


REPORT TO CABINET

09 December 2020

Subject:	Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2019/20
Presenting Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life, Councillor Joyce Underhill
Director:	Executive Director of Children’s Services, Lesley Hagger
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Key Decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member Approval and Date:	Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life, Councillor Joyce Underhill:
Director Approval:	Executive Director of Children’s Services, Lesley Hagger, 26 October 2020
Reason for Urgency:	Urgency provisions do not apply
Exempt Information Ref:	Exemption provisions do not apply to the content of this report
Ward Councillor (s) Consulted (if applicable):	Implications are borough-wide, no need for specific ward councillors to be consulted
Scrutiny Consultation Considered?	Scrutiny has not been consulted
Contact Officer(s):	Lesley Hagger, Executive Director of Children’s Services lesley_hagger@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1** That the Cabinet, as one of the statutory partners for Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements for children:
- (a) formally receives the Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2019/20;
 - (b) notes the progress made during 2019/20;
 - (c) notes the feedback from the Independent Scrutineer;
 - (d) notes the priorities identified for 2020/21.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This is the first Annual Report that Sandwell has published since the implementation of the new Working Together 2018 arrangements, which placed the leadership of the safeguarding of children equally with the Clinical Commissioning Group, the Police and local authorities. This arrangement is known as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangement (MASA).
- 1.3 Consideration of the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership's Annual Report by the Cabinet forms an important part of assurance for the discharge of the relevant children's social care services functions and the safeguarding of all children and young people in the Borough.

2 IMPLICATION FOR VISION 2030

- 2.1 Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership contributes to a number of Vision 2030 ambitions, and particularly:

Ambition 1 - Sandwell is a community where our families have high aspirations and where we pride ourselves on equality of opportunity and on our adaptability and resilience.

Ambition 2 - Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.

Ambition 4 - Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high-quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families.

Ambition 5 - Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods.

Ambition 10 - Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's lives and communities.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 This is the first Annual Report that Sandwell has published since the implementation of the new Working Together 2018 arrangements, which placed the leadership of the safeguarding of children with the Clinical Commissioning Group, West Midlands Police, and Sandwell Council (together with Sandwell Children's Trust). As a local area, it was agreed that the Partnership would be stronger with the continued representation of education providers and the voluntary sector, plus the involvement of a Lay Member, and so this has continued.
- 3.2 The changed legislation also required the transfer of some of the responsibilities previously held by Safeguarding Children Boards as follows:
- (a) replacing Serious Case Reviews with local and national reviews;
 - (b) working with the new national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel when there are Serious Incidents that may be of national significance;
 - (c) transferring local Child Death Overview Panels to a new Regional Child Death Review arrangement.

All of these transfers took place within the required timescales.

- 3.3 In addition to the changes above, the changed legislation also requires that arrangements are subject to independent scrutiny. From June through to December 2019, the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership appointed an Independent Scrutineer who examined the effectiveness of the prescribed arrangements in the following areas:
- Leadership, including engaging relevant agencies
 - Learning and development
 - Case review processes and auditing
 - Learning from Practice.

An Action Plan has been created from the Independent Scrutineer feedback.

- 3.4 The children's services Improvement Board, chaired by a DfE appointed adviser, has a close interface with the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership and requires reports from the Partnership to the Improvement Board meetings. This provides an additional layer of assurance.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 In line with Working Together 2018 the Annual Report 2019/20 demonstrates that the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership is undertaking the required statutory functions, with improvements in many areas. The report also identifies areas for further improvement and/or development.
- 4.2 The Annual Report demonstrates that together the members of the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership take seriously their responsibilities for Sandwell's multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including the required commitment to strengthen the visibility of the partnership.
- 4.3 Additionally, each partner is now the identified lead on a themed strand of work as recommended from the feedback of the independent scrutineer.
- 4.4 During the period 2019/20 there were more than 26,000 contacts made concerning a child or children who may be at risk of harm and 5789 domestic abuse notifications, with 860 children identified as living in 'high risk' domestic abuse households. Neglect and abuse continue to be the main reasons for children needing protection and/or becoming looked after. There were 807 children in need, 671 children with child protection plans, and 874 children in care.
- 4.5 The Annual Report shows that, in most cases, partners have implemented actions arising from reviews of children's cases in a timely manner, and there has been a continued willingness to engage, learn and embed recommendations into practice, and ultimately improve outcomes for the children of Sandwell.
- 4.6 An audit programme has been introduced which consistently monitors the multi-agency safeguarding systems, frontline practice, and the impact and outcomes for children and young people. This process also strengthens the undertaking of child safeguarding practice reviews.
- 4.7 The six priorities for 2019/20 have been delivered. The Annual Report also identifies priorities for 2020/21, including raising the profile of the Partnership and improving its connectivity with practitioners, children, young people, families and the wider and diverse community. The 8 priorities for 2020/21 are set out on page 40 of the Annual Report.

4.8 For the final month of the reporting period for this Annual Report, agencies had started to plan their individual and collective Covid-19 response to ensure that children and young people in Sandwell continue to be safeguarded. Whilst recognising this unprecedented situation, and that the focus of this report must be on the work of the Partnership during 2019/20, it is worthy of note that the continued commitment and involvement of all agencies to plan and work together to safeguard children and young people during this unprecedented time has been exceptional. However, it has been evident that the lower numbers of contacts made for support, and the lower number of incidents reported, inevitably mean that there is hidden harm which has not yet been seen or reported, and the full impact of lockdown on children and young people will take some time to emerge.

5. CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

5.1 This report does not require consultation. However, ensuring that children and young people's voices are heard and their wishes and feelings are taken into account assuring the quality of safeguarding practice is an important part of the Partnership's work, along with the engagement of families, and also the wide range of practitioners that are keeping children safe through their everyday work.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

6.1 The provision of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangement is a statutory requirement, as set out in the Child and Social Work Act 2017.

7. STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The statutory partners provide the Partnership budget of just over £340k per annum. A significant carry-forward resulting from income achieved from the delivery of training has been protected to cover the costs of finalising outstanding activities from the previous Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board, including progressing through to publication and the dissemination of learning from the 5 Serious Case Reviews commissioned but not completed by the former Board. A reserve has also been created to be able to respond to future demands as a result of Covid19.

7.2 Whilst the new MASA arrangement clarifies that the three named partners have equal responsibility, the proportions of funding contributions from partners in 19/20 remained unchanged. Discussions with the Police and Crime Commissioner, and with the new, single, Clinical Commissioning Group, are underway with regard to the budget for 2021 onwards.

8. LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The revised governance arrangements are set out in the Annual Report.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment screening is not required for this report. However, the improvement in children's services will have a positive effect on the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families in Sandwell, including those with protected characteristics.

10. DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1 There are no data protection implications relevant to this report, however, a range of legally agreed data sharing agreements are in place to enable partner agencies to work together effectively to safeguard children.

11. CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

11. There are no crime and disorder issues relevant to this report, however, the safeguarding of children and young people that are victims or perpetrators of crime and disorder are an important component of the Partnership's responsibilities and close working arrangements are in place between the Partnership and Safer Sandwell and the Sandwell Youth Justice Board.

12. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

12.1 This report ensures that the council's statutory responsibilities are met to ensure that it continues to be accountable for the discharge of children's safeguarding responsibilities, as one of three statutory partners. A further national review of the children's safeguarding system is under way and any sustainability of the current arrangement will be impacted by the outcome of that review in 2021.

13. HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

13.1 The health and wellbeing of children and young people is a vital part of improving their lives. The Partnership presented the Annual Report 2019/20 to the Health and Wellbeing Board on 25 November 2020.

14. IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

14.1 There are no implications for the Councils material assets arising from the proposal. There is no impact from this report on any council managed property or land.

15. CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 The recommendations will ensure the council meets its responsibilities as set out in the Child and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together 2018 and will ensure that the governance of the arrangement between the council and its statutory partners is robust and purposeful.

16. BACKGROUND PAPERS

16.1 None

17. APPENDICES:

17.1 Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2019/20.

Lesley Hagger
Executive Director of Children's Services