

CABINET - 13 MAY 2014

Recommendations of the Cabinet Advisory Group on the Strategic Assurance Framework for safeguarding children and young people

Report by Cabinet Advisory Group on Safeguarding

Introduction

1. This report provides some background into the work of the Safeguarding Assurance Cabinet Advisory Group and makes some recommendations to Cabinet to strengthen the current assurance arrangements. These are intended to complement and strengthen existing arrangements rather than replace or subsume them.

Background

Terms of reference

2. At their meeting on 7 September 2013 the Cabinet Advisory Group agreed the following terms of reference:
3. *The Cabinet Advisory Group will be made up of 7 councillors, chaired by the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families.*
4. *The group will meet to consider the existing strategic assurance framework for safeguarding children and young people and make any recommendations to Cabinet for changes.*
5. *This includes considering:*
 1. *How do councillors and senior managers have assurance about front line practice and how safe things are in Oxfordshire? (the council's internal quality assurance framework)*
 2. *The current role of each of the groups below in the overall strategic framework.*
 - *Health and Wellbeing Board*
 - *Children and Young People's Board (including the children's plan)*
 - *Corporate Parenting Panel*
 - *Panels - adoptions and fostering*
 - *Cabinet*
 - *Audit and Governance Committee*
 - *Performance Scrutiny Committee*

3. *The council's inter-relationship with the Local Safeguarding Children Board*
6. *It was agreed that in order to consider these issues the Cabinet Advisory Group will need to understand:*
- *The national safeguarding framework [e.g. The new national indicator set and local safeguarding questions / the new Ofsted framework (out for consultation) / Working Together 2013 etc.]*
 - *Existing Terms of Reference for each group with a role in the framework*
 - *The key statutory functions and legal accountability for children's safeguarding including legally prescribed roles for the Director of Children's Services; the Chief Executive; the Local Safeguarding Children Board.*
 - *The council's approach to corporate parenting*
 - *Key performance metrics*
 - *The council's whistleblowing and complaints procedures*
 - *The involvement of children and young people in governance arrangements*
7. **Members of the Group**

- Cllr Melinda Tilley (Chairman)
- Cllr Val Smith (Vice Chairman) [Cllr Liz Brighthouse in Cllr Smith's absence]
- Cllr Janet Godden
- Cllr Gill Sanders
- Cllr Yvonne Constance
- Cllr Caroline Newton
- Cllr Maurice Billington

Summary of meetings and key issues discussed

8. The Group has met twice - in September 2013 and January 2014, and considered the following issues:
- **Partnerships and Governance in relation to children's safeguarding arrangements** - Jim Leivers, Director of Children Education and Families
 - **Role of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB)** - presented by Peter Clark as Vice Chairman of the OSCB, and Hannah Farncombe, Safeguarding Manager
 - **Child Protection and Safeguarding procedures** - presented by Karen Palmer and Julie Shepherd, children's social care area managers
 - **Existing Safeguarding Assurance Arrangements** - presented by Sarah Cox, Audit Manager and Tan Lea Early Intervention Manager
 - **Role of the Corporate Parenting Panel in safeguarding assurance** - presented by Lucy Butler, Deputy Director, Children's Social Care
 - **Statutory role and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding** - Jim Leivers - Director of Children Education and Families
 - **Corporate parenting - duties and responsibilities of the Councillor** - presented by Peter Clark, Head of Legal Services

9. Meetings were held in public and papers and minutes are available on the council's website.
10. The Group will be meeting during the summer to look at progress and timeframes for the recommendations below.

Recommendations to Cabinet

11. The Cabinet Advisory Group meetings have provided members with an understanding of the substantial and often sensitive work that children's social care undertakes to keep Oxfordshire children and young people safe.
12. The Cabinet Advisory Group now has a good understanding of the complex existing assurance mechanisms, both within the council and in a formal set of partnership governance arrangements.
13. The Cabinet Advisory Group recognise that these are already substantial and include the council's performance management processes, that cascade 'up' from:
 - individual members of staff
 - social care teams
 - the children's social care management team
 - the directorate management team
 - and in reports to the County Council Management team (CCMT) and to Performance Scrutiny and Cabinet.
14. In addition there are additional safeguards that are in place that include
 - The Council's existing audit processes as overseen by the Audit and Governance Committee
 - The key challenge role of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB)
 - The oversight of Children's Services commissioning by the Health and Wellbeing Board.
 - The work of the Corporate Parenting Panel relating to all Looked After Children
 - The role of the Performance Scrutiny Committee to hold the Children and Families Directorate to account
15. The Cabinet Advisory Group's view is that whilst there is very significant work undertaken by these various bodies, nonetheless there is an opportunity to further strengthen the coordination of various bodies involved in safeguarding to ensure there is a robust framework in place that provides the best possibility of protecting children of Oxfordshire.
16. The recommendations below are proposed to complement and strengthen existing arrangements rather than replace or subsume them.
 1. That the Director for Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services make appropriate arrangements to provide effective bi-annual

briefings for all County Councillors on the work of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and associated issues.

2. The Annual Report of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board to be made available for all members of Council to enable a full and public discussion of all safeguarding issues relating to the county council. It is proposed that this should be through the following mechanisms:
 - The annual report and minutes of the OSCB Full Board meetings should be scheduled for discussion by the Corporate Parenting Panel (with a focus on safeguarding of looked after children).
 - The Director for Children's Services providing a report to Cabinet on an annual basis on relevant issues for the County Council arising from the report.
 - The Director for Children's Services providing a report to full Council with regards to the implications from the Annual Report for the Council. This will include inviting the Chairman of the OSCB to address Council and the Director for Children's Services setting out a response. In particular considering practice arising from that review and to ascertain the effectiveness of front line practice and an evaluation as to how safe children are in Oxfordshire.
3. That the Director for Children's Services develop and put into place formal protocols and arrangements for effective ways of working between the OSCB, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Children's Partnership Board (formally the Children's trust). This will include:
 - The Director for Children's Services clarifying the key roles and responsibilities and working arrangements between Children and People's Partnership Board and the Health & Wellbeing Board to include formulation and commissioning and review of the Children and People's plan.
 - The Director for Children's Services ensuring that the Health and Wellbeing Board formally receive the OSCB annual report.
4. A review to be undertaken of the working relationship between all external partners including OSCB and Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnerships to ensure that we all work in a joined up way to ensure that all children are safe within Oxfordshire.
5. That the Performance Scrutiny Committee review current safeguarding key performance indicators (KPIs) in order to ascertain how these can be effectively utilised by the Committee to monitor and performance manage the key safeguarding and child protection work of the Council and its key partners and to hold the DCS to account for performance. In particular consideration should be given to the indicators currently reported to the relevant subcommittee of the OSCB.
6. That the Education Scrutiny Committee receive the Annual Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children and Care Leavers so that members

are clear about the educational outcomes for children and the impact of actions being taken to maximise their achievements.

7. That the Deputy Director for Education & Early Intervention's annual briefing for all members on educational attainment includes the outcomes for looked after children and all vulnerable groups.
8. Members' understanding in relation to safeguarding is strengthened through a broad training session on safeguarding issues led by Director for Children's Services and County Solicitor.
9. Annual locality specific items on children's safeguarding and corporate parenting is provided to members at locality meetings - e.g. including information on numbers of looked after children in a local area, any significant safeguarding trends locally. This will not include any information on individual children.
10. That the Director for Children's Services and Lead Member provide a formal overview of safeguarding arrangements to Cabinet covering the following issues:
 - Recommendation as to whether the Corporate Parenting Panel be made a formal sub-committee of the Council so as to ensure better integration within the governance of the Council.
 - Consideration as to whether there should be a formal member briefing setting out the legal changes to statutory provision for homelessness for under 16 and 17 year olds within Oxfordshire and the services that are provided to them.
 - That all members receive a copy of the Corporate Parenting Responsibility Report that was presented to the Cabinet Advisory Group.
 - Consider how best school achievement of looked after children is reported to Members.
11. The Director for Children's Services to report on the outcome of all serious case reviews, action taken to address any identified improvements and assurance that all frontline children's practitioners have been briefed on the findings. This report to be submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel, Performance Scrutiny Chairman, Lead Member and Cabinet. This should be a formal report to Cabinet on analysis implications and implementation.
12. The Council's section 11 self-assessment audit on safeguarding and other safeguarding audits undertaken by OSCB and Children, Education and Families Directorate to be reported formally to the Corporate Parenting Panel, Performance Scrutiny, Performance Scrutiny Chairman and Cabinet.
13. The Director for Children's Services to consider improvements with regards to communication and briefings for Members on all aspects of safeguarding to include the following:

- Annual safeguarding review of LAC, Care Leavers and homeless young people
 - S11 self assessment audit on safeguarding.
 - Children in care council and sounding board publications
 - OSCB Annual Report
 - OCSP Annual Report
 - DCS to set out how School Achievement, Children's Voice and Children's home visits are communicated to Members
 - Members to be invited to the annual OSCB conference
 - Need to collate all relevant reports and statutory guidance as a Member resource available to all members and deposited in the Members Resource Library
14. The role of the Corporate Parenting Panel be reviewed to ensure that it has regard to, and properly evaluates, the following in relation to any looked after child
- CDOP Annual Report
 - Receive regular reports on missing episodes for LAC and actions taken to address
 - Placement information and performance to go to Corporate Parenting Panel.
 - Any other reports, audits or other relevant information that relates to LAC

RECOMMENDATION

17. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to agree the recommendations of the CAG to allow officers to develop a delivery plan with clear timescales and ownership for implementation.**

COUNCILLOR TILLEY

Lead member for Children's Services & Chairman of the Cabinet Advisory Group on Safeguarding

Contact Officers:

Peter Clark Head of Law & Governance 01865 323907

Hannah Farncombe Safeguarding Manager Team 01865 815273

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