

## **Divisions Affected – All**

### **CABINET 21 October 2025**

## **Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report Report of Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
  - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
  - b) Agree that, once Cabinet has responded, relevant officers will continue to provide each meeting of the Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee with a brief written update on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations for 12 months, or until they are completed (if earlier).

### **REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND**

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

### **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

3. The Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the annual report of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership at its meeting on 19 September 2025.
4. The Committee would like to thank Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Carol Douch, Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement, Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education, Jessie Dobson, Service Manager: Adolescence and Prevention, and Delia

Mann, Deputy Director Children's Social Care, for attending to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions.

## SUMMARY

5. The Cabinet member for Children and Young People noted the complexity of safeguarding and the wholehearted commitment across the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership to supporting all children, especially those at risk. The Assistant Director set out the detail of the report, explaining the 'working together' arrangement, recent leadership changes for improved accountability, and how the Partnership was strengthening its governance.
6. The Committee had a very wide-ranging discussion and topics explored included new screening tools; child-on-child exploitation; online exploitation and mobile phone use; the voice of the child; the structure of the Partnership; local partnerships; child protection plans; and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews.
7. The Committee made one observation, about the importance of public accountability and the visibility of safeguarding, and one recommendation, about support for parents regarding online threats.

## OBSERVATION

8. The Committee accepts that the statutory guidance requires the chair of the Partnership to be one of the Designated Safeguarding Partners and that this is why there is no longer an independent chair. However, the Committee regrets this change to the guidance and considers that there is a risk of a perception of bias and of 'marking one's own homework' when viewed by the public.
9. The Committee notes that the statutory guidance sets out:

*61. To support delivery of these functions, LSPs [Local Safeguarding Partnerships] should appoint one of the DSPs [Designated Safeguarding Partners] as the partnership chair for the multi-agency arrangements. This role needs to be jointly agreed by the LSPs and in doing so given the full backing of all three partners. The role should be regularly reviewed, and any changes updated in published arrangements. The role can be rotated between the DSPs if deemed appropriate by LSPs. This is intended to mirror the joint and equal responsibility for the arrangements and increase shared understanding of the system. The function should facilitate partner discussions, working in conjunction with independent scrutiny which provides rigour and challenge.*

*62. The purpose of the partnership chair will be to provide greater continuity across local areas and act as the conduit between the DSPs and LSPs, providing feedback and escalating collective risk and issues to LSPs as necessary. It will allow for a single point of contact for the partnership but should not cut across existing formal complaints procedures. The functions of*

*the partnership chair are separate and distinct from the functions of independent scrutiny. This arrangement removes any need for a local area to maintain another chair or independent chair.*

10. The Committee questions how no longer being chaired independently will aid rigour and challenge but recognises that the Partnership must no longer be so. The Committee is keen, though, to emphasise the importance of public accountability regarding safeguarding. Vital safeguarding work will necessarily happen unseen but the Council must remain committed to the importance of safeguarding's visibility. It must shine a light that supports children and young people so that they are safe.

***Observation: That the Council must remain committed to the importance of public accountability and to the visibility of safeguarding.***

## RECOMMENDATION

11. Safeguarding is an area that spans huge swathes of life. It is, as practitioners often remind people, Everyone's Business. There are all sorts of ways in which children can be in danger and the Council, not least as Corporate Parent, must be alert to these. However, one particular topic that was raised in discussion in Committee was that of online harms. Whilst the Committee was advised that unsupervised access to a smartphone is not recommended for those under 14 years old, 82% of those aged 10-12 have their own mobile phone and 94% of them use messaging sites/apps and 81% use social media.<sup>1</sup> It is likely that a significant proportion of those do have unsupervised access to it.
12. Parents and carers know that there are risks; most will also trust their own children to behave appropriately. However, that does not preclude them from being nervous and wanting support.
13. The Committee was reminded of an effective education campaign on Female Genital Mutilation which the Council and the then safeguarding board had previously been involved in. The Committee considered that a campaign regarding online harms would be well worth exploring.
14. Ideally working in partnership with other bodies across the county council region, and perhaps more widely, such a campaign would educate and empower parents and carers to support their children when navigating the rapid technological change everyone is experiencing.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/children/childrens-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2025/childrens-media-literacy-report-2025.pdf?v=396621> page 8 – accessed October, 2025

***Recommendation: That the Council should deploy a sustained, smart educational campaign to support parents and carers, particularly regarding online threats and should consider how best to do this.***

## **FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

15. The Committee anticipates a further item on safeguarding during this municipal year and hopes to receive Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews when issued.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

16. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.

17. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

Anita Bradley  
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex: Pro-forma Response Template

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

Contact Officer: Richard Doney  
Scrutiny Officer  
[richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

October 2025