
Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 14 July 2009

Subject: Progress made towards establishing a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) for Central Bedfordshire

Report of: Assistant Director, Specialist Services

Summary: This report describes progress to date towards establishing a Local Safeguarding Children Board for Central Bedfordshire as agreed by the Shadow Executive on 14 April 2009.

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Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Members are asked to consider the initial work undertaken to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board for Central Bedfordshire and to give their views on the future direction of this work.**

Background

1. Central Bedfordshire, as with every local authority in England, is required to establish and maintain a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). The overall purpose of the LSCB is to oversee the arrangements for the protection and safeguarding of children in the area of the Authority. It is a multi disciplinary partnership, bringing together all the relevant agencies which should be integrated into, but distinct from the Children's Trust arrangements.
2. These requirements are currently met through a shared arrangement with Bedford Borough which simply maintains the previous Board established by the former County Council. Although this is adequate and meets the statutory requirements in the short term, it is not a position which should be maintained indefinitely. This is principally because of the need to have in place effective local arrangements and because of the requirement for a strong working relationship with the Children's Trust Board.

3. The Central Bedfordshire Shadow Executive at its meeting on 14 April 2009 resolved that arrangements should be made to establish a separate LSCB:

“that the Executive agrees the arrangements to establish a Central Bedfordshire Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) as set out in the submitted report.” (E/08/124)
4. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director for Children, Families and Learning gave an undertaking to report progress to the first Overview & Scrutiny Committee following the election of the new Council. This report is intended to meet that commitment.
5. The safeguarding of children and young people is the most complex, important and sensitive responsibility of the Council and its partners. It is therefore essential that in disaggregating the current local safeguarding board arrangements, great care is taken to ensure that at no point is the integrity of the multi-agency safeguarding system compromised. For this reason a careful, measured and collaborative approach is being taken, ensuring that the views of key partners as to the precise nature of the new structures and the process required to achieve them are taken into account.
6. It is however, the responsibility of the local authority, in its statutory capacity as a children’s services authority, to establish and maintain the LSCB. It is the clear position of both of the new Authorities that the most effective way to discharge this responsibility is to establish separate boards, reporting to and challenging their respective Children’s Trusts. New guidance is due to be issued in the autumn which will place responsibility for agreeing the LSCB business plan with the Children’s Trust which further reinforces the need for change.
7. This approach is consistent with that described in the paper agreed by the Shadow Executive.

Progress to Date

Shadow Chair

8. In the report agreed by the Shadow Executive on 14 April, was a recommendation that an independent shadow Chair should be appointed to work closely with the Independent Chair of the Bedfordshire Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Director for Children, Families & Learning, to ensure a smooth transition when separation occurs.
9. Members may wish to note that we have appointed to the post. The Council has secured the services of a high calibre individual who has the necessary qualities and experience. It will be for the new Board, when constituted, to make an appointment to the substantive position, as required by regulation.

Transition Planning

10. In order to implement the decision of the Council to establish a separate LSCB, the Bedfordshire LSCB Strategic Board, at a meeting on the 9 June, agreed that a task and finish group should be established. The group will meet twice during the summer with the purpose of proposing a precise model for the new Boards and bringing forward a detailed plan for disaggregation. This group met on 26 June 2009 and will meet again in July with the intention that the plan should be adopted by the current LSCB at an extraordinary meeting early in September 2009.

11. The programme is to be underpinned by four key principles:
 - (a) **Effectiveness**, at no point during the transition or following the implementation of the new structures, can the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements or their governance be compromised.

 - (b) **Efficiency**, establishing two Boards where one previously existed has the potential to create inefficiency, duplication and waste. This is not only of concern to partner organisations but also to the Council. Where collaboration with the Bedford or any other LSCB, allows for more efficient use of resources and is consistent with the aims and duties of the Board, these should be features of the proposed design.

 - (c) **Consensus**, the LSCB is a partnership; its effectiveness is determined by the commitment of all of the partners. Wherever possible, consensus about the way forward will be sought, as long as this is consistent with the decision of the Council to establish a separate Board and the requirements for effectiveness and efficiency.

 - (d) **Resilience**, following the tragic death of baby Peter and Lord Laming's subsequent report; this is a time of enormous change in safeguarding policy and practice. The statutory guidance under which LSCBs are established is being reviewed and re-written. It is expected to be published during the period of disaggregation, for example we already know that the government intends to change the composition of LSCBs to include the Lead Member for Children and two lay members. It is therefore essential that any proposal will create a structure which is stable, compliant with the changed regulatory framework, and as far as is possible, future proof.

12. The Safeguarding of Children is a highly regulated activity and has a fundamental impact on judgements made about the Authority through the inspection framework. It is therefore essential, especially for a new Authority, that proposals for re-structuring safeguarding arrangements are discussed with and understood by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

13. At the time of writing this report, a meeting is scheduled for 2 July 2009 at Government Office with the regional Children's Services Adviser, the regional Safeguarding Adviser and the senior Civil Servant responsible for Children, Families and Learners. The Authority will be represented by the Deputy Director for Children, Families and Learning. The Assistant Director for Vulnerable Children from Bedford Borough will also attend to re-assure Department for Children, Schools and Families that the plans are robust and that Children will be effectively safeguarded during and after transition. A verbal update on this meeting will be provided to members at the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting on 14 July 2009.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Establishing an effective LSCB will support the Central Bedfordshire Strategic Plan (2009-11) particularly in educating, protecting and providing opportunities for children and young people.

Financial: The LSCB is a statutory partnership which is funded through contributions from the core partners. However, the majority contribution comes from the Council as the Children's Services Authority. Budgets are agreed for 09/10. These arrangements feature in the Service Level Agreement between the Council and Bedford Borough. Additional cost will be incurred during the transition because of the necessary decision to appoint a shadow Chair.

Legal: It is a statutory requirement that the Council establish and maintain a Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Risk Management: Initial risks have been identified and mitigation will be incorporated into the Transition Plan.

Staffing (including Trades Unions): In the event of the new arrangements impacting on staff, appropriate consultations will be undertaken with trade unions and professional associations.

Equalities/Human Rights: Effective safeguarding arrangements safeguard and promote the human rights of every child and young person.

Community Safety: The LSCB is the primary mechanism for ensuring the safety of every child and young person in our community.

Sustainability: There is no obvious impact on sustainability

Appendix:

Appendix A – Executive Minutes 14 April 2009