Purpose

1. To present the findings and recommendations of the Safeguarding Children and Young People Task Group since its previous report was submitted to Children’s Select Committee in January 2016.

Background

2. The Task Group was originally established following a multi-agency Ofsted inspection of Wiltshire, undertaken in March 2012. The inspection identified significant failings in the contribution made by local agencies in Wiltshire to ensuring that children and young people were properly safeguarded. The Task Group was established with the following terms of reference:
   a. To monitor and scrutinise implementation of the improvements to safeguarding arrangements required by Ofsted following its inspection of Wiltshire’s Safeguarding and LAC Services in March 2012;
   b. To support Wiltshire Council and its partner agencies in developing robust safeguarding arrangements for children and young people in Wiltshire;
   c. To monitor and scrutinise the impact of safeguarding arrangements in Wiltshire on outcomes for children and young people; and
   d. To monitor and scrutinise the implementation of the Children in Care Commissioning Strategy and its impact on outcomes for Wiltshire’s looked after children and their families/carers.

3. The Task Group presented its report, containing 41 recommendations, to the Children’s Select Committee on 28 March 2013 (link to the agenda) with an executive response given on 6 June 2013 (link to the agenda).

4. Recommendation 32 of the March 2013 report was that the Children’s Select Committee re-establish the Safeguarding Children and Young People Task Group with new terms of reference. In June 2013 the Committee re-established this Task Group and agreed it should continue working for at least 18 months.

5. In January 2016 the Committee endorsed an Interim Report from the Task Group, presenting the outcomes of the work undertaken. In doing so the Committee endorsed the following areas of future work for the task group following which it would be disbanded:
a) To review the internal case file audit process and the format and contents of the internal case file audit reports

b) To meet with the Wiltshire Safeguarding Children's Board (WSCB) Chair to agree how recommendations 3, 28, 29 and 30 of the Task Group's interim report would be implemented and how this should be monitored

c) “Getting to Good” – to review the work planned to achieve at least “Good” from OFSTED. To identify comparable Local Authorities, who achieved good at the OFSTED inspection and investigate the differences in processes with the potential to gather examples of good practice.

d) To consider how to make the practice of Independent Reviewing Officers more pro-active and ensure there is engagement between reviews.

Membership

6. The Task Group comprises the following membership:

Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman)
Mr Ken Brough (appointed by Children’s Select Committee on 3 December 2013)
Cllr Andrew Davis
Rev Alice Kemp
Cllr Bill Moss
Cllr Bridget Wayman

Terms of Reference

7. The following terms of reference, proposed in the Task Group’s final report, were endorsed by the Children’s Select Committee on 28 March 2013:

a. To monitor the implementation of any recommendations made by the Safeguarding Children and Young People Task Group that are endorsed by the Children’s Select Committee and accepted by the executive.

b. To scrutinise Wiltshire Council’s delivery of improvements to safeguarding children and young people as set out in the Safeguarding and Adoptions Improvement Plan.

c. To receive a twice-annual report from the Council’s Lead Member for Safeguarding Children and Young People providing details of their safeguarding activity.

d. To continue/conduct ongoing scrutiny of services for Looked After Children (LAC).

e. To work in collaboration with the Safeguarding Children and Young People Panel to clarify future joint-working arrangements.

Methodology
8. When reviewing the council’s internal case file audit process the task group met with Deborah Barlow, Principle Social Worker at Wiltshire Council.

9. When considering how recommendations 3, 28 and 29 of the its original report should be monitored the task group met with Mr Mark Gurrey, Chairman of the WSCB.

10. When exploring how other local authorities have achieved Ofsted ratings of Good and Outstanding the Task Group met or spoke with colleagues in Children’s Services from the following local authorities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local authority</th>
<th>Overall Ofsted grading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire County Council</td>
<td>Good (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBCK)</td>
<td>Outstanding (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincolnshire County Council</td>
<td>Good (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham</td>
<td>Good (2016)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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11. The task group is extremely grateful to all those who contributed to the Task Group’s work.

**Findings**

Wiltshire’s internal case file audit process

12. In March 2016 the Task Group received a comprehensive presentation from the Principal Social Worker on the new case file audit process. The Task Group noted the following key points:

- The main objective of auditing is to achieve positive changes, with the quality of the work being taken into account as well as the achievement of performance targets. The Local Government Association (LGA) auditing model is used, involving looking at threads in a case and only delving deeper if there are indications of poor performance.

- Cases are chosen in a way that replicates the Ofsted inspection process as closely as possible. Cases are relatively recent unless older cases that should have had reviews are identified. Cases are selected to ensure that they are not all from the same social worker. Managers do not audit cases from within their own teams.

- Audits focusing on a specific topic are scheduled a few months after training had been offered in that area to measure the training’s effectiveness.

- A process of “auditing the auditors” to ensure consistency was underway while auditors acquired the necessary skills and experience. It was
acknowledged that at present this was a time-consuming process and reassurance was offered that it was a temporary necessity.

13. The Task Group resolved to recommend,

1. That auditees have an opportunity to comment after audits with the outcomes discussed at their next supervision;

2. That data obtained through the audits is mapped so that graphs can be used to show outcomes / performance across different areas;

14. Overall the task group had confidence in the consistency and cohesion of the audit process and the process to select the themes and identify the trends (and take necessary actions where appropriate). (Recommendation 1)

**Wiltshire Safeguarding Children’s Board (WSCB)**

15. In July 2016 the Task Group received a comprehensive presentation from Mr Mark Gurrey, Chairman of the WSCB, to agree how recommendations 3, 28, 29 and 30 of the Task Group’s interim report would be implemented. The key outcomes from this discussion are presented below:

16. **Recommendation 3:** In addition to the Social Care Bulletin, the Wiltshire Safeguarding Children’s Board (WSCB) should coordinate a multi-agency safeguarding bulletin, produced co-operatively by the relevant local agencies, to communicate and promote the ongoing changes to safeguarding in Wiltshire. Wiltshire Council’s Communications team should be enlisted in making this an accessible and inviting document to read.

It was reported that three ways were used to disseminate information:

1. Message were distributed back to agencies by their representatives after meeting of the Executive Board and Subgroups;
2. It was planned for the WSCB to meet twice a year with a “mini conference” format with 50 / 60 attendees. These would be very inclusive meetings with every opportunity to share information;
3. The freshening up of the WSCB website (with input from the Young People subgroup).

17. **Recommendation 28:** The Children’s Select Committee and the WSCB should agree a memorandum of understanding to clarify their future working arrangements.

It was agreed that the Chairman of the WSCB would attend Children’s Select Committee once there was more information on what the future will look like for LSCBs and at that time further scrutiny, if required, can be discussed. (Recommendation 2)
18. **Recommendation 29:** Future scrutiny of safeguarding should include consideration of a midterm and annual report from the WSCB, including figures showing WSCB member attendance.

   It was agreed that there would be an annual report to Children’s Select Committee.

19. **Recommendation 30:** Future scrutiny of safeguarding should include comparisons between the WSCB’s Business Plan and the minutes of its meetings in order to ensure that its agreed objectives are being addressed.

   The task group was satisfied that there now was an element of scrutiny within the Board and this exercise would not be required at this time.

**Meetings with other local authorities**

20. The Task Group approached a number of local authorities that have recently achieved Ofsted gradings of ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ in order to understand how this was achieved and learn any lessons that might be applicable in Wiltshire. Members met with Children’s Services teams from Hampshire County Council and held telephone conferences with those at Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea and Lincolnshire.

21. From these discussions, the practices and innovations that the Task Group were particularly interested in are outlined below and where appropriate are referred to the Cabinet Member as ideas for consideration.

**Leadership and performance**

22. Hampshire’s description of a ‘golden thread of accountability’ running from frontline staff right up to the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, with the risks faced by social workers owned at the top of the organisation.

23. Kensington & Chelsea’s case file audit process includes two “practice weeks” per year where senior managers dedicate a whole week to auditing cases. The audits emphasise the practitioner and auditor sitting together to discuss interventions face-to-face. At the end of each day the senior management team share their observations and at the end of the week a report highlighting strengths and areas for improvement is written and widely circulated. It was reported that, as well improving the quality of practice, these weeks have enhanced staff’s ability to explain their interventions and give a narrative to their work, which helps during Ofsted inspections. “Good Practice Days” also allow staff to showcase examples of good work. (**Recommendation 3**)

**Staff structures**

24. Hampshire and Kensington & Chelsea do not divide social care into authority-wide teams handling different sections of the process (Referral and Assessment, Child Protection etc), but instead divide them into district teams that handle the entirety of the process. These are referred to as ‘locality-based’ models. The
philosophy behind them is that district team managers have a vested interest in eliminating all barriers and gaps between different parts of the system. They also seek to maximise staff's continuity of relationship with their clients, so that children stay with one social worker for the entirety of their journey. In Wiltshire has been raised as a concern by young people during a number of scrutiny reviews. (Recommendation 4)

25. Kensington & Chelsea have introduced a new social care role of “Specialist Practitioner” aimed at experienced social workers who do not want to move into management. Specialist Practitioners are more autonomous than regular social workers, handling more complex cases and coaching other staff. The role provides an alternative career pathway for those experienced social workers who want to remain in core practice and continue to carry a caseload. Although introducing the role has required an initial investment, Kensington & Chelsea anticipate it achieving savings overall. (Recommendation 5)

26. Hammersmith & Fulham have introduced a “Family Assist” service, in which staff who are not qualified as social workers work alongside social workers to support families to make sustainable change. The Family Assistants undertake more time intensive work with families, sometimes requiring 3–4 visits per week for a short time.

27. In general the other councils spoken to seem to prefer having “supplementary” social care services, such as domestic abuse specialists and health care workers, embedded within their social care teams, rather than commissioning them out to external agencies. For example, Hammersmith & Fulham have a clinical team comprising 8 qualified “Family Therapists” who provide consultancy, input and development to the wider social care workforce and supporting social workers to unpick their more complex cases. A further rationale is that the Family Therapists can focus on identifying and implementing the systemic changes need for continuous improvement, leaving social workers to manage their caseloads. Kensington and Chelsea reported improved results and better experience for the client once they brought a number of supplementary social care services back in-house. (Recommendation 6)

Social work practice

28. Kensington & Chelsea has adopted a ‘Focus on Practice’ model of social work, which involves all social care staff, including those away from frontline tier 3 work (including Early Help, Youth Offending and senior management) being trained in systemic practice. Systemic practice is an approach which aims to introduce change to the way in which social systems (e.g. families) operate and focuses on the individual in relationship. Kensington & Chelsea reported that, as well as giving staff the skills to make interventions that lead to sustained change within families, the adoption of this approach has helped to create a shared language across the social care system and within the families worked with, improving communication. Its introduction was also driven by a desire to move away from a bureaucratic model that Kensington & Chelsea felt over-emphasised assessments at the expense of effective interventions.
29. Lincolnshire and Hammersmith & Fulham use the “Signs of Safety” model of child protection casework; a strengths-based, safety-organised approach. The Signs of Safety risk assessment process integrates professional knowledge with family and cultural knowledge and is intended to keep the family and the well-being of the child at the centre of the work. Lincolnshire feel that children in their child protection system have embraced the language and approach of the model and feel more confident to share their worries because the model emphasises developing a narrative that is intuitive and powerful for children. (Recommendation 7)

30. In keeping with its systemic model of child protection casework, Kensington & Chelsea define a “case” as a family (potentially including multiple children) rather than an individual child, with case numbers counted as such. (Recommendation 8)

31. None of the local authorities interviewed used the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the tool currently used in Wiltshire to assess children's additional needs. One authority abandoned using the CAF having concluded that it was not effective. Kensington & Chelsea felt that the CAF did not fit with their systemic model of practice and now use the Family Star System. Family Star measures progress towards effective parenting and stable lifestyle for parents with multiple needs. Lincolnshire also use this system and, since adopting it, report that they have been more successful in encouraging non-social care staff to act as the lead professionals, with 52% of leads now from education. 30 local authorities are reported to be using the Family Star System nationally. (Recommendation 9)

Care leavers

32. Hammersmith & Fulham have put greater emphasis on improving care leavers’ transitions to independent life and supporting them to retain a link with their care/foster home, just as young people who aren’t in care usually retain links with their family.

33. Hammersmith & Fulham have a contract providing 77 semi-independent places for care leavers and framework contracts with other providers to provide more spaces. They also have a housing panel that can nominate up to 30 care leavers per year to housing association properties. The task group notes that in Wiltshire, care leavers are often immediately placed on the emergency housing register when leaving care. (Recommendation 10)

34. In Kensington & Chelsea, Ofsted noticed the quality of relationship between social workers and care leavers and officers’ tenacious pursuit of good outcomes for care leavers, despite many care leavers refusing help initially.

Other areas

35. Lincolnshire is taking part in a pilot with Cafcass (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service), the organisation that represents children in family court cases. In the pilot, titled Cafcass Plus, Cafcass sought involvement with
families at an early stage when the local authority was considering making an application for care proceedings. During this period, they aimed to review relevant reports, visit/observe parents and children, attend the formal pre-proceedings meeting and engage in case discussion with both the social worker and the family. This meant that, by the time of the first hearing in court, more plans were in place and more options, such as potential kinship carers, had been identified. The number of cases that were diverted away from public law proceedings, settled outside of court increased within the pilot. (Recommendation 11).

36. Kensington & Chelsea has introduced an app called Mind of My Own (MoMO) to help children in the care system feed back their perspectives and opinions on the care and services they have received. (Recommendation 12)

Proposal

37. To endorse the findings and recommendations of the Task Group and refer them as appropriate to the relevant Cabinet Member(s) for response.

Recommendations

That Children’s Select Committee,

1. Notes that overall the Task Group has confidence in the consistency and cohesion of the council’s child protection audit process and the process to select the themes and identify the trends (and take necessary actions where appropriate);

2. Considers working arrangements with the Wiltshire Safeguarding Children’s Board (WSCB) further when more information on national plans for LSCBs is available;

That the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services considers,

3. Adding dedicated “practice weeks” to the council’s social care learning and improvement framework;

4. Amending social care structures and processes so that, to the greatest extent possible, children and families have the same social worker for the whole of their journey in the social care process;

5. Exploring if introducing a “Specialist Practitioner” role or similar to provide an alternative career pathway for experienced social workers who wish to remain in frontline practice rather that move into management would deliver similar benefits for Wiltshire;

6. The possible benefits of having “supplementary” social care teams and services in-house rather than commissioning them to external agencies;

7. Introducing a systemic model of child protection casework, similar to
those evidenced in other authorities;

8. In keeping with a systemic model of child protection casework, defines a “case” as a family (potentially including multiple children) rather than an individual child, with internal case numbers counted as such, thereby ensuring that families have a single social worker (while recognising that the case numbers reported to central government have to reflect individual children);

9. In keeping with a systemic model of child protection casework, introducing an alternative model for assessing children’s additional needs, such as the Family Star System;

10. Working with the Cabinet Member for Housing, and while recognising the clear differences between small, urban London boroughs and the rural county of Wiltshire, reserving an allocation of properties on the housing list for care leavers to support their transition into independent living, thus removing the necessity of placing care leavers on the emergency band for housing;

11. Supporting the CAFCASS+ pilot as a potential way of easing pressures within the family court system;

12. Outlining how the Mind of My Own (MoMO) app is currently used in Wiltshire as a way of ensuring the child’s voice is heard in the social care process.

Cllr Jon Hubbard, Chairman of the Safeguarding Children and Young People Task Group

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Appendices

None

Background documents

None