

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** July 2022  
**Report of:** Head of Corporate Strategy  
**Title of Report:** Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report 2021/22

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To report on the progress made on the Oxford City Council's Safeguarding Action Plan 2021/22
<b>Key decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Executive Board Member:</b>	Cllr Diko Walcott Safer Communities
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Supporting Thriving Communities
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Corporate Plan. Safeguarding Policy
<b>Recommendation(s): That the City Executive Board resolves to:</b>	
1.	Note the key achievements of the Safeguarding work delivered through Oxford City Council during 2021/2022
2.	Agree the Safeguarding Action Plan 2022/23 set out in Appendix 1

<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1	Oxford City Council's Safeguarding Action Plan 2022/23
Appendix 2	Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) Governance Structure

## Introduction

1. This is an agreed annual report to Cabinet on how we are fulfilling our statutory safeguarding duties within Oxford City Council. It aims to:
  - Outline the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in Oxfordshire.
  - Share the results of the safeguarding self-assessment audit 2021.
  - Highlight the key achievements and progress made in relation to the safeguarding work delivered by Oxford City Council.

- Recognise the impact of COVID-19 on safeguarding issues and Oxford City Council's responses to these.
  - Focus on areas identified to strengthen in 2021/22, collated within an Action Plan attached at Appendix 1.
  - Consider identified challenges and risks in relation to external environment and actions that we will contribute to, to support the system.
2. Oxford City Council has a legal duty of care to ensure children and adults at risk are protected within the facilities, services and activities under the direct remit and control of the Council. The Council has specific legal responsibilities under the Children Act 2004 (section 11) and the Care Act 2014 (sections 42-46) which aim to make sure the welfare and development needs of children are met and that children are protected from harm.
  3. Safeguarding is the action taken to promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults with care and support needs and protect them from harm as well as protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse and maltreatment, preventing harm to children's health or development and ensuring that they grow up with the provision of safe and effective care enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect.
  4. Oxford City Council's Safeguarding Policy builds upon existing good practice across its services and sets out its safeguarding policies and procedures.
  5. The Safeguarding Policy was reviewed in May 2021 and agreed at Cabinet in June 2021. There are no changes to the Policy to note this year.

### **Oxfordshire Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA)**

6. The development, delivery and quality monitoring of safeguarding service provision is the responsibility of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) and Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board (OSAB).
7. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced flexibility to replace Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) with new local safeguarding arrangements. It also established that collective responsibility and accountability of these arrangements lies with Oxfordshire County Council, the Clinical Commissioning Group and the Police, "the three safeguarding partners".
8. The three safeguarding partners in Oxfordshire have made arrangements to work together as an Executive Group with overall accountability for safeguarding consisting of the Chief Executive of Oxfordshire County Council, the Assistant Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police and the Accountable Officer of The Clinical Commissioning Group.
9. The new Integrated Care Board (ICB) comes into existence on July 1<sup>st</sup>, a member of this board will join MASA in replacement of the Clinical Commissioning Group.
10. The purpose of the Executive Group is to work with relevant partners through the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB), under the leadership and scrutiny of an independent Chair, Derek Benson. Derek Benson retires in June and the role is currently out to advert.

11. The focus of the Executive Group this year has been to oversee the multi-agency COVID-19 Opportunities and Risks register. As key statutory agencies, the group ensures they are sighted on new and emerging concerns, seek evidence and assurance from OSCB the concerns are being addressed and there is no duplication across the system. The focus has been:
  - Increase in referrals to services, in particular CAMHS.
  - Staff recruitment, retentions and sickness.
  - Looked after children placement shortage.
12. The independent Chair acts as the link between the Executive Board and the OSCB. The governance framework can be viewed in Appendix 2.
13. The key priorities for OSCB over the last 12 months have been:
  - Child exploitation
  - Keeping children safe in education
  - Jacob Child Safeguarding Practice Review
14. The OSCB Business Group continues to work operationally under the OSCB. This group includes all the chairs of OSCB sub-groups and strategic leads for operational services. In addition, the Council's Policy and Partnership team manager is a representative on the group for both City and all Districts. Its purpose is to recognise emerging concerns, problem solve, work collaboratively across the system and escalate issues when needed.
15. Oxford City Council's contributions to this work have been:
  - To ensure free school meals were provided for those that are eligible and continued in school holidays through participating in data mapping exercise to identify children and families.
  - Attending weekly sessions with social and health care colleagues to review the needs of families identified and target outreach support.
  - Weekly system calls have been established to discuss caseloads and children of concern. Joint plans have been developed to support these children.

### **Children missing out on education**

16. Oxford City Council was concerned about the percentage of children missing out on education and the exacerbation of the attainment gap for disadvantaged children before COVID-19.
17. There is growing concern about children that have been hidden from view for periods of time and this is intensified by non-attendance to school.
  - At the end of Easter term, a quarter of Oxfordshire children have attendance under 90%.
  - The highest non-attenders are our most vulnerable children – on Child Protection Plans or educational health care plans (EHCPs).
18. In response to this concern an education summit was convened, led by Oxford Strategic Partnership (OSP), to start a dialogue about finding a collaborative way forward to address this issue.

19. The education summit came up with a set of recommendations and subsequent actions, in summary:

- Lobby Government for establishment of an Education Opportunity Area in Oxford - OSP to commission letter to Secretary of State signed by members + MPs + others setting out case for Oxford Opportunity Area.
- Set up computers for schools donation programme - Oxfordshire Community Foundation coordinating a programme targeting donated laptops to schools for use by digitally excluded children.
- CPD expansion and creation of linkages between existing programmes - Oxfordshire teaching schools – 100 trainees  
Brookes and Oxford University CPD collaboration  
County Council support programme with Oxford Head Teachers  
Examine the creation of a funding pot to help backfill teachers released for training
- Increase partner involvement with Oxford community impact zone - Invite much wider group of stakeholders including businesses to participate in Community Impact Zone (CIZ)
- Expansion of schools access programme -  
Mapping exercise within Oxford University + Colleges to better understand existing links with schools  
Expand twinning arrangement to involve other Oxford colleges and local schools

20. Progress has already been made on the second, third and fifth actions – with the creation of a Computers for schools donation programme; additional CPD support provided for school head teachers; the completion of the Oxford University and Colleges mapping work, and five colleges and Oxford primary schools now involved in twinning arrangements.

21. A 'safety programme', available on the OSCB webpage, was developed for schools and includes training for digital safeguarding. This training is delivered by external providers throughout the school to all year groups and teaching staff.

22. In addition, all schools have a policy about digital access and safety. Oxford City Council participate in the check and challenge of this programme on a quarterly basis at the quality and assurance group. We are also provided with a written annual report. As a Council, OSCB training is promoted in internal comms which includes: [WEBINAR: Digital Safeguarding - Reducing Risk and Building Resilience](#).

23. The City Council participated in a Neglect Challenge Event held in September 2021 and this has progressed in a newly created joint Neglect action plan with three district Councils. The Policy and Partnership Team Manager Reports back to each quarterly Neglect Strategy meeting.

24. Oxford City Council has incorporated specific actions in relation to the core components within our action plan. These are:

- Include a specific slide on Neglect in awareness briefings for staff and councillors.

- Offer training to front facing teams on using the neglect practitioner assessment tool, to support staff to check list their thoughts and thinking.
  - Two staff to attend the neglect practitioner forums, to share good practice and cascade through our champion network.
  - Ensure that learning from neglect serious case reviews is shared within our Communications plan, through videos and the voice of the child's lived experience.
  - Ensure our Housing teams record all concerns on our central MyConcern system.
  - Share case examples on the intranet.
25. Oxford City Council is further represented on the performance and quality assurance group, training sub groups, exploitation sub group, neglect strategy group, as well other task and finish groups.
26. Oxford City Council staff have engaged with and are supporting the recommendations from the recent 'Jacob' serious case review and participate in all three work streams highlighted within the report in relation to Education, Child exploitation and System approach. Cllr Louise Upton has also participated in the learning review workshop
27. The OSCB held an online learning event in January, which was attended by 100 delegates. They were given an overview of the findings from the CSPR for Jacob and a reminder of the need for system change, both locally and nationally, to prevent and tackle child exploitation. They heard the views of children and families in Oxfordshire and what has worked well in supporting them as well as what could be better.
28. The business group has developed the Risk Register, which identifies key areas of concern in relation to the impact of COVID 19 and it is monitored and reviewed at every meeting.
29. All of the boards and sub groups have continued to meet virtually throughout the pandemic. The OSCB business group increasing the amount of meetings.
30. The Adult Safeguarding Board, OSAB also has an independent Chair, newly appointed this year Jayne Chidgey-Clark.
31. The four priorities set last year were: 1. Move training to an accessible e-learning and webinar format 2. Improve our communication links with non-Board members 3. Share the learning from Safeguarding Adults Reviews 4. Maintain high standards of strategic safeguarding work during COVID 19
32. The Department of Health and Social Care wrote to the Board at the beginning of COVID 19 outlining its expectations throughout the pandemic. OSAB continued to deliver on all its agreed priorities.
33. Oxford City Council contributions to this work have been:
- The learning/recommendations from these serious case reviews have resulted in the following actions:
  - An audit of safeguarding practice across our housing team functions.
  - Targeted training on central reporting system MyConcern.

34. Oxford City Council put forward the Safeguarding Serious Adult Review (SAR) for the homelessness deaths and requested an independent review of these and the process. This resulted in an independent review report, an ongoing conversation with County and multi-agency action plan.
35. This multi-agency action plan aims to fulfil all the recommendations in the review and gain traction on a whole systems approach to homelessness countywide. This is making good progress.
36. A new Governance structure for homelessness has now been established and convened for the first time in this capacity in May. Oxford City have been striving towards this system wide support for some time, this is a very positive step forward.
37. A strategic, planned approach to domestic abuse is being taken forward with Oxford City Council's active contribution to the development and delivery of a countywide plan and continued delivery of bespoke services for victims of domestic abuse. Oxford City Council is now working towards a Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation and has recently employed two Domestic Abuse Housing Link workers to support complex cases and work towards achieving the DAHA accreditation.
38. A Supported Learning Visit was conducted by OSAB which partner agencies were invited to observe. Oxford City Council presented an overview of safeguarding at the Council. This was widely praised and agreement was made that Oxford City Council is fulfilling its safeguarding duties with no recommendations made.
39. The Joint Community Hub working group is bringing together initiatives to enhance welfare support through Community Hubs at City and District Councils and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).
40. Oxford City Council's food response was designed around the lockdown, particularly aimed at people who were vulnerable, housebound, and those that would not have access to or could not afford food.
41. Oxford City Council set up a single point of contact telephone number and using the locality hubs as a base, set up an emergency food parcel delivery system for our residents.
42. We also worked with Oxford Brookes University and Good Food Oxford to create a balanced and nutritious food parcel offer that was sensitive to cultural and religious requirements such as Halal and Kosher.
43. In addition to the delivery of the emergency food parcels, we also began contacting the recipients to understand the root causal issues and began offering support through Council services and other partner services, such as advice centres.
44. As we moved through the pandemic our support to the most vulnerable through the Community Food System evolved. The system now includes food banks, community food larders, local community fridges, SOFEA, GFO and community food operations such as Oxford Mutual Aid and Oxford Community Action.
45. The support included Oxford City Council targeting funding through Government Food Essentials Funding and COVID Winter Support grants amongst others. In addition we supported the system with logistics such as vans and drivers,

signposting groups to training such as safeguarding and support with their own systems and processes.

46. We worked with Good Food Oxford (GFO) to set up the City Community Food network, within the City this enables the sharing of resources, joint opportunities, upcoming issues and working together to ensure that nobody falls between the gaps

## **Safeguarding Responsibilities**

47. Oxford City Council has a statutory duty to ensure that, in discharging its functions, it has regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare and wellbeing of children, young people and adults with care and support needs. Day to day safeguarding challenges are supported and managed by a group of Safeguarding Champions from across service areas with oversight being provided by the Safeguarding Coordinator and four Designated Safeguarding Leads.
48. The impact of COVID 19 has seen an increase in mental health concerns, social isolation and people struggling with bereavement and loneliness.
49. MyConcern is Oxford City Council's internal safeguarding concern recording system. Reports are discussed at quarterly internal Strategic Safeguarding meetings, attended by senior managers and Designated Safeguarding Leads, during which the data is interrogated and themes are identified
50. The MyConcern application has had a positive impact on the safeguarding culture within Oxford City Council. Quarterly reports are published on the intranet to show staff across the organisation the current safeguarding themes and trends. Reports by service area are also published. Reporting trends in relation to topic or service area are brought to the attention of the strategic safeguarding group for discussion and further consideration.
51. Most recently we have identified an increase in suicidal threats, attempts and thoughts. This highlighted the need for further training and the republishing of Oxford City Council's suicide threat guidance for staff. This includes a section on staff welfare.
52. December 2021 saw 44 concern categories recorded. The total for the year was 305 and the average monthly number of reports was 25.
53. Oxford City Council's own staff, reporting into MyConcern, are also reflecting the increase in these wellbeing challenges, with an increase in reports of suicidal thoughts, suicidal threats and suicide attempts.
54. Oxford City Council has utilised this information by updating and redistributing Oxford City Council's Suicide Threat Guidance for staff. Partner work was undertaken to produce this guidance and the final document was shared with partner agencies.
55. The OSCB Neglect strategy 2020/23 has been developed and an Action Plan managed by the Neglect Strategy Group. The peer group findings showed that to tackle Neglect effectively it needed a system wide approach. Subsequently, each member agency of the Neglect Strategy group has developed its own Neglect Action Plan based on suggested common core components in order to ensure a more robust ownership and responsibility at an individual as well as a collective agency basis.

## Safeguarding Audit 2021

56. Oxford City Council is required to complete an annual self-assessment to evidence standards in the quality of its safeguarding work. The self-assessment audit, which is a joint audit between the OSCB and OSAB spans across all Council departments. This year Oxford City Council has been able to evidence best practice in all areas for the fifth consecutive year.

57. Oxford City Council was required to evidence its standard of work in the following areas:

For 2021, the standards assessed are as follows:

1. Leadership, Strategy and Working Together
2. Service Delivery, Development & Effective Practice
3. Commissioning Arrangements
4. Safer Recruitment, Staff Development & Effective Learning
5. People's Experiences of Safeguarding
6. Reflecting on Past and Future Challenges

58. The evidence provided is given the following RAG rating:

**Green** – Fully met and evidenced – Best Practice

**Amber** – the standard/compliance point is not met but work has begun or work is underway but has experienced delays in completion

**Red** – the standard/compliance point is not met, work is not underway and there are issues with commencing work

59. Oxford City Council's assessed standards were as follows:

Leadership, Strategy & Working Together	Service Delivery, Development & Effective Practice	Commissioning Arrangements	Safer Recruitment, Staff Development & Effective Learning	People's Experiences of Safeguarding
Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

60. The full Self-Assessment is available as a background paper to the report.

61. A peer review was held in February that enables partners to check and challenge the self-assessments of different organisations. Oxford City Council upheld their green ratings across all five areas within this process for the fifth consecutive year.

## Key achievements to note 2021/2022

62. As Chair of the Refugee, Vulnerable Migrant and Asylum Seeker coordination group for Oxford we had been discussing as a partnership that there have been



growing concerns about the availability and access to interpretation services for people who are experiencing domestic abuse issues or health concerns.

63. Oxford City Council supported the providers to bring a report with real case examples to the group. Oxford City Council presented this report to OSAB with a call to the board to explore the safeguarding issues that had arisen for this vulnerable group due to lack of accessible interpretation services.
64. As a result of this challenge, the Board worked effectively across the partnership to produce a poster and campaign for health services to increase awareness to all health staff about the interpretation services available. The Board wrote back to the group to inform them of the actions taken.
65. 2021 saw the recruitment of seven additional Safeguarding Champions, two additional Designated Safeguarding Officers and one additional Designated Safeguarding Lead; taking the respective totals to 14, seven and four.
66. The internal training package was updated in January 2022 to reflect responses from the October 2021 staff survey.
67. 38 Safeguarding Awareness briefings were carried out in 2021.
68. The Council's one hour awareness briefing session, which is now an interactive online session, enabled us to continue to deliver the sessions throughout the pandemic. The October 2021 staff survey showed 51% of colleagues would prefer safeguarding briefings and training to remain online and 28% would prefer a combination of online and face to face training.
69. Sessions have also been made available and delivered to Councillors in throughout 2021.
70. Managing Suicide threats had become an increasing concern across Oxford City Council. MyConcern reporting enabled the identification of the increase in trends and subsequently, guidance and support was distributed and offered to staff.
71. Briefings around the use and purpose of MyConcern have been delivered at team meetings in Housing Services and Locality Hubs, in addition to the mandatory Safeguarding Awareness briefings. Plans to deliver the briefings to additional team are in place for 2022. Intranet pages are regularly updated with information and key messages.
72. The inclusion of Modern Slavery in the Care Act 2014 as a form of abuse means that the subject of Modern Slavery is included in the remit of adult safeguarding in England.
73. Oxford City Council employed a new Anti-Slavery Coordinator in January 2022. Although employed by Oxford City Council the role covers the whole of Oxfordshire and will therefore also be working closely with the other Oxfordshire Local Authorities and agencies.
74. Oxford City Council's successful bid to the Controlling Migration Fund has enabled us to commission research to investigate the nature and extent of Modern Slavery and trafficking in Oxford. The findings will be used by city and countywide bodies responsible for community safety to:
  - Identify where exploitation is happening and who is vulnerable
  - Understand how to protect and support victims better

- Make it harder for exploiters and traffickers to operate in our area

### **The key areas of focus for 2022/23**

75. To support the priorities of the OSAB and OSCB and to further improve safeguarding provision in all of Oxford City Council's service areas, our analysis identified the greatest needs as Homelessness, and Mental Health & Wellbeing.
76. Details on actions being taken forward to support these areas can be found in Appendix 1.

### **Risks and Challenges**

77. As an organisation our key safeguarding challenges and priorities are:

#### **Homelessness/Housing – Identified within Priority 2 of Oxford City Business plan**

78. Emerging from the pandemic Homelessness continues to be under significant pressure. Ranging from the impact of 'Everyone In' to the ending of the eviction ban, the end of the furlough scheme and rising unemployment, all of which may drive further hardship and homelessness.
79. In addition, the introduction of new Government legislation and programmes that require reviews and change in local housing legislation, policy and process to support the implementation, such as the Domestic Abuse Bill, Safer Accommodation Strategy and the recent National and Local impact of the Afghan refugee crisis and homes for Ukraine need to be considered.
80. This places additional pressure on an already stretched housing supply and on the system as a whole.
81. We will continue to drive and support the positive move towards a countywide approach to homelessness in the next year which aims to bring health, housing, criminal justice and social care together around these issues, this is progressing but is challenging.
82. Our housing, homeless and community services are developing upstream prevention/intervention to identify families and single people who are at risk of homelessness early in order to prevent their homelessness. Particularly in the private rented sector where the greatest risk is. We will be ensuring all of our staff keep up to date with their safeguarding training and encourage any additional training where required. We will continue to provide SWEP to support rough sleepers. We have committed to housing a further 10 afghan families this year.
83. Violence against Women and Girls is a priority this year and we will be leading on the implementation of a Safer Streets project in the night time that increases safety for women and girls, and complements the Operation Vigilant approach led by Thames Valley Police.

## **Mental Health and Wellbeing – Youth and Adults. Identified within priority 3 of Oxford City Council business plan**

84. There is no doubt that COVID-19 has impacted on how we safeguard vulnerable people. This has been challenging, especially during periods of the COVID 19 restrictions and with vulnerable residents not able to access face to face support services.
85. With restrictions being lifted and things returning back to normal, numbers of concerns being raised in relation to mental health has increased within the City Council of which is reflected in the data coming through the board performance reports. We will ensure that staff are being vigilant on the subject and have the confidence of dealing with safeguarding issues and making appropriate referral into services in good time. This will be monitored through our DSL network.
86. Oxford City Council set up Locality response hubs to help with responding to the needs of residents in our communities. These Locality hubs are still in place and continue to support the needs of vulnerable people.
87. This includes a pilot project being delivered with Public Health to support young people with mental health issues.
88. Our Youth team has now resumed their face to face provisions in disadvantaged areas in the city.
89. The Public Health England (PHE) Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health aims to facilitate local and national action around preventing mental health problems and promoting good mental health. Oxford City Council signed up to the Concordat in 2019 and are represented on the partnership group that includes organisations within the Health and Wellbeing Board, Oxfordshire Mental Health Partnership and Active Oxfordshire. The aim of the concordat has been building relationships, by sharing tools and communications, identifying quick wins, reviewing what's existing and inviting new partners. Oxford City Council will continue to actively contribute to this programme of work.
90. It is also important in the next 12 months to ensure that:
- Safeguarding is embedded across all services areas.
  - Team managers are able to support staff with safeguarding concerns.
  - Staff can confidentially raise concerns for colleagues.
  - New staff induction programmes include access to MyConcern and appropriate training.
  - Members receive training and understand how to report safeguarding and handle sensitive information.
  - Training addresses local and national concerns.
  - Sufficient horizon scanning is conducted to allow the Council to predict impending trends, changes to government priorities and funding opportunities.
  - Staff are listened to through the internal survey about what they feel they need support with most in relation to good quality safeguarding practice.

## Financial implications

91. Oxford City Council contributes an annual contribution towards the running costs of the OSCB of £10,000 and the OSAB of £10,000. The Council has one member of staff who is an active trainer who contributes to the OSCB and OSAB training pool.
92. MyConcern annual licence fee is £6,592.80
93. All work identified in this report can be funded from within the Policy and Partnerships budget.

## Legal issues

94. Oxford City Council's legal responsibilities are set out in the body of the report and the Appendices, by reference to various Acts including - Children Act 1989/2004, Care Act 2014, Modern Slavery Act 2015, Homelessness Reduction Act 2018, Mental Capacity Act 2005, Equality Act 2010 and Children & Social Work Act 2017. Otherwise there are no legal implications arising from the report. Failure to meet these legal responsibilities would increase the risk that children and vulnerable adults are not protected from harm and may lead to an increase in unidentified abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults.

## Equalities impact

95. An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out in relation to the Council's Safeguarding Policy. This assessment is considered to be relevant to this report and also sufficient. After considering all areas of the policy, report and action plan, there appears to be no differential impact on any protected characteristics.

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### Background Papers:

1. Safeguarding Self-assessment 2021
2. Safeguarding Policy 2021