfolio Holder and Chair and PCC

#### 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 has confirmed its satisfaction with the action plan and recognises that it provides a robust framework covering all the areas for improvement identified from its 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 DfE and the LGA 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
  - 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
  - The partnership agreement to fund the development of the Safeguarding Board's business unit, to incorporate the community safety partnership agenda and functions
  - The recruitment to a new Independent Chair of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board

### **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 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 its 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 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.