

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 9 February 2021

Report Title: Safeguarding Annual Report

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Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager

Portfolio Holder Cllr. P Feacey
Portfolio Holder for: Community Safety and Wellbeing



Summary: This report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the council's annual safeguarding update. The report pays particular regard to the council's obligation to work in partnership to protect children, young people and adults at risk from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development.

It gives information on the safeguarding activity that has been undertaken and raises awareness of emerging issues. It also supports the delivery of the priorities set by the Kent Safeguarding Children's Multi-agency Partnership and the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: All wards

Recommendations: **The committee is recommended to note the information contained in this report.**

Policy Overview: The safeguarding policy was reviewed in September 2020 and this is available on our website.

Financial Implications: There are no financial implications.

Legal Implications: Not applicable

Equalities Impact Assessment: Not required because this is an update report.

Data Protection Impact Assessment: Not applicable

**Risk Assessment
(Risk Appetite
Statement):** Not applicable

**Sustainability
Implications:** Not applicable

**Other Material
Implications:** Not applicable

**Exempt from
Publication:** Not applicable

**Background
Papers:** Not applicable

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Report Title: Safeguarding – annual report

Introduction and Background

1. This report covers the period April 2109 to January 2020 and includes:
 - Update on the council's safeguarding policy
 - Accountability and governance
 - Actions taken
 - Referral update
 - Training
 - Input for Ashford Children's social work service
2. Safeguarding continues to have a high profile with significant political and media focus nationally as well as locally.
3. The Children Act 1989 states that the child's welfare is paramount and that every child has the right to protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation. Statutory guidance on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under Section 10, 11, 13 of the Children Act 2004 specifies what is required of local authorities.
4. The Care Act 2014 codified the principles 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 of how local authorities (Kent County Council – KCC) and other parts of the public sector, including the borough council, should protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect.
5. 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.
6. All together, these legislative provisions place on local authorities and their partners stringent responsibilities regarding the general safeguarding of both children and adults at risk.

Ashford Borough Council's Safeguarding Policy

7. The council's safeguarding policy stipulates that an annual review will be undertaken each September by the Safeguarding Lead Officers Group. This was completed in September 2020.
8. The policy was brought up to date to align with recent changes in national policy, along with 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 refreshed the referral process flow chart.

9. Management Team approved the revised version of the Safeguarding Policy in October 2020 with all associated documents being updated on the council's intranet and internet.
10. The Safeguarding Policy is available at:
<https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/vr0jdgub/safeguarding-policy-2020-21.pdf>

Accountability and Governance

11. 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 that the council's responsibilities and procedures are implemented, monitored and consistently reviewed.
12. The Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) 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 authority's Safeguarding Policy. If the DSO is unavailable then the Deputy DSO (DDSO) can be approached, or one of the lead officers as detailed at **Appendix A**.
13. A Safeguarding Lead Officers' Group was established in 2016 and continues to support the Designated Safeguarding Officer. This is an operational group with representatives across the council with key skills and knowledge that can support the council's responsibilities. We have lead officers in the following areas:
 - Adults at risk
 - Children including child sexual exploitation
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Prevent (preventing extremism)
 - Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking
 - Contracts
 - Commissioning

There is also a lead officer for training, to assist the DSO in ensuring relevant safeguarding training is provided to lead officers, staff and members.

14. All borough councillors, 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, bringing safeguarding concerns to the attention of the DSO or in their absence to the Deputy DSO.

Actions taken

15. Safeguarding Lead Officers meet quarterly to deliver key improvements in the council's safeguarding governance, policymaking, procedures, working practices, training and monitoring.

16. The officers also review recent Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) and Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) to see if any of the lessons learnt or recommendations have an impact on the work of the council and its procedures.
17. Management Team receive quarterly safeguarding reports for strategic review, operational oversight and cascading information through the organisation.
18. On 24 September 2020 Cabinet approved the Modern Slavery Statement. This statement sets out the steps that Ashford Borough Council will undertake to ensure there is a collaborative approach across the organisation.

An action plan has been produced and the tasks that have been completed to date are:

- Modern slavery referral guidance has been produced and shared with staff, members and parish councils.
 - A Modern Slavery article was published in the December edition of *Ashford For You* magazine.
 - Kent Police presented to the Community Safety Partnership in November 2020.
19. Completion of a Section 11 Return. This is where all local agencies and organisations who provide services to children and young people are asked to self-assess the extent to which they meet the safeguarding requirements and standards as set out in Section 11 of the Children Act 2004. This was completed and submitted to the Kent Safeguarding Multi-Agency Partnership for review. We are currently awaiting feedback.
 20. A member Briefing on Prevent and Extremism was held on 29 October and was delivered by the Prevent and Channel Strategic Manager from Kent County Council.
 21. Continuing engagement with the county's Channel Panel to assess and support those who may be vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. Channel uses existing collaboration between partners to support individuals and protect them from being radicalised.
 22. Ashford Domestic Abuse Forum has continued to work closely with the council's Domestic Abuse coordinator to offer a service to all victims of domestic abuse during the year, despite the pandemic and the inability to run the weekly face-to-face One-Stop-Shop.
 23. A housing officer attends the bi-weekly Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) meetings to continue to safeguard adults and children from domestic abuse, which are now held virtually due to the pandemic.
 24. The DSO attends the Local Children's Partnership Group and provides input and support for their priority areas.

25. During the period, a range of voluntary sector organisation including Sk8side CIC, Uprising Youth and Community and Ashford Volunteer Centre have had to adapt the services that they offer to young people. Ashford Borough Council provided those organisation with funding throughout the pandemic to ensure vulnerable and 'hard to reach' groups and individuals were still catered for. In many cases they provided a 'one to one' service. Mental health amongst young adults has been a concern due to school closures and lack of jobs opportunities so these organisation provided help and support.

Referral update

26. To date (January 2020) we have recorded 31 referrals from officers concerning an adult or child/children; this is a decrease of 24 reports for the same period last year. The decrease is likely to be linked to the pandemic as the number of interactions with the public fell during the lockdown period.
27. All referrals are recorded and monthly reviews are conducted by the relevant lead officer to ensure that the matters have been addressed.

Training

28. The authority is currently 92% compliant for our Level 1 Safeguarding training (e-learning) and 74% complaint for our Level 2 training (virtual face-to-face). The L2 compliance level is lower than last year due to the changes that had to be made to deliver the face-to-face training through virtual means. The training officer worked hard to ensure that the L2 courses can continue and more are planned over the next few months to increase the level of compliance.
29. A virtual training session on Safeguarding for Councillors was held on 6 October, with 15 in attendance.
30. The internal safeguarding content has been reviewed and additional subjects have been added such as modern slavery, hoarding and cuckooing.
31. We have ensured that managers and staff are reminded to book their training, if the officer fails to comply; after three reminders their manager is then notified to take appropriate action.
32. Officers are able to attend continuous development courses based on safeguarding subjects on a regular basis which are facilitated by the Kent Safeguarding Child Multi-agency Partnership. These also tend to be free of charge.

Input from Ashford Children Social Work Services

33. Ashford Children's social work services, have continued to work as business as usual, with initially visiting mainly child protection cases and those children rated in need of intervention. They have continued with face-to-face visits even when visiting could be virtual which was rarely used to avoid cases escalating.

34. Cases requiring court intervention have been progressed with virtual court hearings and online approaches to meetings with Lawyers.
35. Ashford, in the main have sustained a fully staffed workforce, with some gaps being filled by locums. Staff have had periods of time self-isolating or shielding but this has never resulted in their ability to be able to manage the workload.
36. Between September and December they received an unprecedented number of referrals and averaged 35-40 per week for over the three month period. This was above what would have been considered a busy week, which is normally around 25-30 referrals. They also had higher referrals of concern resulting in more child protection strategy meetings than other districts across the county, indicating a higher level of complexity. The nature of the referrals was predominantly domestic abuse and physical abuse. They have seen an increase in sexual abuse allegations and online activity too, likely linked to greater of social media platforms use by teenagers.
37. They are fortunate that staff within this service are now booking and being vaccinated which will protect the service better.

Conclusion

38. 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. Ashford Borough Council has shown their commitment through the delivery of the achievements listed above whilst facing the challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Portfolio Holder's Views

39. This corporate approach and effort alongside working with our partners 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.

Cllr Peter Feacey
Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing
Member Champion for Safeguarding

Contact and Email

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Appendix A

Safeguarding Lead Officers	
Designated Safeguarding Officer	Alison Oates
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Officer	Rebecca Wilcox
Adults at Risk	Vikki Perry
Child Sexual Exploitation	Danny Regan
Children	Danny Regan
Contracts	Caroline Roberts
Domestic Abuse	Domestic Abuse Coordinator
Prevent	Alison Oates
Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking	Sarah Richards
Additional Support for Adults at Risk and Children	Anthony Crossley
Training	Gillian Crayden