

Division(s):

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 September 2019

Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board – Annual Reports

Report by Director for Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to note these annual reports and provide any comments.

Executive Summary

2. Local Safeguarding Children Boards were set up under the Children Act 2004 in order that agencies co-operate with each other to safeguard children and promote their welfare. The Oxfordshire Board is led by an independent chair and includes representation from all six local authorities in Oxfordshire, as well as the National Probation service, the Community Rehabilitation Company, Police, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, schools and Further Education colleges, the military, the voluntary sector and lay members. In April 2019 these arrangements changed to reflect the requirements of the DfE guidance 'Working Together 2018' however these reports relate to the financial year 2018/19.
3. This paper presents three annual reports: the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Annual (OSCB) Report; Performance, Audit and Quality Assurance Annual Report and the Case Review and Governance Annual Report.
4. The OSCB Annual Report sets out report sets out the challenges that the safeguarding partners have faced in terms of the ongoing demand on the system with neglect being a key feature; the need to keep children safe in full-time education and the contextual safeguarding risks that exist for children outside of their home environment. The report also highlights a number of examples of good practice including work around child exploitation.
5. The Performance Audit and Quality Assurance subgroup scrutinises the effectiveness of safeguarding practice. This annual report summarises the common themes for learning and improvement to support vulnerable children.
6. The Case Review and Governance Annual report summarises the learning from four serious case reviews.

Introduction

7. Richard Simpson (OSCB Independent Chair), Lara Patel (Deputy Director, Safeguarding, Children, Education and Families) and Tan Lea (Strategic Safeguarding Partnerships Manager, Children, Education and Families) will present a paper on **three** annual reports from the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board. The reports concern an overview of safeguarding work; serious case reviews and quality assurance.

Background

8. Local Safeguarding Children Boards were set up under the Children Act 2004 in order that agencies co-operate with each other to safeguard children and promote their welfare.
9. The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OCSB) is led by an independent chair and includes representation from all six local authorities in Oxfordshire, as well as the National Probation service, the Community Rehabilitation Company, Police, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, schools and Further Education colleges, the military, the voluntary sector and lay members.
10. The Board is funded through a partnership arrangement and meets 4 times per year. The Board is supported by a Business Unit located within Oxfordshire County Council. The board has two joint meetings with the Safeguarding Adults board per year. In 2018/19 there were three area groups to ensure good communication lines to frontline practitioners.
11. The Board has a series of multi-agency subgroups, each of which produce an annual report. This paper includes annual reports produced by two the subgroups working on learning and improvement in safeguarding practice: the Case Review and Governance subgroup and The Performance, Audit and Quality Assurance subgroup.
12. It should be noted that the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for the Board were revised in May 2019 in accordance with the requirements set out by the DfE guidance, Working Together 2018. However the reporting period for these reports was not affected by any of these changes.

OSCB Annual Report

13. The key purpose of the **OSCB Annual Report** is to assess the impact of the Board's work in 2018/19 on:
 - service quality and effectiveness
 - safeguarding outcomes for children and young people in Oxfordshire.
14. The report evaluates performance against the priorities that are set out in the Business Plan for the year and against other statutory functions that the LSCB must undertake.

15. The report sets out the challenges that the safeguarding partners have faced in terms of the ongoing demand on the system with neglect being a key feature; the need to keep children safe in full-time education and the contextual safeguarding risks that exist for children outside of their home environment. The Board has also been concerned with supporting transgender children; improving specialist placements for those in care and those with serious mental health needs as well as supporting good access for all children with emotional and mental health needs to CAMHS help.
16. There are many good examples of safeguarding work within the partnership. Partners have made good progress to tackle child exploitation. Drug exploitation in particular is an area of growing concern. The board has set up a partnership structure and screening tool to identify and support children. Partners have increased the uptake of multi-agency chronologies that ensure that there is a full picture of a child's life, that joint working makes a difference. Partners have got a tighter grip of the information on those children on reduced timetables, excluded from school or not attending and board members have met with headteachers to get sign up to keeping children safe in education.
17. As a result of OSCB work: Thames Valley Police reported an increase in uptake by schools of 'Operation Encompass' from 48% to 94%. (This system alerts schools if the child has been in the home when a domestic abuse incident has taken place in the family home the evening/ night before school). Children's Social care has developed a practice handbook to set out expectations and guidance for workers with respect to good supervision and the inclusion of children's views. The Clinical Commissioning Group has worked with GP practices to develop improvement plans for safeguarding work. Oxford Health NHS FT's recording systems include prompts to include and flag safeguarding information.
18. In 2018/19 the OSCB delivered over 150 free safeguarding training and learning events plus online learning. The training reached over 11,000 members of the Oxfordshire workforce:
 - ✓ 5,017 multi-agency practitioners undertook face-face training
 - ✓ 6,497 multi-agency practitioners have undertaken e-learningThe OSCB ran a wide range of training to cover not just core safeguarding and early help but also working with fathers, supporting LGBTQ+ children and young people as well as digital safety.
19. The OSCB delivered termly updates over 4000 members of the workforce and e-bulletins to educational settings across the county. In the coming year the OSCB will launch and update website and twitter feed. Learning and improvement events for approximately 150 delegates each time have covered:
 - Child drug exploitation: identifying and responding to it
 - Multi agency chronologies: understanding how to use them and why
 - Contextual safeguarding: what it means and how to work with it

Performance, Audit and Quality Assurance Annual Report

20. The Performance Audit and Quality Assurance subgroup scrutinises the effectiveness of safeguarding practice. This annual report summarises the common themes for learning and improvement to support vulnerable children. They are drawn from safeguarding self-assessments, school audits, single and multi-agency audits, participation work with children and young people, annual reports and serious case reviews practitioner feedback, performance data.
21. The data shows that the local context is one of continued increasing demand on services and higher rates of escalation into child protection and care. There is some indication that the early help work is beginning to increase and have impact. The number of children subject to a child protection plan remains high (605 at year end compared to 250 ten years ago). The main reason for a child protection plan is 'neglect'. The number of children looked after by the local authority rose by 13% over the year to 780 at the end of March 2019 but remains lower than national average. A large proportion of this increase is due to younger children coming in to the system with increasingly complex needs and elevated risk profiles particularly autism, mental health issues and risk of exploitation.
22. Partners identified the key financial and organisational pressures in relation to safeguarding children and adults (with care and support needs) as: recruitment & retention; increasing demand for services and the pressures placed on services through problems with housing and homelessness.
23. Practitioners have told the OSCB that the top three things they would change in the system are (1) Better joint working between partners e.g. communications, info sharing (2) Better training e.g. shorter, tailored to role, using case studies (3) More positive profile of safeguarding work
24. Through OSCB case reviews children have conveyed simple messages that at times they 'felt like they were missing' or simply 'not seen' by professionals. They also told us how small gestures of kindness and being noticed by professional made a big difference.
25. Key messages are summarised as:
 - There is much to be proud of across the safeguarding partnership although the workload is high, and it is not straightforward
 - We need to continue to focus on working well together
 - We need to 'think family'
 - We need to be better at listening to children

Case Review and Governance Annual Report

26. The purpose of the group is to support the OSCB in fulfilling its statutory duty to undertake reviews of cases both where the criteria¹ are met and where they

¹ Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015

are not met in order provide valuable information on joint working and areas for improvement. The group comprises members drawn from Thames Valley Police, the County Council's children's services and legal services, the OCCG Designated Doctor and Designated Nurse, OH NHS FT, Public Health and a Head teacher representative.

27. Over the last year the OSCB has worked on four serious case reviews. The OSCB also instigated four partnership learning reviews, which were ongoing at year end.
28. Safeguarding themes covered by case reviews have been cross cutting – neglect plays a part in almost all cases. Broadly speaking additional themes have included: the impact of parental mental health on parenting and the well-being of children; severe emotional and physical abuse; engagement and attendance in education as well as children's emotional wellbeing as they explore their identity and, in doing so, may also become at risk of harm to themselves. The CRAG considered 8 cases for a potential review this year. An emerging theme from these has been 'contextual safeguarding' e.g. children being vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families such as online abuse and child drug exploitation.
29. The ten most frequent learning points to strengthen working together in Oxfordshire have been:
 1. **Understand the 'lived experience' of the child in the family:** use multi-agency chronologies to share information in a cumulative view to weigh up risks over time and keep previous events in mind. Make sure that children's comments are clearly recorded and understood – actual words used and not just the interpretation of them.
 2. **Curiosity:** being curious about the family's past history, relationships and current circumstances in a way that moves beyond reliance on self-reported information
 3. **Response to physical abuse:** identifying it, listening to children and following safeguarding processes thoroughly; children may sometimes be too afraid to speak or unable to verbalise what they are going through
 4. **The role of schools in keeping children safe**
 - effective management of safeguarding records and sharing them when children transfer schools; effective escalation of concerns.
 - children are safest in full time education. Oxfordshire serious case reviews indicate that children on reduced time-tables, children absent from school and children educated at home are at increased risk. School attendance is a critical factor to support opportunity, well-being and safety
 - when the child is not in school being aware of the implications of elective home education and knowing which agencies are in touch with the family and to what effect
 5. **Parental wellbeing:** mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse are recurring themes. With respect to mental health colleagues need to

recognise the risks and impact on the safety of the child; don't minimise 'older' information

6. **Fragmented management of health needs:** ensuring effective communication across services for co-ordinated and consistent management of care
7. **Children's emotional wellbeing:** increasing evidence of self-harm by children aged 10 years & above, recognising that, as children explore their identity they may be at risk of harm to themselves
8. **Children's limited capacity to protect themselves** as they move into adolescence after experiencing a lack of consistent, supportive parenting in their early years (long lasting impact of neglect)
9. **Rethinking 'did not attend' to 'was not brought'**
10. **Understanding safeguarding risks that exist in the child's environment – not just their family** e.g. children being vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families such as online abuse, peer on peer abuse and child exploitation.

Financial and Staff Implications

30. None noted

Equalities Implications

31. None noted

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Background papers:

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