

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
COUNCIL

14 October 2015

Report of the Director of Social Services, Health and Housing

Matter for Information

Wards Affected

All Wards

Corporate Safeguarding

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform Members of the steps being taken to ensure that the Council safeguards Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults in all aspects of its activities; whether through its own staff, partners, contractors or volunteers.

Background

2. Last year (3 September 2014) Council received a similar Report.

That Report explained how since June 2013 Corporate Safeguarding had been overhauled and new, more rigorous procedures had been put in place.

This included:-

- Revision of our procedures to ensure Safer Recruitment
- Formal Audit by Internal Audit of key areas of potential risk
- Extension of review and audit to schools and provision of refreshed guidance
- Ensuring that taxi drivers, escorts and volunteers who work with children are correctly vetted; and that contractors are fully aware of their own duties

- The establishment of the Corporate Safeguarding Board which meets eight weekly; and the Operational Safeguarding Group.
- The need for constant vigilance and common sense practice to ensure that potential safeguarding risks are anticipated and eliminated to the utmost extent, humanly possible.
- The need to maintain awareness and understanding of procedures at all levels of the Council.

That report also explained a key distinction, namely:-

- (a) That the Council has specific Safeguarding duties with regard to Children, Young People and Adults. (For example Child Protection Services and Protection of Vulnerable Adults)
- (b) In the case of the Council's own activities it ensures that they are conducted in a way which safeguards Children, Young People and Adults. The latter is what Corporate Safeguarding is about.

3. **Progress to Date**

In June 2014 the Council and all Welsh Councils received a Corporate Safeguarding Review by the Wales Audit Office.

The Council came out well from this Review and also compared with many other Councils. The Report which we received from WAO was presented to Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Board on 12 February 2015.

More recently (July 2015) a Summary Report covering all 22 Welsh Councils was published by WAO. That Report is reproduced at Appendix 1.

The Report individual to this Council showed that we have many strengths and there were no significant recommendations about requirements for improvement or unaddressed risk.

For example:

- Our procedures for Safer Recruitment are robust
- We conduct Internal Audits which are proportionate to potential areas of risk
- We have a planned series of Audits throughout the year, which address relevant themes.
- A Staff Survey conducted by WAO as part of their Review showed that staff have high levels of awareness of Safeguarding issues, understand procedures correctly, know who the Local Authority Designated Officer is, etc.

I am pleased to report that the overhaul work which was undertaken in mid to late 2013 was not only reflected in the WAO Report, but that the developments put in place have been maintained and developed in the period from last year's Report to Council to date.

The Corporate Safeguarding Board which includes the Chief Executive; Director of Social Services, Health and Housing; Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning; Head of H.R. continues to ensure that high standards of Safeguarding are applied to and maintained across all of the Council's activities.

On account of their relationship with the Council owing to Local Management of Schools, it has been necessary regularly to remind school Leaders and Governors of their responsibilities and to provide refreshed guidance.

One particular area has been the use of Supply Teacher Agencies, where schools must ensure that Agencies they use have robust DBS checking systems in place.

Over the past 12 months there have been a number of Professional Abuse Strategy Meetings (PAMS) with regard to allegations of abuse by professionals. Appendix 2 sets out the number and by type. .

On account of the Council's Forward Financial Plan, the level of external recruitment (excluding Schools and Children's Services) has been lower than it might otherwise have been.

As a consequence the level of DBS checking where required, is correspondingly lower.

Never the less this must not be allowed to become a cause for relaxing our approach to vetting employees.

In relation to criminal record checks, HR implemented electronic DBS checks in January 2015, a more efficient process in terms of both cost and time, which also provides greater assurance in relation to tracking checks.

The work which was undertaken in late 2013 onwards related mainly to Safeguarding Children and Young People. This was because at the time Children's Services was subject to the Serious Concerns Protocol (lifted in April 2015).

During the last year an identical approach has been extended to Protection of Vulnerable Adults.

The Directorate now has two embedded HR officers in Adults' and Community Services, which the Directorate funds.

This has enabled us to achieve the level of compliance which we achieved previously in Children's Services. For example, HR officers sign off Recruitment Checks before any employee starts.

Since a Court Ruling in March 2014, Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) have become a significant safeguarding issue for all Councils. In summary this means that where people are placed in residential care that they or a representative have the capacity to consent to this; and individuals are not unlawfully deprived of their liberty.

An illustration of the pressure which has mounted in DOLS referrals is as below:-

2013/14: 8

2014/15: 447

2015/16: 780 (projected).

Care Homes are one of the largest areas by cost, where Third Parties provide services to individuals on the Council's behalf.

This is an area where the Council must check robustly that high standards of safeguarding are being maintained throughout.

The system of reviewing Care Homes has been amended. For instance there is a dedicated individual for each Care Home, leading to greater continuity and better knowledge of each setting.

Where there are concerns, Improvement Notices are issued, which are monitored and supported to achieve rapid compliance.

Over the last four years there has been a decrease in the number of referrals in relation to protecting vulnerable adults, as follows:-

2011/12: 348

2014/15: 287 (-18%)

An Internal Audit Report was published on 14th November 2014 regarding Safer Recruitment in Adults & Community Services; with a follow-up Report on 13th May 2015. Both showed significant improvement.

A significant amount of training is undertaken in relation to a range of safeguarding topics, including Safe Recruitment (mandatory for recruiting managers), Child Protection Training for CYPS Social Work staff (mandatory for qualified social workers), Child Sexual Exploitation, etc.

4. There are two Safeguarding Boards which cover the Western Bay Region. The Western Bay Safeguarding Children Board (WBSCB) and The Western Bay Safeguard Adults Board (WBSAB).

There has been high focus for both safeguarding boards on compliance with the Social Services and Wellbeing Act in preparation for implementation in April 2016. The WBSCB is now fully compliant, has a robust Business Plan which is reviewed and reported on through the governance of its management groups on the board's behalf. The plan for 2015/16 is publicly available on the website.

The WBSCB has also just signed off the annual report which provides an overview of progress made against 2014/15 business plan, what gaps existed and where the focus should continue over the next year.

During the last year the WBSCB has taken a lead nationally in spearheading the multi agency approach to Child Sexual Exploitation; and to ensuring that Agencies individually and collectively are effective, vigilant and well prepared.

As the Annual Report shows, the WBSCB has a high emphasis upon efficient, business like operation and above all, being effective in challenging and ensuring that agencies are meeting their Safeguarding duties and responsibilities.

Most recently, the Chairman of WBSCB sought assurances from each local authority within the region on the recommendations from the national review of corporate safeguarding published in July 2015.

Each year the WBSCB requires each Agency to complete a Section 28 Audit. This Audit aims to confirm that each Agency is compliant with its own Safeguarding Duties towards Children and Young People.

The WBSCB scrutinises these audits, challenges and holds agencies to account for these Audits.

Similarly, the SAB is developing against its strategic responsibilities which will come into force with SSWA implementation. The structure and terms of reference are being reviewed to assure the board is ready and in place. The SAB also has a Business Plan in compliance with the Act identifying its strategic priorities which include implementation of part 7 of the Act, DOLS and domestic abuse of older people.

5. Conclusions

- The systems, checks and balances to ensure that the Council fulfils its Corporate Safeguarding duties to a high standard are all in place and work.
- Systems and safeguarding themes are audited through a planned programme to ensure compliance and eliminate risk.
- Safeguarding is overseen at the highest managerial level by the Corporate Safeguarding Board.
- Its work extends to schools, partners, contractors and volunteers.
- In the past year an identical approach to that taken in 2013/14 for Children's Services has been extended to Adults & Community Services.
- Above all, successful Corporate Safeguarding relies upon constant vigilance and common sense.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils

Appendix 2 – Professional Abuse Strategy Meetings

Officer Contact

Nick Jarman, Director of Social Services, Health and Housing

Tel: 01639 763279 Email: n.jarman@npt.gov.uk

