

**Agenda Item No:**

**Report To:** AUDIT COMMITTEE

**Date:** 16 June 2016

**Report Title:** SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

**Report Author:** Rich Clarke



**Summary:** The report sets out progress made since this Committee received the 'weak' assurance rated report on Safeguarding in December 2016. The report notes that, as a result of progress towards implementing recommendations, Mid Kent Audit's most recent follow up report (examining actions due by 31 March 2016) raised the assurance level from 'weak' to 'sound'.

**Key Decision:** No

**Affected Wards:** All

**Recommendations:** 1. The Audit Committee **NOTES** the progress made towards implementing recommendations raised in the Safeguarding Audit Report brought to this Committee in December 2015.

**Policy Overview:** Not Applicable

**Financial Implications:** Not Applicable

**Risk Assessment** No

**Equalities Impact Assessment** No

**Other Implications:** Not Applicable

**Exemptions :**

**Background Papers:** Safeguarding Audit Report (presented December 2015)

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## Report Title: Safeguarding Update Report

### Purpose of the Report

1. Our audit plan, approved by Members in March 2015, included an audit intended to examine the controls designed and operated by the Council to ensure it meets its obligations under legislation and regulations to ensure safety of children and vulnerable adults. That report concluded the controls offered only *weak* assurance, meaning the service required support to operate consistently at an effective level.
2. The audit included six recommendations for improvement and officers responded with a proposal for 23 actions to implement those recommendations. The majority of actions (18/23) fell due for implementation in the quarter ended 31 March 2016 and this report provides an update for Members on progress.

### Background

3. The audit report, dated October 2015, was reported to Members in December 2015. For context and a summary of the findings, we reproduce below the original executive summary:

*The audit focussed on the Council's management of the risks associated with operation of the Safeguarding function. We examined similar areas to the statutory assessment tool's 8 standards and aimed to assess the effectiveness of the arrangements for safeguarding children. Our findings are consistent with a 2014 peer assessment undertaken by the Kent Children's Safeguarding Board against the Council's statutory responsibilities under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004. Most (6 of 8) areas in that assessment were graded as "partially met" at best because of out of date policies and procedures and limited training rollout. We also note that the peer assessment differed considerably from the Council's own assessment recording all standards as 'met'.*

*The Council established a working group in response to the peer review, aimed at implementing improvements ahead of a 2016 further review. While the Council has made some progress, overall advances are limited especially considering revised processes will need to be demonstrably embedded by the time of re-assessment.*

*We also examined governance arrangements, training, recruitment aspects, and referrals. We found that the current Council policy and procedures are untested since Housing staff are routinely using external protocols rather than Council procedures. This means that, although statutory requirements are met, the Council is not itself tracking or gathering information on referrals efficiently or comprehensively.*

4. Of the 23 actions proposed by officers in response, 19 had implementation dates by 31 March 2016 (1 by 31 December 2015). The remaining four actions were

due in 2016/17 principally because of the time necessary to progress to implementation, for example it takes time to set up and roll out a training programme.

5. We followed up the actions due in April 2016 and reported findings to officers in May. Below is the section of that follow up report relating to Safeguarding:

*We initially assigned this review a **weak** assurance rating largely because of our concerns around out of date policies and procedures and limited training roll out to meet the Council's statutory responsibilities in this area. Management provided a thorough and detailed action plan in response to the recommendations made.*

*The majority of actions fell due in this quarter and we found a positive response with the implementation of recommendations to be on track. We note the formal adoption of a new Safeguarding Policy by the Council and the formation of a Strategic Group and Safeguarding Leads Group to embed new policies and procedures. Training and awareness raising to support implementation of the arrangements has been given prominence and a Safeguarding Training Strategy introduced to meet this aim. The Locator system has been suitably developed to provide a central source for monitoring referrals and holding information.*

*The actions which are not yet due for implementation at this time rely primarily on the arrangements maturing and include the continuation of staff training and annual reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.*

*We are happy to upgrade the assurance rating to **sound** following the action taken by management.*

6. As is standard with high priority recommendations, our work involved verification and re-testing where appropriate to ensure implementation. As a matter of process it is also worth noting that we do not re-grade audits up to 'Strong' (the highest level on our scale). Each assurance rating is based on a full evaluation of the service area as set out in our brief and so a partial evaluation (focussed solely on areas recommended for action) cannot be to the same standard of assurance as it does not, for example, provide assurance that areas originally assessed as satisfactory have remained.
7. However, we recognise the value to an authority in identifying the point where progress means we are satisfied it can place reliance on the system so we do re-grade to 'Sound'. This marks the point in the process where we are satisfied the residual risks to the authority from non-implemented recommendations no longer represent a significant concern, although it does not mean that action could or should stop in progressing remaining issues which we will continue to follow up as they fall due.
8. A report to Management Board in June 2016 by the Designated Safeguarding Lead provided further detail on activity to date and areas yet to address:

## **Activity January to June 2016**

- Reviewed and agreed revise procedures for recruitment, staff checks and whistle-blowing
- Set up a safe, confidential and robust monitoring system for Council referrals
- Introduced a monitoring system to senior management and elected members
- Broadened and relocated the Designated Officer to champion the corporate importance of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults throughout the organisation and externally
- Drafted, agreed and adopted a new overarching Safeguarding Policy for the Council with reference to statutory responsibilities and underpinning procedures
- Established a Lead Safeguarding Officer group to champion safeguarding and provide points of contact within the council
- Developed, adopted and implemented a safeguarding training strategy
- Coordinated awareness training for child sexual exploitation training for partners
- Delivered three Prevent duty WRAP training to DWP, foster agencies, schools and other partners
- Started two Freedom programmes and a Recovery Toolkit (a psycho-educational resource which includes a cognitive behavioural therapy module) for victims of domestic abuse

## **Areas to address in remainder of 2016**

- Embedding of new procedures, policy and recording system
- Raise awareness within the local authority
- Train 100+ council staff up to level 2 awareness training
- Conduct a review of more specialist safeguarding training needs for lead safeguarding officers
- Put all referral forms in to one accessible location on intranet
- Report to senior managers on progress
- Review job descriptions - Designated Safeguarding Lead and Lead Safeguarding Officers by August 2016
- Update website to include how children and other members of the public can make a complaint when there is a concern regarding the organisations safeguarding actions
- All commissioned services to be audited for safeguarding requirements
- Senior Management training on safeguarding responsibilities

## **Risk Assessment**

9. This report is presented for information and update. It has no risk management implications.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

10. There are no proposals made in the report that require an equalities impact assessment.

## Other Options Considered

11. Not applicable

## Consultation

12. The audit follow up and management reports were presented to Management Board in May and June 2016 and are presented here as updated for comments received.

## Implications Assessment

13. Not Applicable

## Handling

14. Not Applicable

## Conclusion

15. Progress to date against recommendations raised within the *weak* rated audit of Safeguarding has been satisfactory. As a result, we have revisited the assurance rating and now regard the service as offering *sound* assurance (operating effectively). Recommendations remaining for action will be followed up as they fall due.

## Portfolio Holder's Views

16. We understand the portfolio holder has been kept informed of progress in implementing recommendations.

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