

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>Monday 2 October 2017</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board (HSCB) Annual Report 2016/17</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Cabinet member young people and children's wellbeing</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

Non-key

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose and summary**

To present the 2016/17 annual report of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board (HSCB), which addresses the work of multi-agency partners in Herefordshire in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people within the county, including achievements and areas for improvement, and priorities identified for 2017/19.

To ensure the scrutiny committee is aware of the work of the board and future priorities, and has the opportunity to assess the compatibility of any future council activity with those ongoing priorities.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) the annual report and effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements for children and young people in Herefordshire as assessed by the board be noted;**
- b) the strategic priorities identified by the board be noted; and**
- c) any further areas that the safeguarding board should be focusing attention upon to provide challenge regarding the council's functions to safeguarding children and**

**young people be identified.**

## **Alternative options**

1. This report is to inform and enable the scrutiny committee to consider the HSCB annual report. The scrutiny committee could therefore suggest alternative activities or priorities for consideration by the board.

## **Key considerations**

2. The information provided below in relation to the safeguarding children board's annual report should be considered within the context of safeguarding within Herefordshire.
3. From a children and young person's perspective the impression can be one, influenced perhaps by ongoing national coverage, that abuse is perpetrated by 'strangers', or is historic in nature. Although this is correct to an extent, the reality both in Herefordshire and elsewhere is that it is very much a current and ongoing problem, and that the vast majority of child protection issues happen within the family, and in the child's home. It is also important to recognise that the abuse can take many forms, it is not only physical and sexual abuse that the board and agencies seek to protect children from, emotional abuse and serious neglect is a very real problem in the county, as it is across the country. These forms of abuse can provide particular challenges for professionals to recognise, respond to and deal with, but can be as damaging to the child or young person's long term health and wellbeing as better recognised and understood forms of abuse. It is of note that emotional abuse and neglect remain the main reasons for children being made the subject of a child protection plan. Additionally, children and young people find themselves increasingly exposed to, and at risk from, harmful individuals and material as a result of the accessibility of the internet and social media at a younger and younger age.
4. The work of the board is a critical element of the ongoing challenge to keep the most vulnerable members of our Herefordshire communities safe from harm. It is well known to both the board and the various partner agencies involved in the safeguarding of these children and young people that a number do regrettably come to serious harm. As such the importance of an effective board and the effective co-ordination of high quality services, as reflected in the annual report should be recognised.

## **HSCB annual report 2016/17**

5. The HSCB annual report details a number of developments in 2016/17 within the priorities set for that period. Key developments, impact and continuing areas for development are detailed below.
6. Priority 1 – To improve the recognition and response to child sexual exploitation (CSE) and missing children and young people.
  - a. Assessment – Mainly achieved, with the awareness and understanding of practitioner guidance an ongoing area of work. Furthermore, it will be important to establish how best the sub-group can support the Herefordshire Community Safety Partnership priority of reducing sexual offending against children in the county.
7. During the year, the HSCB child sexual exploitation (CSE) and missing sub-group has

continued to drive improvements in our collective response to this threat within Herefordshire.

8. The CSE Strategy and Delivery Plan was reviewed, updated and was signed off by the HSCB in January 2017. It has been informed by the local and regional problem profiles and has drawn on evidence about effective practice from local and national research, policy and guidance, including a report 'Local profile of children assessed for Child Sexual Exploitation' commissioned by the HSCB and delivered in October 2016.
9. On 27 April 2016, HSCB held a conference which focussed on the theme of child sexual exploitation. A total of 110 multi-agency professionals attended the conference, which was well received, and contributed greatly to raising the understanding of CSE amongst professionals in Herefordshire.
10. HSCB's work with licensing continued throughout 2016/17. The HSCB arranged for safeguarding questions to be added to the compulsory "Conditions Test" that every taxi driver has to pass before they are granted their licence. HSCB also commissioned an awareness raising sticker, which is displayed within every licensed Herefordshire taxi. CSE awareness training for taxi drivers regularly took place, the sessions were well attended and included the two major taxi firms within Herefordshire. Over 160 taxi drivers have now been trained, and all have been issued with a sticker for the back of their identity badge, which provides them with the number to call for the MASH Team, if they have any safeguarding concerns regarding a young passenger, and the Adult Referral Team (ART) if they have safeguarding concerns regarding an adult.
11. During 2017/18, the HSCB CSE and missing sub-group will be supporting the Herefordshire Community Safety Partnership in achieving its new priority for 2017 – 2020 of reducing sexual offending against children in the county. The sub-group will be reviewing how best it can contribute to preventing sexual offending against children more generally, and then incorporating this into their action plan for the coming year.
12. Priority 2 – The child's journey through the child protection process ensures effective planning and intervention to improve the care, safety and wellbeing of children and reduce/eradicate actual or the risk of significant harm.
  - a. Assessment – Steady progress, but with areas for improvement remaining. Specifically during 2017/19, the HSCB will be working to ensure we improve our response to children and young people living with domestic abuse, learning from the child protection conference observations is embedded through further member attendance, our board procedures are in line with regional arrangements and statutory guidance, so children receive the correct response. We use multi-agency performance data well to monitor the effectiveness of local safeguarding practice and the quality of child protection plans, we get feedback from children and young people who have experienced the child protection journey to understand the effectiveness of the local safeguarding system and learning from our serious case review and practice learning reviews is used appropriately to improve the journey of the child through the child protection process.
13. In October 2016, the quality assurance sub-group conducted an audit of services provided locally for children living in a household where domestic abuse is present. Although the audit found examples of outstanding practice, a number of areas for improvement were also identified, and the HSCB will be monitoring the response to these

areas, which is being led by the domestic violence and abuse delivery group within the Community Safety Partnership.

14. During 2016, members of the HSCB attended various child protection review conferences and recorded their observations. The feedback was captured within a number of specific areas, for example the quality of the multi-agency work, how well the child's views and experience were captured and then taken into account, and the quality of the conference process and resulting child protection plan. Since the visits and feedback there have been a number of changes made which will improve the child's and family members' experience of child protection conferences and also improve the effectiveness of planning and sharing of information within the meeting.
15. During 2016/17, the council's Children's Wellbeing Directorate built on the improvements of the previous year by reviewing key elements of its safeguarding practice to ensure it was as effective as possible. An extensive review of our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) led the board to agreeing revisions to its purpose, emphasising its role in managing requests for a social work service and ensuring that children at risk received a prompt response. A MASH Governance Board was established and this has overseen the revision of guidance and the move from Bath Street to Nelson House.
16. Schools remain critically important partners in our collective responsibilities towards safeguarding children. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub education posts and the safeguarding services provided to schools by the learning and achievement service are fundamental to the effectiveness of safeguarding in schools, and from April 2017 Herefordshire has introduced new funding arrangements for these services. These arrangements have been negotiated through 2016/17, and although it has met with challenges, they are now in place. The academic year 2016/17 saw the ongoing participation of professionals in workshops to raise awareness of the Prevent duty; the implementation of the CSE pre-checklist and toolkit and the completion of the audit process of policy and practice with regard to Keeping Children Safe in Education. In addition, the Head of Learning and Achievement has overseen the review of over half of Herefordshire's schools' safeguarding policies to ensure that they are fit for purpose and understood by staff.
17. Priority 3 – Identification and response to childhood neglect.
  - a. Assessment – Some progress, however tackling childhood neglect remains a key challenge for the HSCB, as Herefordshire reflects the national pattern where neglect is the most common reason for children being made the subject of a child protection plan. Furthermore, the HSCB's review processes continue to highlight areas for development in our identification of and response to childhood neglect.
18. A serious case review commissioned by the HSCB, in relation to a family of children who had suffered neglect over a long period of time, delivered a final report in December 2016. The circumstances of the incident covered within the serious case review reinforced the importance of the identification and response to childhood neglect being a priority for the HSCB, and made a number of recommendations to the board on how the response could be improved. The first of these recommendations was that the HSCB should ensure that there is an effective multi-agency childhood neglect strategy in place. As a result, the board has developed a childhood neglect strategy which is available on the board's website.
19. The neglect strategy sets out the strategic aims and core objectives of the HSCB in relation to the prevention, identification and response to childhood neglect, and how the

broader partnerships support and contribute to those. This strategy also sets out the key principles under which work around neglect should be undertaken and identifies key priority areas of work in order to improve our collective response to neglect, and sets a number of objectives for the HSCB to achieve. The strategy forms part of Herefordshire's approach to early Help, which is led by the Children and Young People's Partnership, and complements other key strategies within the partnerships, including Herefordshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Community Safety Partnership Strategic Plan, and the Herefordshire Levels of Need Threshold Guidance.

20. In order to ensure that these objectives are achieved, the HSCB has formed a neglect task and finish group to drive activity and improvement. In addition, throughout 2017/18 there will be an update on the progress of the work of this group at every board meeting, as it is important that the momentum is maintained. This work is also being supported by another group working to the HSCB, which has been tasked with assessing the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements for children and young people with disabilities, a group particularly vulnerable to neglect.
21. During 2017/18 work will continue to introduce an effective childhood neglect assessment tool that can be used by all partner agencies, train practitioners in the use of the tool to effectively responding to childhood neglect, and increase the awareness among partners of the problem of neglect and their responsibilities in tackling it. The effectiveness of this work and impact will be measured through audit activity conducted by the HSCB quality assurance sub-group.
22. Priority 4 – The early help services effectively identify needs and concerns relating to children and families, and services address these needs through effective planning and interventions to enable families to function effectively and children's needs are met and they are supported to achieve their full potential.
  - a. Assessment – Steady progress, with a continuing area of focus being to develop the knowledge of the workforce in relation to the use of the Levels of Need document, and to promote the move to an emphasis on early help.
23. The Levels of Need document is a guide to support professional judgement when considering the help that children and families need and when to refer concerns. The HSCB policy and procedure group has reviewed and revised the Levels of Need Threshold guidance during 2016/17, with a greater emphasis on early help. To help the board understand how well the Levels of Need document is understood and being used within Herefordshire, the board ran a survey audit for practitioners which asked a number of questions of staff. 246 responses were received from ten different partner agencies. 78% of respondents reported that they knew how to access the document, and reassuringly the majority of those that had needed to make a contact or referral had used the Levels of Need to inform that submission.
24. The HSCB has continued to support and challenge the development of early help services within Herefordshire. The board received a report from the Children's Wellbeing directorate on the development of the early help response, and was reassured that the effectiveness of this response continues to develop.
25. HSCB adopted an Early Help Strategy in the spring of 2016 and its implementation is being led by the Head of Educational Development, who chairs a multi-disciplinary group. The Head of Additional Needs now manages an integrated 0 to 25 special educational needs and disability (SEND) service, which will give children and their families a more consistent and coherent service.

26. During 2016, the HSCB conducted a multi-agency audit of early help cases which involved examining in detail how the cases had been dealt with by partner agencies. This audit highlighted outstanding practice in some of the cases, for example excellent and sustained engagement from schools, good engagement with the family, stability in the membership of the team working with the family, and being able to provide the right service to families at the right time. It also highlighted some areas for development, for example better inclusion of fathers in the Common Assessment Framework process, when appropriate.
27. Within education, the tracking down of children referred to as 'missing from education' (CME) has been increasingly successful over the past four years, with fewer children remaining as 'missing' from one quarter to the next. There has been a steady improvement in the tracking and location of CME year on year. In relation to Elective Home Education (EHE), 2016/17 saw a further increase in numbers of children known to the local council being educated at home; from 118 the previous year to 170. The EHE officer continues to offer guidance and to make robust monitoring visits about outcomes for children.
28. In support of the development of early help in Herefordshire, in 2017/18 the board will continue to embed and enhance the understanding of the Levels of Need for children and families across Herefordshire, particularly within the multi-agency training offered to partners, and ensure that HSCB procedures support the early help strategy. The board will also be supporting the work of the Children and Young People's Partnership in ensuring that the workforce is sufficiently prepared for the shift in emphasis towards early help by ensuring that HSCB training products promote understanding of the early help offer. The HSCB quality assurance sub-group will also be developing a set of assurance questions for use in assessing the effectiveness of the changes to early help arrangements and will be carrying out a further audit of early help cases during 2017/18.

### **Priorities for 2017/18**

29. Reflecting on the achievements of the board through 2016-2017, and using a range of sources of information, which has included inspections, self-assessments, learning from reviews and consultation with our partners in Herefordshire, highlighting areas where development is required, the board has set five priorities for 2017 – 2019. These are:
  - a. Priority 1: Neglect.
  - b. Priority 2: Child sexual abuse and exploitation (including children who go missing).
  - c. Priority 3: Safeguarding vulnerable children.
  - d. Priority 4: Early help.
  - e. Priority 5: Strong leadership, strong partnership.
30. Further information on the priorities and how these are to be achieved is provided within the HSCB Business Plan 2017/19, attached at Appendix 2

### **Community impact**

31. The partners represented on the board have statutory responsibilities for services in Herefordshire that safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children, young people and vulnerable adults. The board has a statutory duty to scrutinise, challenge and support this work. The HSCB is key mechanism for challenge, supporting and promoting improvement of these services within the council. The annual report and priorities going forward not only identify areas of safeguarding that require sustained focus and

improvement, but also complement and support the work of the other partnerships in Herefordshire such as the Children and Young People's Partnership's focus on early help, neglect and safeguarding, and the Community Safety Partnership's focus on domestic abuse.

## **Equality duty**

32. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:
33. 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 that is 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.
34. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. As this is a decision on back office functions, we do not believe that it will have an impact on our equality duty.
35. The safeguarding board pays due regard to The Equality Duty on public bodies and others carrying out public functions, specifically that public bodies consider the needs of all individuals in their day to day work. This is particularly evident for example within the HSCB in that there is a particular emphasis on ensuring that the child and parent(s) have the appropriate opportunity to express their views within child protection conferences, so their needs can be fully considered within the decision making.

## **Resource implications**

36. The HSCB receives contributions from partner agencies to fund its organisation and work. A budget is set out and reviewed throughout the year and any risks identified.

## **Legal implications**

37. There should be a clear framework to allow the HSCB to monitor the effectiveness of local services.
38. Section 13 of the Children Act 2004 requires each local council (authority) area to establish a safeguarding board and specifies who should be represented on the board.
39. The statutory objectives and functions of the HSCB, as set out in Section 14 of the Children Act 2004, are:
- 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; and
  - To ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each such person or body for those purposes

40. Regulation 5 of the LSCB Regs 2006 sets out the functions of the safeguarding board in relation to the above objectives.
41. Under statutory guidance, the safeguarding board has a duty to produce an annual report on the effectiveness of safeguarding children in the area. The reports should provide a rigorous and transparent assessment of the performance and effectiveness of local services. It should also identify weaknesses, causes of these and action to be taken to address them.

## **Risk management**

42. There are a number of identifiable risks associated with a reduction in the effectiveness of the safeguarding board. The board has a statutory responsibility to ensure the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements within Herefordshire. Ineffective safeguarding arrangements directly increase risk to the most vulnerable members of our community, this risk, being both high in probability and the impact on individuals, is evident from previous high profile cases in other areas, which in turn carries legal, political, reputational and financial risks to the partner agencies involved.
43. The current identifiable risks to the effectiveness of the board continue to be financial, as the need for contributing partners to identify savings continues, and organisational as the uncertainty of future board structure remains. The financial risk is currently mitigated by the boards holding modest reserves, combined with recent efficiency savings being identified, and the organisational risk comes from the amended statutory guidance being expected towards the end of 2017, which may have a significant impact on safeguarding children boards.
44. The HSCB, together with the Herefordshire Safeguarding Adults Board and Herefordshire Community Safety Partnership, run a joint risk register in order to monitor and manage these risks where appropriate, and this is subject to regular review.

## **Consultees**

None

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – HSCB Annual Report 2016/17

Appendix 2 - HSCB Business Plan 2017/19

## **Background papers**

None identified