

## **The Strategic Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Panel Report**

**2014/15**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. Members will be aware that the Council prioritises the safeguarding field very highly and has included it once again in its Strategic Plan for this year. Members will be also be aware that the Strategic Safeguarding Panel (Children and Vulnerable Adults) was established to provide assurance to the Cabinet and the Statutory Director of the efficiency of our safeguarding and protection arrangements as a Council.
- 1.2. Therefore, the purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Panel's work in 2014/15 along with a summary of the opinion of external inspectors of our work. We will also summarise our intentions for 2015/16, for information.
- 1.3 The Panel is chaired by Councillor Mair Rowlands who is supported by Morwena Edwards, the Statutory Director with responsibility for the safeguarding field. Councillors Gareth Roberts and Gareth Thomas are also members of the panel by virtue of their duties in the field of adults and children's services. In terms of officers, many Heads of Department are members of the panel (such as Education, Adults, Health and Wellbeing, Children and Supporting Families, Corporate Support) as well as the Monitoring Officer.
- 1.4 An Operational Group exists to support the Panel's work. The purpose of this Group is to implement the work programme and also deal with operational matters. This Group's membership includes a safeguarding champion from each of the Council's departments. The Chairman of the Operational Group is also a member of the Strategic Panel.
- 1.5 The principal focus of these abovementioned arrangements is ensuring that the Council's corporate procedures on safeguarding are effective and robust. Other arrangements are in place, the Regional Safeguarding Board for Children and Vulnerable Adults for example, to deal with specialist matters in the field. These Boards are statutory and they operate across agencies, with specific and legal responsibilities. The Council is responsible for contributing to these governance arrangements regionally and sub-regionally, and from time to time, there will be a need to amend the Council's corporate arrangements to reflect the recommendations of the Regional Bodies.
- 1.6 Our intention as a Strategic Panel is to ensure that we provide regular reports to the Cabinet on progress in this field, offering recommendations for improvement when needed. Following this report, it is anticipated that we will report to the Cabinet in a regular cycle in accordance with performance reporting arrangements – an annual report will also be submitted every May.

## 2. Work Programme

2.1 The Strategic Panel has been responsible for implementing a comprehensive work programme. The following table provides an update of what was achieved between April 2014 and March 2015.

	<b>Field of Work</b>	<b>Action/Outcome</b>
1	Secure an understanding of corporate safeguarding policies and procedures within the Council	Following the Panel's establishment in November 2012, the departmental and corporate policies have been reviewed every year. This includes all Council departments revisiting their arrangements and through their designated managers ensuring that staff have an understanding of these procedures.
2	Ensure awareness and compliance of the Corporate Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Guidelines	Every designated manager began a series of meetings with individual teams within their department in order to raise awareness of the contents of the corporate and departmental policies – and briefing notes were provided to those managers in order to facilitate the work. Posters were produced to promote the message that safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is everyone's responsibility and copies of these posters were distributed to every workplace within the Council with clear instructions to display them in prominent locations on the site. This message was reiterated in an information sheet and business cards were circulated to all Council departments, noting the new phone number that has been set up to receive reports on concerns relating to safeguarding children and/or vulnerable adults.
3	Provide safeguarding training for members, staff and managers	Nine workshops were held with officers and Elected Members in order to raise awareness and ensure better understanding of what is expected of every officer and Member in this field. A safeguarding children e-learning pack was developed as well as an e-learning pack for the vulnerable adults field, which is yet to be released. Some designated managers attended more specialist external training sessions and there are plans to ensure that a wider audience receives this training during 2015/16.
4	Approve, distribute and ensure awareness of the education service's safeguarding policies and guidelines	The Department's Safeguarding Policy was reviewed in accordance with the annual procedure.  It is intended to review safeguarding policies and guidelines and to relate them to Estyn's key questions.
5	Ensure an annual independent audit is undertaken of the quality of safeguarding children and child protection procedures	Schools submit an annual report for the attention of the governing bodies every year.  Further work has begun and a timeframe for action has been agreed with the schools in relation to Estyn's requirements in

	in schools	the field.
6	Ensure that an annual independent audit is undertaken of the quality of safeguarding and protecting children and vulnerable adults procedures across departments and Services is undertaken by sampling operational safeguarding procedures	An independent audit was undertaken during October 2014 in order to measure the level of staff awareness and understanding across the Council of what we are seeking to achieve in this field. The audit entailed visiting staff in twenty separate locations, interviewing every designated manager and the Chair of the Strategic Panel along with reviewing the policies and the work programme. It was reported that there were good examples of the policy being implemented; however there was a need to concentrate on ensuring that the messages are conveyed effectively to workers who travel across the County. Three elements of the corporate policies causing concern to some workers were identified, namely the requirement to act beyond work duties, concern regarding making false allegations and lack of understanding about matters relating to having to act as a witness.
7	Ensure that the prioritising of the safeguarding children and vulnerable adults field is reflected in the Council's Strategic Plan	The safeguarding work is already included within the Strategic Plan and has remained a priority following a review held in 2015. The proposed work programme has now been agreed. The work programme includes giving further attention to corporate matters in the fields of education and children in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation and adults in relation to the recommendations of the Older People's Commissioner and the Winterbourne report.
8	Lead Members receive evidence of the council's corporate / cross-departmental performance in relation to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults' issues.	As part of the Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Strategic Panel, the Lead Members receive an update on progress against the corporate work plan and also matters of departmental importance.
9	Support the functions and duties of the Statutory Director within the Council	Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is part of what is required of the Statutory Director, but is also the duty of the Council as a whole. The work of the Strategic Panel demonstrates the support of the body and the departments across the Council to these duties. The Statutory Director's Report is submitted to the Full Council every year and this year it was submitted in July 2015. This report is also a way of supporting the Director's duties. This year, the Panel also added a standing item to its meeting agenda which provides the opportunity for Panel members to raise any concerns or submit any information they have to the Director's attention. This is of course in addition to the need to do this without delay if it is an urgent matter.  As part of the Director's arrangements in discussing with relevant Heads of Department, a Statutory Team meeting

		also takes place where the Director meets with the Head of Adults, Health and Wellbeing Department and the Head of Children and Supporting Families Department regularly in order to discuss specific Service issues.
10	Share information about the vision, priorities and the policies of the Safeguarding Panel	The Panel's work has been prioritised within the Strategic Plan and therefore receives due attention within the Council's work.
11	Strengthen the links between the Regional Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Board and Services within the Council as appropriate	The Directors and the Head of Children and Supporting Families Department and the Head of Adults, Health and Wellbeing Department are members of the Regional Safeguarding Boards. The Head of Children and Supporting Families takes a lead role in attending these two Boards, as the Head of Department specialising in the field of safeguarding. The Head of Children and Supporting Families Department provides regular reports on any matters raised at these two Boards that require the Panel's attention. Obviously, the Statutory Director attends meeting regularly and receives information through the usual Networks. This year's work programme, in terms of including the matter of Child Sexual Exploitation, is an example of the joint relationship that exists.
12	Ensure effective arrangements for commissioning or regulating outside agencies' work with children or vulnerable adults	A Task Group was established from the members of the Operational Panel, and other key officers, to review and add guidance to the Procurement Handbook in relation to arrangements for commissioning, regulating and monitoring the activities of external agencies in this field. The outcome of the review has been approved and the guidance that was developed now forms part of the corporate Procurement Handbook.
13	Develop an integrated corporate database to record Council staff activity in terms of working with children and young people	A database was established to record the criminal record checks of every employee who fulfils a role where a disclosure of criminal record is required from the Disclosure and Barring Service. The corporate policy notes the need to renew this check every three years and the database is a means of assisting managers across the Council to ensure that every relevant worker has an up-to-date disclosure.
14	Ensure there are arrangements and procedures for safeguarding vulnerable adults following the recommendations of the Winterbourne review	<p>A report was submitted to the Strategic Panel on this field; however the Statutory Director's opinion is that further work is needed in this field. It has been a challenging time within the Adults Department during 2014/15 due to the absence of key staff.</p> <p>The matter has been prioritised for 2015/16 and the Head of Adults, Health and Wellbeing Department will lead to ensure that the matter is addressed appropriately.</p>

### **3. External Inspections Undertaken During This Period**

#### **3.1 Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils (Wales Audit Office)**

During 2014-2015 Wales Audit Office undertook an audit on 'Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils'. The purpose of the audit was to examine whether the Council's "governance and management arrangements offer quality assurance in overseeing the safeguarding of children". It seems fair to say that the outcome of the review was generally very positive and it could be argued that it evidenced the success of the Panel and the Operational Group's recent hard work. Nevertheless, the review proposes improvements for the Council to consider. The safeguarding Strategic Panel will ensure that these recommendations are considered and included in the work programmes that are already operational.

#### **3.2 Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW)**

During April and May 2014, an audit was undertaken by CSSIW of the Council's arrangements in planning care for our most vulnerable children and young people and those who display challenging behaviour that could place them in danger. It asked whether practice encouraged listening to the voice of the child and whether or not it promoted better outcomes for them. The inspectors determined that there were stable arrangements in place in Gwynedd and described the workforce as a stable one with high morale. It identified a number of lessons to learn from and fields to develop along with positive messages. The inspections' 10 findings were shared with the Corporate Parenting Panel, the Corporate Strategic Safeguarding Panel and the Council's Cabinet.

#### **3.3 'A Place to Call Home?' Review (the Older People's Commissioner)**

Following the publishing of 'A Place to Call Home?', namely a review of the standard of care in Residential and Nursing Homes in Wales undertaken by the Older People's Commissioner, we went about creating a work programme to meet these expectations. By now, the Commissioner has approved the work programme and the senior managers are ensuring that the necessary actions take place. We were confident that the monitoring of matters such as health and safety was already taking place, but were less confident that we were monitoring the standard of care from the Service user's perspective. This plan insists that we do this and we will report on our findings every year.

#### **3.4 Review of Whistleblowing Arrangements (Wales Audit Office)**

The review focussed on reviewing the following fields: Policy, Commitment, Action, Education and Training, Awareness, Caseload and Policy at work. The findings of the review were positive; however recommendations were also proposed to improve a number of these fields.. There was specific mention of good practice in the field of 'Education and training', whilst also identifying obvious areas for improvement.

### **3.5 Annual Report (CSSIW)**

On 30 October 2015, we officially received the Annual Report on the performance of Social Services for 2014/15 year. This report will be submitted to the Cabinet in December of this year. CSSIW has referred to our safeguarding arrangements within the report and have praised the progress achieved in terms of corporate safeguarding arrangements. It sees the need for the Adults, Health and Well-being Department to improve arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable adults. This work has already been identified by the relevant Head of Department, and a work plan is being discussed with the specialist senior managers.

#### 4. Our aims for the future – 2016 onwards

4.1 As noted at the beginning of this report, the Council has prioritised and elevated Safeguarding within the Strategic Plan by ensuring that it receives cross-departmental consideration and the attention of the entire Council – rather than being seen as the responsibility of some departments only. By reviewing the Strategic Plan in July of this year, three transformation projects were commissioned for the field (See below D1, D2, D3). These projects have been commissioned in response to some of the challenges that emerged last year. It is fair to say that it has been a difficult year due to complex cases and some that were extremely serious. The Strategic Panel is confident that the following projects will target those elements that need to be strengthened and improved. The nature of the challenges and recent cases mean that some matters must receive specific focus – ensuring that we learn lessons from cases and continue to improve our arrangements.

##### 4.2 D1 – Ensure whole-council ownership of safeguarding

The purpose of the project is to ensure corporate ownership of the safeguarding agenda and that effective actions are undertaken in relation to safeguarding Gwynedd's children and vulnerable adults.

By the end of March 2017 we will have:

- Reviewed policies and procedures on an annual basis
- Ensured that arrangements are in place to measure the impact of corporate safeguarding arrangements
- Undertaken awareness raising sessions in the field and monitored their impact
- Undertaken an annual audit of compliance with the policy
- Monitored contract arrangements (staff and provisions) in terms of safeguarding and strengthened procedures as needed
- Ensured that scrutiny members are aware of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel's work.

##### 4.3 D2 – Safeguarding children and young people

The purpose of this project is to continually improve the safeguarding arrangements and culture within the field of children and young people. By the end of March 2016, we will have:

Reviewed Council arrangements in terms of responding to the risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, by:

- Ensuring that Council arrangements coincide with the regional strategy that is being developed on a multi-agency basis
- Ensuring that the Council understands the demand for service, and CSE trends in Gwynedd, as much as is practically possible
- Improving individuals and key groups' understanding and awareness of this particular field including how to identify signs
- Recognising that the risk is greater for looked after children and work with Corporate Parent Panel on seeking to protect the most vulnerable children.

During 2015-16 we will also further strengthen the safeguarding procedures and culture within Education by:

- Undertaking an annual audit of safeguarding and governance arrangements within the department and within schools
- Creating a training programme to meet the needs of the annual audit
- Implementing a work programme in accordance with the recommendations of the annual audit and also consider any opportunities for improvement.

#### 4.4 D3 – Safeguarding vulnerable adults

The purpose of the project is to aim to continually improve the safeguarding arrangements and culture within the field of adults. By the end of March 2016, the project will respond specifically to the recommendations of the Winterbourne report and also to the 'A Place to Call Home' report by the Older People's Commissioner, by:

- Developing a range of different methods for individuals to be heard
- Identifying whether suitable use is made of advocacy and seek to respond to any deficiencies
- Providing evidence that the corporate groups are able to demonstrate that they are listening to the voices of vulnerable adults.

4.5 By now, we have confirmed who will be leading these projects and their initial work programmes were approved by the Strategic Safeguarding Panel in September 2015.

4.6 We need to improve ownership of the safeguarding field among members and staff, and to act effectively in terms of safeguarding Gwynedd's children and young people. The three projects will enable us to deliver this, however, safeguarding will obviously remain a field of priority for the Council and we will continue to review and monitor beyond the lifetime of the Strategic Plan



## 5. Conclusion

- 5.1 That which we achieved last year in terms of the work programme highlights the activity of the Strategic Panel and the Operational Group in terms of the hard work they have undertaken to continue to improve our safeguarding and protection arrangements on a corporate level. With the external audits offering positive feedback overall they also highlight the elements that could be improved. Also, the individual cases that have arisen have also created opportunities for us to improve and review our arrangements. There will be a need to ensure that these opportunities are incorporated in the work programmes of the relevant projects or service units.
- 5.2 The Strategic Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Panel is confident that the projects that have been commissioned via the Strategic Plan will offer proactive opportunities to improve our arrangements but also to respond to any potential challenges.
- 5.3 We anticipate that we will witness the fruits of this labour by the next time a report is submitted to the Cabinet in May.