

Divisions Affected - All

Health and Wellbeing Board – 7th December 2023

Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) Annual Report Report by Business Manager

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Health and Wellbeing Board is RECOMMENDED to** note the annual report of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board senior safeguarding partners and to consider the key messages.

Executive Summary

2. This paper highlights findings from the Board's annual report on the effectiveness of local arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in Oxfordshire.

Background

3. Local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are the collective responsibility of chief officers in the county council, the Integrated Care Board and Thames Valley Police.
4. These three senior safeguarding partners agree ways to co-ordinate their safeguarding services for children; act as a strategic leadership group in supporting and engaging others; and implement local and national learning including from serious child safeguarding incidents. They work with relevant partners through the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board, under the leadership of an Independent Chair. The arrangement is referred to as the "Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB)".
5. The report can be accessed in full on the [OSCB website](#).

Key Issues

6. The OSCB Annual Report sets out the safeguarding challenges in Oxfordshire. The report shows the need to improve practice with respect to the themes of: (1) Neglect (2) Child exploitation and (3) Keeping children safe in education.
7. There are key messages for system leaders to bring a collective focus to:

“Ensuring early help is led and resourced at a senior level in line with the Children and Young People’s plan”

“Ensuring organisations are doing everything they can to support safeguarding priorities of neglect, child exploitation and keeping children safe in school. This needs whole system change and should be everyone’s business”

“Making sure capacity and demand issues in organisations are known across the partnership so we can tackle them together as a whole system. This includes issues of recruitment and retention of our highly valued workforce”

8. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Annual report sets out what the safeguarding partnership can learn from the most serious and complex reviews.
9. Over the last year two Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews were commissioned and six Rapid Reviews completed. Practical learning from these reviews informed the OSCB training programme for local workers and volunteers. It also informed learning summaries, workshops and an online conference.
10. The strategic messages for system leaders from these reviews, are:
 - The partnership took learning from repeat themes with moving from “What is wrong with you to what has happened to you “
 - Recognise the importance of key adults in a child’s life and involve them in any assessment made
 - Avoiding using victim blaming language in reports referring to young people in any reporting
 - The importance of understanding family dynamics including the history of the family and particularly in large families
 - The importance of understanding the impact of historical intra familial sexual abuse
 - Neglect was not recognised which led to significant harm of children
 - More robust pre-birth assessment and planning is required
 - Further understanding is required in neurodiversity and the impacts this has on parenting ability
11. The Performance Audit and Quality Assurance Annual report sets out what is understood about the effectiveness of safeguarding practice. The report has evidence of high standards of partnership working and acknowledges the complex challenges and pressures faced by workers over the pandemic. It summarises the common themes for learning and improvement to support vulnerable children. It concludes that:
12. **Our current priorities for system change are right – we just need more traction on making change happen.** This means helping practitioners learn how to identify early and deal with neglect; bringing together educational leaders to work on issues regarding exclusions and alternative provision to keep children safe in education; ensuring earlier and timely access to mental health and well-being services.

13. **We need to work better as one system.** We all need to think about how we work together based on what we have learnt. For example, reminding practitioners to use multi-agency chronologies, share information.

Strategic Policies and Priorities

14. The report outlines the Safeguarding Children Board's priorities, the learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, the outcomes of quality assurance work and the summarised findings with respect to the unexpected child deaths in Oxfordshire. The report supports the vision, values, objectives and strategic priorities in the Council's Strategic Plan (see [Strategic Plan 2022-2025](#)).

Financial Implications

15. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. There is no requirement for the council to commit any further financial resources towards the Board beyond what is currently committed. Checked by: Danny Doherty, Finance Business Partner

Legal Implications

16. There are no legal implications for the Local Authority. Checked by: Naomi Bentley-Walls, Principal Solicitor, Child Care Team (Legal Services)

Staff Implications

17. There are no additional staff resources being requested by way of this report for the work outlined in the Annual Report.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

18. There are no additional equality & inclusion implications.

Sustainability Implications

19. The Board have moved much of its work to a virtual environment, reducing travel congestion, and no longer prints any materials for Board meetings or training sessions, instead making these available electronically. It has also reduced printing & design costs by making more things, such as this annual report, plain text on the OSCB website.

Risk Management

20. The Board is made up of the partners who attend the meetings, supported by a small team in the Board Business Unit. If organisations do not continue to provide the level of engagement with the work of the Board it is likely it would fail to meet its duties laid out in statute and its accompanying guidance. As the

Local Authority is one of the safeguarding partners to work together under the Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act, 2017), and Working Together 2018, to ensure the Board is established and running well, this would represent a reputational risk. It is also likely any such failings would be highlighted under the Ofsted framework and in any resulting published report.

Annexes:

Annex 1: OSCB Annual Report

Annex 2: Child safeguarding practice review subgroup annual report

Annex 3: Performance, audit and quality assurance subgroup annual report

Contact Officer: Laura Gajdus. Business Manager - OSCB