

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 28 March 2017

Report Title: Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk – The Council's Role and Partnership Working

Report Author: James Hann – Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Bradford – Portfolio Responsibility for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety



Summary: Safeguarding is the process of protecting children, young people and adults at risk from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development, and ensuring they are growing up and developing in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care - enabling them to have optimum life chances.

This report provides members with an introduction to the council's responsibilities and highlights some of the work carried out in the last 15 months

Key Decision: No

Affected Wards: All Wards

Recommendations: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the information contained within this report.

Policy Overview: The council has a Safeguarding Policy that supports the council, its officers, elected members and volunteers in fulfilling their statutory responsibilities.

Financial Implications: The work is primarily carried out within service budgets, although Management Team did agree an additional £7,000 for Level Two Safeguarding training.

Risk Assessment Not applicable.

Background Papers: The self assessment and peer review required under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 is available in the Member Room

Contacts: james.hann@ashford.gov.uk Tel: (01233) 330513

Agenda Item No.

Report Title: Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk – The Council’s Role and Partnership Working

Purpose of the Report

1. In 2015 the audit partnership recorded as “weak” the council’s safeguarding activities, procedures and policies. While there was no indication that the council had put anyone at risk, its training, awareness, policies, procedures and recording needed an urgent update to ensure they reflected the safeguarding challenges faced by the council. Officers from across the council have undertaken a significant amount of work over the last fifteen months and the subsequent review undertaken by the auditors recorded the council’s safeguarding as “sound”.
2. This report provides the committee with:
 - an overview of the council’s role and responsibilities
 - accountability and governance
 - an indication of the work that has been carried out since the audit in December 2015
 - referrals made since April 2016
 - future work

Background

3. Over the last few years the safeguarding agenda has become increasingly high profile with significant political and media focus at a national as well as local level. In response to this, duties placed on councils and other agencies have been extended.
4. The Children Act 1989 states that the child’s welfare is paramount and that every child has a right to protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation. Statutory guidance on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under Sections 10, 11 and 13 of the Children Act 2004 specifies what is required of local authorities.
5. The Care Act 2014 codified the principle of wellbeing and placed safeguarding adults’ duties on a statutory basis. The council’s policies and procedures are governed by this Act, which provides the legal framework for how local authorities (in this case Kent County Council) and other parts of the public sector, including the borough council, should protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect.
6. The Counter-Terrorism Act 2015 dictates that all local authorities are vital to the Prevent work which exists to reduce the risk of people being drawn into terrorism, while under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 the council has a statutory duty to report and provide notification to the National Crime Agency about any potential victims of modern slavery or trafficking.

7. Taken together, these legislative provisions place on local authorities and their partners stringent responsibilities regarding the general safeguarding of both children and adults at risk.
8. The introduction of the Care Act 2014, which came in to effect from April 2015 and the publication of national guidance such as “Working Together”, plus the council’s own audit prompted a review of the council’s existing safeguarding arrangements.

Ashford Borough Council’s Safeguarding Policy

9. A revised over-arching Safeguarding Policy was adopted in April 2016. It provides a clear understanding of the council’s role and the procedures required to respond appropriately to this increasingly complex and challenging subject.
10. The policy supports the council, its officers, elected members and volunteers in fulfilling their statutory responsibilities under the Care Act 2014, the Children Act 2014 and the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 statutory guidance.
11. The policy was brought up to date to align with recent changes in national policy, and best practice from around the county. It also drew on the collaborative work being undertaken across the council, reflected local working arrangements with the relevant statutory partners and responded to the audit recommendations.
12. The council believes that safeguarding is ‘everybody’s business’ and is committed to ensuring children, young people and adults at risk are protected from abuse and are provided with opportunities to thrive. As a part of this ambition, officers have undertaken a programme of work to revise its detailed operational procedures, embraced best practice, and provided additional support to members, employees and volunteers to deliver our responsibilities around this agenda.

Accountability and Governance

13. Ultimately, accountability for safeguarding under the work of Ashford Borough Council falls to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive and Senior Management Team are responsible for ensuring the council’s responsibilities and procedures are implemented, monitored and consistently reviewed. Also, the Chief Executive is responsible for nominating an officer to represent the Council on the Local Child and Adult Safeguarding Boards and relevant subgroups.
14. The Designated Safeguarding Officer is responsible for dealing with reports or concerns about the protection of children, young people and adults at risk appropriately and in accordance with the procedures that underpin the Safeguarding Policy.

15. A group of Lead Safeguarding Officers was established to support the Designated Safeguarding Officer and they hold responsibility for safeguarding within different areas of the council's operations:
 - Adults at risk
 - Children
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Child Sexual Exploitation
 - Prevent (preventing extremism)
 - Contracts
 - Commissioning

16. All members, employees and volunteers are responsible for carrying out their duties in a way that actively safeguards and promotes the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk. They must also act in a way that protects them from wrongful allegations of abuse as far as possible. They must bring safeguarding concerns to the attention of the Designated Safeguarding Officer.

Actions Taken

17. Lead Officers and other staff have been implementing an action plan to deliver key improvements in the council's safeguarding governance, policy making, procedures, working practices and monitoring.

18. Along with the adoption of a revised Safeguarding Policy a considerable amount of work has been undertaken in the last 15 months. The following provides some of the key achievements:
 - Reviewed and agreed revise procedures for recruitment, staff checks and whistle-blowing;
 - In January 2016 the council's Senior Management Team considered and approved updated Personnel Policies, revised in light to the recent legislative and policy changes relating to safeguarding;
 - In March 2016 the Joint Consultative Committee also received and approved these changes;
 - Set up a safe, confidential and robust monitoring system for council referrals to ensure all referrals were recorded in one place;
 - Introduced quarterly reports to the Senior Management Team and an annual report to elected members;
 - Broadened the role of the Designated Safeguarding Officer role to champion the corporate importance of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults throughout the organisation and externally;
 - Transferred the role of the Designated Safeguarding Officer to the Health, Parking & Community Safety Service in order to maximise linkages with the wider community safety agenda;
 - 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 (refer below for more detail);
- Coordinated awareness training for child sexual exploitation training for partners;
- Delivered Freedom programmes and Recovery Toolkit sessions (a psycho-educational resource which includes a cognitive behavioural therapy module) to victims of domestic abuse;
- Established a Lead Member role to address safeguarding;
- Ensured that safeguarding was a priority for the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and established working parties on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Prevent, Domestic Abuse and Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery which have their own tactical delivery plans and which are reviewed quarterly at the CSP;
- Updated our intranet to provide best practice guides, links to current referral forms and contact details for Lead Safeguarding Officers;
- Held regular Lead Safeguarding Officer meetings to encourage collaborative working, strong communication links and sharing of best practice;
- Promoted safeguarding awareness via the online staff magazine covering for example the role of Lead Safeguarding Officers and promoting who they are; and finally
- Developed guidance on the role of the Lead Safeguarding Officers.

Training

19. A key area that has been strengthened is staff safeguarding awareness training. A complementary staff training strategy was developed and investment allocated to support professional training.
20. To date 95% of staff (406 people) have completed their Level One Safeguarding e-learning. A further 23 members of staff still need to complete their training.
21. In addition, 116 of 133 members of staff have been trained in Level Two Safeguarding.
22. From 2017 this training becomes a business as usual session and courses will be run regularly in order to ensure those people that are new to a role or who have not attended a session for any reason are appropriately trained. While we cannot say that 100% have been trained, we are in a very strong position and have ensured a focus on those members of staff who are more likely to face safeguarding concerns as a consequence of their area of work.
23. The following training sessions were completed by the council's Designated and Lead Safeguarding Officers:
 - KSCB Child Protection for Designated Staff – Designated Safeguarding Officer and the Lead Safeguarding Officer for Children
 - KSCB Alcohol Awareness - Lead Safeguarding Officers
 - KSCB Basic Awareness of Child & Adult Sexual Exploitation – e-learning - Lead Safeguarding Officer for CSE

- KSCB Child Trafficking & KSCB Essential Safeguarding - Early Help to Referral – Designated Safeguarding Officer
- Co-located CSE team - CSE - Designated Safeguarding Officer
- DA perpetrator training course (5 days) - Lead Safeguarding Officer for Domestic Abuse

Partnership Working

24. The council's Lead Safeguarding Officer for Prevent, the Designated Safeguarding Officer and Community Safety Support Officers have held several multi-agency Workshops to Raise Awareness of Prevent (WRAP) Workshops for the Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB), providing training for approximately 200 people. Attendees have included elected members, staff from the Department of Work and Pensions, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, Kent County Council (KCC) Wardens, foster agencies, schools and other partners.
25. The Community Safety Partnership's Prevent Working Group meet to update the actions on the plan and the Lead Safeguarding Officer for Prevent meets Kent Police regularly to ensure the relationships are maintained.
26. Officers from across the council have worked with KCC Specialist Social Services and the Child Sexual Exploitation co-located team to provide awareness training for taxi drivers. 60 taxi drivers were trained by a police trainer on child sexual exploitation awareness and how to spot and report concerns, with good feedback from drivers and press coverage on local television news.
27. A comprehensive summary of the partnership work undertaken on tackling domestic abuse was presented to the Cabinet on the 25 January 2017. A link to the copy of this report is available at <https://secure.ashford.gov.uk/committeesystem/ViewAgenda.aspx?MeetingId=3092>

Referrals

28. The council follows the Kent-wide referral procedures as set out in Kent County Council's "*Multi-agency Safeguarding Adults Policy, Protocols and Guidance for Kent and Medway*" and "*Kent and Medway Safeguarding Children Procedures*" for making referrals.
29. There are a range of referral routes and forms available depending on the nature of the safeguarding incident in question. Access to these are provided on the council's intranet (<http://abcinside/index.php/abc-services/health-parking-community-safety/safeguarding>)
30. The council's Safeguarding Policy requires each referral to be recorded on a database (called Locata) in addition to making the referral to the relevant agency.
31. Training has been provided on the use and appropriate referral system to ensure the correct information is captured. There has been some concern that

while staff are submitting referrals to the appropriate agencies, some staff are not recording them on Locata. Further reminders and staff training are planned.

32. There have been 17 referrals by council officers between April 2016 and March 2017. They have primarily concerned adult safeguarding.

Section 11 audit

33. The council has a responsibility under section 11 of the Children Act 2004 to complete a comprehensive bi-annual self assessment on safeguarding. This focuses on the need to have in place safe systems and safe processes; for example, by ensuring safe recruitment of staff, by providing appropriate training and by having up to date policies which all staff know how to access.
34. The self assessment is peer reviewed by other local authorities and professionals specialising in safeguarding. Most public bodies, such as the police, fire service, education and health services have the same requirement to complete the assessment.
35. In March 2017 the council was informed that it was at 100% compliance. A copy has been made available in the Member Room.

Future Work

36. Officers are working on the introduction of a robust, but proportionate protocol to cover the safeguarding aspects relevant to our procurement processes. Guidance, questions for contractors (for example at pre-qualification stage) and template clauses for contracts have been produced. Subject to a final check by Legal Services these will be implemented for use in procurement and contracts entered into from April 2017.
37. As stated above the majority of referrals are made for adults at risk. Officers continue to develop their understanding of the adult safeguarding process, when criteria are met for referral and what support is available for those adults that we identify as being at risk. We are working with KCC's Safeguarding Coordinator for the Ashford, Canterbury and Coastal team to help strengthen our understanding.
38. We plan to provide awareness sessions on the council's risk register. This is the database that officers check before visiting premises in order to ensure that there are no known safety concerns. This register is being re-badged viSit SAFE in order to distinguish it from other risk based systems. This is planned to take place over spring 2017.
39. Finally we plan to continue to undertake awareness campaigns on safeguarding.

Conclusion

40. Ashford Borough Council believes that safeguarding is 'everybody's business' and is committed to ensuring children, young people and adults at risk are

protected from abuse and are provided with opportunities to thrive. As a part of this ambition, officers have undertaken a programme of work to revise the council's policy and procedures, embrace best practice, and support members, employees and volunteers to deliver our responsibilities around this agenda.

Recommendations

41. This report is noted.

Portfolio Holder's Views

42. This corporate approach and effort alongside the partnership working is seen as good practice by our peers and such work must continue to ensure the council helps to protect the most vulnerable within our community and continues to meet its responsibilities.
43. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the officers' dedication and hard work. Special thanks go to the Human Resources Manager for her work on revising the recruitment and whistle-blowing procedures, the Learning and Development Officer for devising and delivering the training strategy, the Senior Housing Options Managers for her work on the Locata database, the Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer for the revision to the policy, the communication team for their support in raising awareness, all the Lead Safeguarding Officers for taking on the extra responsibilities and the Designated Safeguarding Officer for leading this work and ensuring the council meets its responsibilities. This report represents an opportunity to acknowledge their hard work which protects the most vulnerable within our community.

Lead Member's Views

44. It is very reassuring to see the council's position in relation to safeguarding. It's clear that a huge amount of work and effort have gone into it.

Contacts: Designated Safeguarding Officer – James Hann
Safeguarding Management Team Champion – Christina Fuller