

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Children's Service Sub Committee meeting Monday 23 April 2012

Safeguarding - annual report presented by independent chair

6.1 Chris Davies, Independent Chair of Southwark Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) and Ann Flynn, SSCB development manager, introduced the report. The safeguarding chair reported that the council had demonstrated its commitment to safeguarding when it lost the children's safeguarding manager and filled that position in a timely and appropriate way.

6.2 He explained that one of the board's functions is to identify high-level risks in the system. Last year the board identified the NHS as a risk because of a high level of turnover of staff and systems change because of the introduction of the NHS and Community Care Bill, particularly the local move to clinical commissioning. He reported that early on the board identified this change programme as a significant risk to our safeguarding work, but because of the strong commitment and effective leadership of our health colleagues locally, the board has been reassured that the effectiveness of the council and health colleagues working together on safeguarding is being sustained.

6.3 The Independent Chair went on to detail that locally safeguarding in health services are moving to Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, as managers of community services, and to the Business Support Unit and Southwark Clinical Commissioning Committee (SCCC), as GPs assume their new role as clinical leads. He went on to explain that the board has been building relationships with the SCCC and local GPs and had seen a growing commitment and understanding of the importance of safeguarding.

6.4 The Independent Chair explained that the board does not carry out direct safeguarding work, but has a significant role in supporting frontline practitioners who work to support and safeguard children and their families. He reported that he was particularly pleased with progress in training and that this was now quality assured.

6.5 The last time the Independent Chair had visited the scrutiny committee he spoke about the high volume of safeguarding referrals. He referred to this and explained that the board had focused on this area over the last year to ensure that social workers were not flooded and this has led to improved referrals. He reported that fewer cases which turn out not to need a response are now being referred, and more appropriate alternative help is being put in place for many of these, but the service is not overwhelmed.

6.6 A member asked how referrals had been reduced and improved and it was explained that the Common Assessment Framework had been used to encourage service users and practitioners to come together and provide more local support where possible. There had been an emphasis on early support, even before a formal assessment had been made.

6.7 The Independent Chair said that the board is now asking all partners to come and account for their work on safeguarding and other partners are asked to participate in challenging and asking questions.

6.8 The safeguarding team explained that they have resolved to work more closely with adult safeguarding as this is a time of huge stress and increased safeguarding risk.

6.9 He reported that private fostering is reasonably common in Southwark and the board think there is major underreporting of this, as the legislation is not very well understood. The Independent Chair said that there is also the issue of child trafficking, which is hard to quantify, but he said that given the nature of Southwark's population, and the degree of flux, it is likely to be present to some degree.

6.10 Child neglect is one of the areas that the board is considering exploring thresholds for intervention, the Independent Chair explained. Child sexual exploitation and particularly the grooming of young vulnerable girl is an area of particular concern.

6.11 The Independent Chair reported that safeguarding training is now on a more secure, planned and assured basis, with the new partnership between the Board and the Council's Organisational Development Service

6.12 The safeguarding team explained that there had been a big investment in domestic violence prevention and the team have decided to audit this work and would like to send an early draft to the committee to consider.

6.13 The chair of committee thanked the safeguarding team for their presentation and remarked that CVS are reporting on their work supporting families shortly. He asked how integrated CVS is with the safeguarding work. The safeguarding manager responded that she had assisted with CVS training.

6.14 A lay member commented that the training programme had been of very high quality and commended the recent training on domestic abuse. He also went on to comment that often practitioners in Early Years are often not highly trained so this is particularly valuable.

6.15 A member raised concerns about girl gangs grooming other girls into prostitution. The safeguarding team said that the grooming of girls by other girls had not been identified as a specific risk; however, they have been identifying concerns around the use of rape and sexual abuse to initiate girls into gangs. The team is working to identify particularly vulnerable girls, for example siblings. The approach has been to build resilience so that girls are more able to be assertive, know their rights and so reduce the risk of exploitation. The member responded that she is in contact with a voluntary provider in Peckham doing good work with girls at risk and that she would like the safeguarding team to follow up this contact outside of the meeting.

6.1 Members raised concerns about witchcraft and child abuse, in both church and the wider community, commenting that this is a national issue and there was a recent child death. Members pointed out that many churches have good

safeguarding procedures, such as CRB checks and training; but there is also a need for officers and ministers to improve practices in faith communities. Officers said that they try to work with families on cultural beliefs and are clear that some things are acceptable in this country and some things are not. Members expressed particular concern for children who may be at risk because they belong to a faith group that believes in spirit possession, and the Independent Chair agreed that these concerns would be pursued and that this would be reflected in the next annual report.

6.2 A member asked how acceptable parenting is defined and representation for parents during any hearings. The Independent Chair commented that parenting standards are often not clearly defined and are a matter of judgement; for example there is no set age when a child can babysit but there is a need for a competent carer. He went on to explain that judgements about acceptable behaviour are not left to one person and that the team try to ensure that there is a network of support. For any court hearing there would need to be full representation.

RESOLVED

- **Officers will contact the community group based in Peckham, to follow up concerns raised about girl gangs grooming other girls into prostitution.**
- **It was recommended that officers do more to address the risk of harm from witchcraft and spirit possession in their child protection and safeguarding work. Members advised that there is a particular need for engagement work with faith group communities and leaders, and that more is done to ensure that those in authority meet certain training standards and have the appropriate checks; e.g. CRB checks.**