

Lancashire County Council

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday, 17th July, 2015 at 10.30 am in Cabinet Room 'B' - The Diamond Jubilee Room, County Hall, Preston

Present:

County Councillor Bill Winlow (Chair)

County Councillors

A Barnes	D O'Toole
C Crompton	M Parkinson
M Devaney	V Taylor
C Henig	D Watts
R Newman-Thompson	G Wilkins
Mrs L Oades	

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None were disclosed.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 June 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2015 were agreed to be an accurate record.

4. Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board Update

The Chair introduced Jane Booth (Independent Chair of Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board), Louise Taylor (Corporate Director, Operations and Delivery), Paul Hegarty (Business Manager, Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board), Stasia Osiowy (Head of Safeguarding, Inspection & Audit) and Tony Baxter (Lancashire Constabulary), to the meeting. The Committee considered a report from Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board following a request in December 2014 for an update to be provided to the Committee. It was elucidated that the update would outline additional information around a number of key safeguarding activities which had been referred to in December 2014.

Members were informed that, following a diagnostic exercise carried out by the Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), detail had been provided to the Committee delineating the findings of the exercise, along with information around Police operations, however it was stressed that specific details could not be

provided around the Police data. It was also explained that detail had been provided regarding the information sharing pilot and the progress of the amalgamation of the business unit which supported the LSCB with that of the Lancashire Safeguarding Adults Board.

Members were informed of the diagnostic exercise around child sexual exploitation (CSE), which had been catalysed by the desire to undertake a considered exercise following events in recent times involving CSE. It was explained that a task and finish group had been convened which had completed the diagnostic exercise, and that their report had been provided to the Committee as set out within Appendix A of the agenda document. It was conveyed that in undertaking the diagnostic, it had provided the opportunity to reassess strategies, policies and procedures, which had been concluded to be robust. However, it was stressed that strategies, policies and procedures would be continually updated to reflect national good practice and the results of research outcomes.

It was explained that the diagnostic exercise had identified strong initiatives around prevention and that there was a large amount of work being undertaken by the young people's service, and others, in terms of preventative measures.

Members were informed that within Lancashire there were a large number of colocated multi-agency teams present in the County which were nationally recognised, such as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in Accrington, which had advantages in terms of communication between agencies.

The Committee noted that they had recently visited the MASH in Accrington and explained it was good to see verbal communication between staff, noting the use of the software systems as an aid rather than staff relying solely upon the system. It was also highlighted that the Committee had noted strong leadership around the significance and important of the CSE agenda, and that the partnerships in place were strong.

It was explained that the scale and diversity of the service arrangements in Lancashire were challenging and complicated, noting the two tier nature of the local government system with District Councils responsible for enforcement in areas such as taxi licensing which were deemed to be key in terms of management of CSE.

The Committee was informed that the Chair of LSCB had met with the Police and Crime Commissioner around collaborative work between the Police and the LSCB, and that the Chair had also met with District Council leads around collaborative work concerning the licensing of taxis and private hire vehicles.

Members were informed that Lancashire had not appointed a CSE Coordinator in the past, which was attributed to sound partnership working in comparison to other areas, and the work of the Police was highlighted to have filled the void. However, this would be remedied with the restructure of the business unit for the Safeguarding Boards with a new position dedicated to the role of coordination. It

was explained that the post was expected to be filled by November 2015, subject to HR procedures.

It was explained that work was being undertaken around thresholds, as a lack of continuity had been identified across the County.

Members were informed that operational management through the Police had been revisited, updated and changed in order to be more responsive.

It was outlined that data analysis required more attention, and therefore a meeting had been organised with the safeguarding Chairs of Blackburn with Darwen, and Blackpool, along with the Police and Crime Commissioner, to discuss analytical capacity going forward.

Members noted that the assessment of intelligence and performance monitoring had uncovered weaknesses, and highlighted that within the report it was explained that the County Council was developing an early help IT system. Therefore, it was queried how this was progressing and the Committee enquired when it would become 'live'. The Committee was informed that the County Council was in the process of assembling a program board, and work was ongoing with BTLS (British Telecom Lancashire Services) to develop the technology required, which was expected to become 'live' in April 2016.

Members made reference to concerns, outlined in the report, that connections between victims, and the existence of victim networks as well as perpetrators, may not be identified sufficiently. Therefore, it was queried what provisions may be put in place to allay these concerns. It was explained to the Committee that it would be the Police, Children's Social Care, and Health who were required to implement provisions, and the LSCB would monitor accordingly. It was expressed that problems had arisen as numerous cases related to the use of modern technology, such as mobile phones and computers, which produced myriad data sets which required examination. Consequently, it was conveyed, this had produced capacity issues for monitoring and analysis, and therefore required improvement. It was outlined that this would be discussed with the Police and Crime Commissioner at an upcoming meeting.

The Committee was informed that the Police had been considering the implementation of high-tech crime specialists based within individual teams, as analysis of communication devices was currently performed via a centralised high-tech crime unit. However, it was emphasised that the implementation of high-tech crime specialists within individual teams was subject to funding. It was expressed, following a College of Policing report, that issues were uncovered and investment had been placed into the high-tech crime unit to assuage these issues. It was stressed that investigations were prioritised via risk, and Members were reassured that if there was any indication that a young person was subject to abuse via modern communication devices, it would be treated as a high priority.

Members made reference to issues around referral thresholds, noting that there were various organisations with variable referral thresholds, and consequently this had created consistency issues. Therefore, Members queried what progress had been made. It was conveyed that evidence suggested that high risk cases were being successfully recognised, and that the figures from the previous three years had indicated that responses had been appropriate to identified cases. It was explained that basic awareness training had been rolled out across Lancashire, and that the County Council had made a commitment to train its staff via an e-learning package, along with other member agencies of the LSCB. It was expressed that within some areas of the County, too many cases were being referred, thus creating capacity issues. Therefore, creating continuity with thresholds across the County was emphasised as the solution in order to avoid too many case referrals.

Regarding District Councils, it was queried how new arrangements, that replaced single district Children's Trusts, were working. It was noted that District Councils had taken on responsibility around its registry functions for licensing and queried whether information could be shared with District Council Members in order to increase their knowledge. It was explained to the Committee that the e-learning package was available for District Council employees, and therefore it was available to Members, which provided basic knowledge. It was conveyed that a section 11 annual audit of safeguarding practice included District Councils and that their approach towards CSE would be examined. It was outlined that the delivery of what was present within the Pan-Lancashire action plan was the responsibility of the District Councils. Furthermore, it was noted that there was growing confidence within District Councils and that their action plans were being implemented as a consequence.

It was explained that a number of District Councils had created joint steering groups and were working on joint action plans. It was noted that the Police were reassured that work had filtered down to District Councils successfully and that there was activity around awareness and safeguarding training. Members were informed that three new District Council Chief Executives had been appointed in Lancashire, and that the LSCB had been approached to give basic training. Consequently, it was suggested that the materials used to train the new Chief Executives would be shared with existing District Council Chief Executives.

It was elucidated that quality assurance inspections around multi-agency safeguarding practice had been, and would continue to be, undertaken on a quarterly basis. The results of which were presented to the children's partnership board, and subsequently, the board was expected to complete action plans that focussed upon safeguarding arrangements for children and families. Therefore, in terms of accountability for inspection discoveries, there was an expectation that the partnership board would take action.

The Committee raised concerns that information had not been filtering to District Councils in some instances, and therefore it was requested that this be investigated. It was agreed that this would be assessed to assuage the issue.

Members noted that there had been a focus upon awareness training for taxi and private hire drivers in District Council areas around CSE, and queried whether this would be broadened to other services. It was explained that an inspection had taken place in relation to CSE in 2014, and this had produced practice in which enforcement functions had collaborated to improve their understanding, and therefore tackle CSE. It was explained that agencies such as Inland Revenue, the Border Agency, housing agencies, and others were involved, which helped to identify areas of vulnerability. It was expressed that these agencies were important as they were in contact with the public on a regular basis, and had a large knowledge base. It was noted that collaborative working around CSE had led to licensing and Police action. Therefore, the agenda for collaborative working had been considered, and nominated safeguarding leads in each district would be discussing further areas of partnership working.

The Committee was informed of Operation Fervant, which was explained to be a national inquiry into alleged sexual abuse by people of public prominence or people in positions of trust. It was explained that Lancashire Constabulary had set up a specialised team to investigate cases of this nature and that the unit had undertaken 31 separate investigations. It was explained that LSCB had asked agencies what their response had been in order to assess their procedures, such as protective mechanisms, to manage risk. Members queried whether information around responses had been provided in a timely fashion. It was explained that the information was reaching the LSCB, and that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) had implemented the assessment of responses within their inspection criteria.

The Committee was informed about the Information Sharing Pilot, which, it was outlined, was a national initiative to ensure health systems for urgent care and A&E indicated if a child was on a protection plan, or where a looked after child and therefore staff could contact children's social care, or the relevant party, to raise concerns if any came to light. It was explained that the County Council was one of the first authorities to use the system and it had already raised alerts, which displayed it was a positive initiative. The LSCB expressed that the health agencies and the County Council deserved recognition for the early implementation of the system.

Members queried what future plans around the Information Sharing Pilot would be. It was explained to Members that it was described as a pilot initially as Lancashire was one the first to use it, however it had now been rolled out nationwide. It was noted that it was particularly important for Lancashire because a large number of children were from other local authorities, and as a nationwide system, this enabled staff to view if the child was looked after via another local authority. It was explained that, as it was fully implemented, it would be used throughout the County for the foreseeable future.

Members queried whether housing associations received training around CSE, as they had regular contact with the general public on a daily basis. It was explained to the Committee that training was provided to all agencies across

Lancashire, which was free at the point of delivery, and therefore avoided any financial disincentive for the agencies to utilise it.

Members queried how children who were not seen by health visitors, or other parties, were captured by the overarching CSE system. It was explained to the Committee that risk could not be eliminated, but there were robust arrangements in place. It was explained that all children under five years of age were registered with a health visitor, which was linked to children's centres and that children's centre staff contacted all new Mothers, therefore taking a proactive approach and involved the monitoring of milestone development. It was emphasised, however, that some children could go unseen, for example, a Health Visitor could contact a family for an appointment, and the family may not attend which was within their rights. It was conveyed that, after the age of five, children were captured by the school system in terms of attendance and oversight, and if a child was not attending school, the reasons for which would be investigated as there was a statutory requirement for the County Council to provide education.

Members asked whether social workers and the Police service had sufficient capacity to deliver policies in light of the rising expectations placed upon them. The Committee was informed that there was enormous pressure on children's services due to increasing demand, budget reductions, and significant implications for service providers. It was explained that the board had written to all agencies offering discussions around financial planning and risk mitigation. It was explained that the unavoidable consequence of the financial constraints was an impact upon preventative services, which could subsequently result in more families hitting the threshold for concern, whereas previously, escalation of the issue may have been prevented.

It was explained, from a County Council perspective, that frontline practitioners would explain that a significant amount of their time was spent on process, and a reduced amount of time engaged in face-to-face contact, which was parallel to the rest of the country. It was explained that a bi-product of recent events had been an increase in process. Therefore, there was an imbalance between engagement and process which needed to be addressed. Consequently, it was explained that the County Council had commissioned a procurement exercise to employ an external agency to address the balance between process and engagement, as it was deemed to be unfeasible to delegate the task to County Council staff due to capacity issues.

It was explained that the County Council had worked transparently with LSCB around the County Council's transformation plans and efforts had been made to prioritise frontline social work posts, and as a consequence, social work posts had not reduced, and the budget had been protected. However, it was emphasised that the position was not sustainable in the long term. It was also explained that Jane Booth, Chair of Lancashire Safeguarding, had regular meetings with the Chief Executive of the County Council, and Louise Taylor (Corporate Director, Operations and Delivery) to challenge the County Council's planning, thinking and policies, and vice versa, which had proved to be a productive arrangement.

It was expressed that, despite the financial pressures for the County Council, funding reductions could catalyse positive changes much more rapidly than would have been possible otherwise. It was explained that there may be a greater commitment to colocation and mixed teams, and it could breed economies with better practice.

Members voiced concerns that there were an increasing amount of inexperienced social workers and noted that on a visit to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), there were members of staff who performed their job from their desk and did not go out and perform the role in a traditional way. Therefore, it was queried whether trainees could gain experience and understand their responsibilities without working outside of their office. It was agreed that career progression, opportunity and support was of paramount importance for all social workers and that opportunities to perform duties outside of the office had been provided. It was explained that social workers had been offered secondments into MASH as it had been observed that, due to the nature of the job, social workers may desire to leave their profession, or the local authority they were employed by. Therefore, offering secondments provided respite within a different type of social work role, and therefore allowed for the retention of knowledge within the service area by offering roles within MASH.

Information was provided around budget reductions in the Police, and Members were reassured that there had been no disinvestment into public protection services, and that their public protection teams were fully staffed.

It was explained that in 2014, the NSPCC had taken a protective program into all junior schools, which had been well received. It was conveyed that a consultation involving 800 secondary school children around understanding safeguards on the internet had been delivered. It was emphasised, however, that the children were ahead in terms of technology and the communication applications used, therefore it was emphasised to be an evolving agenda with resources targeted towards it.

It was explained that LSCB had commissioned young advisors who had spoken with primary school students around issues of using technology and the risks involved. The Committee was informed that this had been well received and was deemed to be important as an increasing amount of junior school children had mobile phones. It was explained that there were not enough young advisors to go into every school in Lancashire, but currently commissioned initiatives involved young advisors addressing sixty school children at a time, who had conceived useful concepts such as, regarding password safety and the importance of use, that a person wouldn't share a toothbrush and that this was akin to password sharing. It was expressed that the LSCB was impressed with the concepts and creativity that had been displayed.

Members queried what action was taken in the event that the system failed a child subjected to extreme neglect and abuse. For example, reference was made to a television documentary that reported on an occurrence when, despite contact with agencies and services, the appropriate action had not been taken and had

resulted in the fatality of a child. It was explained that systems were robust and staff were adequately trained, however some children were still subjected to abuse. In these instances, it was explained that the LSCB undertook serious case reviews and that every systemic failing was analysed in considerable detail to identify what had enabled it to happen. It was noted that often such failings were a result of failings in an individual's practice, rather than a systemic failure, and in these instances agencies would take disciplinary action. Regarding unseen children, it was explained that there was no statutory requirement for a child under five years old to receive a health assessment, and that some children were educated at home, therefore they may not be seen at all for considerable periods of time.

The Committee noted that, as identified via cases within other local authorities' dominion, there had been police discrepancies such as the failure to escalate reports of CSE to the necessary level. Therefore, it was queried how such reports were communicated in light of the aforesaid scenario. It was explained to members that the Police strategy for training focussed upon providing every staff member who had contact with the public to understand key areas of business. It was conveyed that the vulnerability strategy for Lancashire Constabulary was currently being rewritten and staff training was being analysed from the first point of contact to the specialist officers, to ensure that risks were understood around all areas of business. It was explained that training was already provided, but improvements to police training would be continually made to assuage any issues and to ensure that all staff understood procedures for communicating reports.

Members queried what arrangements were in place in order to support whistle-blowers, it was explained that the Police supported whistle-blowers, and that staff could contact the Police's professional standards department and disclose any malpractice, which would be investigated thoroughly. It was conveyed that the Safeguarding Board had an escalation procedure for whistle-blowers and therefore, if a whistle-blower felt their concern was not dealt with adequately, they could notify the independent LSCB and the reports would be investigated. Jane Booth explained that at a future meeting of the Committee during the Autumn, the LSCB could present its annual report, a summary of service inspections, MASH Diagnostic and a summary of two recent serious case reviews.

The Chair thanked all who attended to provide the LSCB update.

Resolved; That:

- (i) the update provided by the Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board be noted;
- (ii) The Committee receives a further report from the LSCB during the Autumn to include the LSCB Annual Report, a summary of service inspections, MASH diagnostic and a summary of two recent serious case reviews.

5. Work Plan and Task Group Update

Resolved; That the work plan and task group update be noted.

6. Urgent Business

There was no urgent business

7. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Friday, 18 September, 2015, at 10:00am at the County Hall, Preston in Cabinet Room 'B'.

I Young
Director of Governance, Finance
and Public Services

County Hall
Preston