

To: City Executive Board

Date: 16 June 2016

Report of: Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Oxford City Council Safeguarding report 2015-16

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee on the

Scrutiny lead member: Councillor Andrew Gant

Executive lead member: Councillor Dee Sinclair, Board Member for Community Safety

Recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee to the City Executive Board:

That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the six recommendations set out in the body of this report.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee pre-scrutinised the Oxford City Council Safeguarding report at its meeting on 6 June 2016. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Sinclair, Caroline Green and Jennifer Kotilaine for presenting this item and answering questions.

Summary of the discussion

2. The Board Member said that the Council complied with its statutory responsibilities and was going over and above in a number of areas but could not be complacent. The creation of a permanent part-time Safeguarding Co-ordinator post, which had previously been recommended by Scrutiny, was a very welcome development and more outward looking community work would be a priority for the year ahead. The Committee warmly welcomed the report including the extension of the annual safeguarding review to include vulnerable adults as well as children, and commended officers on their excellent work in this area.

3. The Committee noted that the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) had been set up to facilitate safeguarding processes and information sharing with regards to children. The Committee heard that a decision had recently been taken not to extend the work of the MASH to include safeguarding vulnerable adults.
4. The Committee commented that neglect was a common form of abuse and that members needed to be sensitive to signs of neglect. It was suggested that anonymised case study examples of safeguarding issues that had been referred by City Council services to the County Council would be useful to elected members. Members also commented that they needed to know who to report concerns to and heard that safeguarding training was being offered to members.

Recommendation 1 - That anonymised case study examples of safeguarding referrals made by the Council are provided to elected members.

5. The Committee raised concerns about high levels of absence at some academy schools and questioned where the responsibility for addressing this lay. The Committee heard that the role of the City Council was limited here. What the Council could do was signpost effectively and work proactively in partnerships with other agencies to highlight these kinds of issues.

Recommendation 2 - That the Council continues to work positively and proactively through partnerships to raise awareness of potential safeguarding issues in the City and push for action to investigate and address these issues, including, for example, high levels of pupil absence at particular schools.

6. The Committee questioned whether increased awareness and more effective signposting were leading to more referrals and increased pressure on services. The Committee heard that the Council had a responsibility to report concerns but its role was not to investigate them. Officers said they would appreciate more feedback following referrals and did not know whether increased awareness was having a positive impact.

Recommendation 3 – That the Council continues to request feedback from partner agencies following safeguarding referrals.

7. The Committee considered safeguarding issues around language schools in the City and noted that the Council and the Police were beginning to engage with language schools around their safeguarding responsibilities through a new forum. The Committee heard that it was unclear where in the City many language school students (specifically those under the age of 18) were living and in what conditions. The absence of rigorous checking was a concern because these students didn't speak English and were potentially vulnerable. The Committee noted that this lack of rigor contrasted with, for example, the checks around fostering and adoption arrangements, and was a national issue that should be referred up to government.

Recommendation 4 – That the Council makes representations to government through appropriate channels about the need for more rigorous safeguarding arrangements for language school students aged under 18 living in private sector accommodation.

8. The Committee noted that the Council was not able to proactively check and monitor of the welfare of language school students living in the City and heard that it could be difficult to engage with language schools. In response to a question about whether anyone had sought the views of language school students, officers advised that they did not know. It was suggested that these issues should be thought through and discussed with language schools and partner agencies, and that it may be possible to learn lessons from the recent scrutiny review of guest houses.

Recommendation 5 – That potential safeguarding issues around language school students aged under 18 living in private sector accommodation should be considered and discussed with language schools, the police and other relevant partner agencies.

9. The Committee noted that the Council’s Houses in Multiple Occupations (HMO) and Private Sector Enforcement teams had a role to play in identifying and reporting safeguarding issues. It was suggested that these officers should be trained to recognise safeguarding issues relating to language school students and to report any concerns they come across.

Recommendation 6 – That Safeguarding training provided to the Council’s HMO and Private Sector Enforcement Teams should cover how to recognise and report potential safeguarding issues around language school students aged under 18 living in the private sector.

Further consideration

10. The Committee agreed the following actions:
- a. An item on language schools would be added to the scrutiny work plan for a possible future review;
 - b. Details of non-compulsory Safeguarding training would be circulated to Committee members;
 - c. A question about how planning applications for a new category of student housing built by private developers would be dealt with would be referred to Planning Officers.

Name and contact details of author:-

Andrew Brown on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee
Scrutiny Officer
Law and Governance
Tel: 01865 252230 e-mail: abrown2@oxford.gov.uk

List of background papers: None

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