

**Agenda Item No:** 5  
**Report To:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date of Meeting:** 14 February 2023  
**Report Title:** Safeguarding Annual Report  
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**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr. P Feacey  
**Portfolio Holder for:** Member Champion for Safeguarding



**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, including support to National Safeguarding Adults Awareness Week and improvements to our internal training and safeguarding webpages.

It also supports the delivery of the priorities set by the Kent Safeguarding Children's Multi-agency Partnership (KSCMP) and the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board (KMSAB).

**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 2022 and is available on the Council's website. The council has both a moral and legal obligation to ensure that all children and adults at risk are protected and kept safe from harm. Safeguarding is relevant to the council's current corporate plan and draft Corporate Plan 2022-24 i.e. the Caring Ashford priority theme.

**Financial Implications:** There are no additional budget implications resulting from this report.

**Legal Implications:** The Children Act 2004 specifies what is required of local authorities relevant to making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. 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 Ashford Borough Council, should protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect. The production of an annual report forms part the council's measures to meet its safeguarding responsibilities.

<b>Equalities Impact Assessment:</b>	Not required for this update report
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment:</b>	Not applicable
<b>Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):</b>	Not applicable
<b>Sustainability Implications:</b>	Not applicable
<b>Other Material Implications:</b>	No additional staffing implications result from the review however, additional support for the council's Safeguarding Lead Officers (SLOs) is acknowledged as necessary.
<b>Exempt from Publication:</b>	No
<b>Background Papers:</b>	Not applicable
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## **Report Title: Safeguarding – annual report**

### **Introduction and Background**

1. This report covers the period January 2022 to December 2022 and includes:
  - An update on the council's safeguarding policy
  - Accountability and governance arrangements
  - Actions taken
  - Referral update
  - Training update
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 of paramount importance 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 and 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. Together, these legislative provisions place stringent responsibilities on local authorities and their partners 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 2022.
8. The policy was brought up to date and aligned with recent changes in national policy, along with best practice from around the county. It also emphasised 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. The council's Management Team approved the revised version of the Safeguarding Policy in November 2022 with all associated documents being updated on the council's [website](#) and staff SmartHub.

## **Accountability and Governance**

10. Ultimately, accountability for safeguarding as relevant to the functions of the borough council falls to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive and Management Team are responsible for ensuring that the council's responsibilities and procedures are implemented, monitored and consistently reviewed.
11. The Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) is responsible for dealing with reports and 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 the Deputy DSO (DDSO) can respond, or one of the Safeguarding Lead Officers (SLOs).
12. A Safeguarding Lead Officers Group was established in 2016 and continues to support the DSO. This is an operational group with representatives across the council with key skills and knowledge who can support the council to meet its responsibilities. SLOs are assigned to the following areas:
  - Adults at Risk
  - Children at Risk, including Child Sexual Exploitation
  - Domestic Abuse
  - Prevent (preventing extremism)
  - Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking
  - Contracting
  - Training
13. 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**

14. SLOs meet at least quarterly to deliver key improvements in the council's safeguarding governance, policymaking, procedures, working practices, training and monitoring arrangements.
15. SLOs review recent Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs), Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs), Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs) to see if any of the lessons learnt or recommendations have an impact on the work of the council and its working procedures. In addition to this Kent Community Safety Partnership hosts various DHR Lessons Identified Webinars, which relevant officers attend.

16. The council's Management Team receives six-monthly safeguarding reports for strategic review, operational oversight and to cascade information through the organisation.
17. In March 2022 the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement was refreshed. This statement sets out the steps that the borough council will undertake to ensure there is a collaborative approach across the organisation.
18. Ashford Borough Council continues to operate its Telecare service, which has recently been rebranded to Lifeline Anytime and provides a 24-hour service, giving an instant response at the touch of a button. This service allows our customers to live independently for longer.
19. In May 2022 the council completed the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board (KMSAB) annual agency report. All KMSAB partner agencies are required to complete this document annually regarding safeguarding activity that took place in the previous calendar year (April 2021 to March 2022). These reports are peer reviewed at the Quality Assurance Working Group and are made available to the Board and Business Group Members.
20. In July 22 we completed the KMSAB thematic statutory self-assessment on self-neglect and hoarding which was subsequently peer-reviewed at the end of August 2022. The peer review panel agreed with our assessment with the exception of two areas: (1) our safeguarding training needs to incorporate the Mental Capacity Act (this has now been added into the Level 2 safeguarding course), and (2) that we need to review our involvement with hospital discharges that are linked to our tenants. This has been allocated to the DSO to progress with the opportunity to work with the two Ashford Volunteer Centre Care Navigators who are based at the William Harvey Hospital.
21. Section 11 (S11) of the Children Act 2004, places a statutory responsibility on key agencies and organisations to make arrangements to ensure that in discharging their functions, they have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. S11 compliance is a mandatory.
22. The statutory S11 self-assessment questionnaire comprises of 52 questions for each return. It is broken down in to the following 8 sections:
  - Senior management commitment to the importance of safeguarding and promoting children's welfare
  - A clear statement of the agency's responsibility towards children is available to all staff
  - A clear line of accountability within the organisation for work on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children
  - Service development takes account of the need to safeguard and promote welfare and is informed by the views of children and families
  - Staff training on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children for all staff working with or in contact with children & families
  - Recruitment, vetting procedures and allegations against staff
  - Interagency working
  - Information Sharing

23. The latest return was completed by the DSO in September 2022 and sent to the Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership (KSCMP) for peer review and analysis.
24. Each response to the 52 questions is RAG rated and after the peer review on 19 October 2022 the council received the following score:

Category	Number
Red (Criteria not met)	0
Amber (Criteria partially met)	2
Green (criteria met)	43
Not applicable	6

25. The feedback from the peer review was positive with just a few minor additions to be added to reassure the KSCMP that our requirements are fully met. These amendments were made and submitted on 3 November 2022. The peer review panel advised us there were a lot of positives in our audit and thanked us for taking the time to complete it.
26. National Safeguarding Adults Awareness Week took place between 21 and 27 November 2022. This is a national event that is hosted by the Ann Craft Trust and that encourages councils, health providers and other organisations to raise safeguarding awareness with the aim of empowering members of the public to act when they are worried about the welfare of another person, or indeed are experiencing abuse/neglect themselves.
27. The theme of the week was 'Responding to Contemporary Safeguarding Challenges' with each day focusing on a different strand; these were:
- Monday – Exploitation and County Lines
  - Tuesday – Self-neglect
  - Wednesday – Creating Safer Organisational Cultures
  - Thursday – Elder Abuse
  - Friday - Domestic Abuse in Tech-Society
  - Saturday & Sunday – Safeguarding in Everyday Life
28. Ashford Borough Council was keen to promote awareness of safeguarding and supported this week of action with the public, staff and members in a variety of ways that included:
- Comms messages via social media and the SmartHub
  - A display in the Customer Contact Centre, with topical posters and various leaflets available
  - A display in the One You Shop
  - Providing information to the Welfare Intervention Officers and Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator for relevant clinics and events
  - Presentation to the Independent Living Schemes; this was deferred due to sickness and an alternative date sought
  - Leaflets in different languages. Those in relevant languages were also provided to the Refugee Resettlement Centre
  - Face-to-face events in the Town Centre; these were joint events with the police. The public were able to speak to ABC officers and the

police, as well as receive information and merchandise (which was provided by the KMSAB).

29. There is 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.
30. The Assistant Director Contest and Serious Organised Crime (SOC), KCC has a standard agenda item at the Ashford Community Safety Partnership meetings; this includes a yearly update on the Counter Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP) in respect of Ashford.
31. 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. The One-Stop-Shop, which offers a weekly drop in facility, re-opened in December 2021 for face-to-face sessions (following being closed due to Covid-19 restrictions) and continues to offer support to those in need. There is also a multi-use facility in Tenterden where specialists are available once a month to give support and advice and which has resources to deal with emergencies as and when they arise.
32. A Neighbourhood Housing Officer attends the twice-monthly Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) meetings to continue to safeguard adults and children from domestic abuse. These meetings continue to be held virtually following on from the format used during the pandemic.
33. The DSO attends the Local Children's Partnership Group and provides input and support for their priority areas.
34. The safeguarding pages on the staff SmartHub have been developed to provide additional information. This section has been made more user-friendly and additional information has been added. The new areas include Deprivation of Liberties (DOLs), Domestic Homicide Reviews & Serious Child Reviews with direct links to the lessons learned, as well as information on the Emotional & Mental wellbeing of children, the Care Act, Advocacy, Self-neglect & hoarding, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and more. These changes build on the recommendations made following the safeguarding self-assessments around raising awareness of those areas.
35. The District Safeguarding Lead Officers group identified that all districts were recording their referrals in different ways. Therefore, a proposal was submitted to KCC for the development of a software solution that could be utilised across Kent and Medway. KCC have now developed the Safeguarding Reporting System and have covered the first year's annual licensing fee. This is excellent news and means the cost to districts and boroughs will only be an ongoing annual fee which will be found within existing service budgets. This system was implemented on 12 December 2022.

The electronic safeguarding system will ensure:

- There is a robust process so that districts are able to effectively manage the record of a safeguarding concern.
- District councils in Kent have a standardised way to submit and review safeguarding referrals.
- There is a secure and efficient way to share safeguarding data amongst multi-agency partners. It also enables safeguarding officers to pick up records when a person moves from one district to another.
- Actions are able to be clearly assigned and monitored.
- There is a clear view of the districts' reporting statistics, including the ability to monitor trends across each individual district, which will save time for designated safeguarding leads.

## Referral update

36. Between 1 January 2022 and 31 December 2022 the council recorded 23 referrals from officers concerning an adult or child/children; this is a decrease of 15 reports as compared to the same period last year. The majority of referrals are linked to adults and are reviewed as part of the Safeguarding Lead Officers meetings. It is worth noting that there has been an increase in self-neglect related cases (this is also a county trend). The Safeguarding Adults Team Service Manager attended the SLO meeting on 12 December to discuss the KMASB updated Self-Neglect and Hoarding Policy, as well as some examples of complex cases housing officers are dealing with.
37. All referrals are recorded and monthly reviews are conducted by the relevant lead officer to ensure that the matters have been addressed.

Referral Group	1 Jan to 31 Mar 2022	1 Apr to 30 Jun 2022	1 Jul to 31 Sep 2022	1 Oct to 31 Dec 2022
Adult Social Care	3	3	5	2
Adult Vulnerability Panel	0	0	0	1
Children - Referral to Front Door	2	5	1	0
Domestic Abuse	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>
No of months	3	3	3	3
Average per month	2	2.66	2	1

## Training

38. The authority is currently 88% compliant for Level 1 Safeguarding training (e-learning) and 54% compliant for Level 2 training (virtual face-to-face). The Level 2 compliance level is lower than last year. This lower level of compliance is mainly a consequence of the training for many members of staff all expiring at the same time. An additional course was added to the training programme but take up was low. Further courses are being arranged and it is noted that the March course date has been fully booked. Management Team are strongly encouraging relevant staff to book on (and attend) the courses.



39. A process is in place to ensure managers and staff are reminded to book their training once it falls due. If an officer fails to complete their training, after three reminders have been issued, their manager is then notified to take appropriate action. For level 2 learning, officers receive a notification 9 months before expiry – this gives them two opportunities to attend a course. These are held every March and September. Many officers have waited until their training has expired though before looking to attend training. We need to ensure that officers book on to a course and attend it prior to expiry of their current certification.
40. Officers are able to attend continuous development courses based on safeguarding subjects on a regular basis which are facilitated by the KSCMP. These also tend to be free of charge.
41. The DSO is now trained to deliver the following courses:
  - KSCMP Basic Child Protection course
  - KSCMP Child Safeguarding for Designated Practitioners
42. Ashford Borough Council members are able to access safeguarding training course: [Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk 2021 \(learningnexus.co.uk\)](http://learningnexus.co.uk)

## **Conclusion**

43. Ashford Borough Council believes that ‘safeguarding is everybody’s business’ and is committed to ensuring any children, young people or adults at risk are protected from abuse and are provided with opportunities to thrive.
44. As this report shows the last 12 months have been busy with a number of audits, peer reviews and complex cases being managed by the DSO and our SLOs.
45. It should be noted that all SLO roles are undertaken on a volunteer basis, on top of their substantive duties and that without their dedication and commitment this important work would not happen. As the Designated Safeguarding Officer, I would like to personally thank them for their continued support.

## **Portfolio Holder’s Views**

46. This year has brought unprecedented safeguarding challenges from the pandemic recovery and cost of living crisis. Our strength has come from working closely with our multi-agency partners supporting each other to ensure safeguarding and protecting the most vulnerable within our community is given the priority it both morally and legally deserves.

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Member Champion for Safeguarding

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