

Committee: **Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **12th February 2020**

Report Subject: **Wales Audit Office Review of Corporate Arrangements for the Safeguarding of Children**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**

Report Submitted by: **Damien McCann, Corporate Director of Social Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	22.1.20	29.01.20	31.03.20		12.02.20			

1. Purpose of the Report

To present the findings of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) *follow up review of corporate arrangements for the safeguarding of children* and the management response to the proposals for improvement.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 WAO undertook a review of corporate arrangements for safeguarding children in 2014 and in addition made recommendations within the Auditor General's report *Review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils* (July 2015).
- 2.2 WAO undertook a review during June 2019 to seek assurance that the Council has acted upon their previous national and local recommendations.
- 2.3 The Council were asked to complete a self-assessment and provide documentation to support its self-assessment. WAO then interviewed key officers and the lead member for Corporate Safeguarding.
- 2.4 WAO review sought to answer the question *Can the Council provide assurance that it had addressed the recommendations and proposals for improvement contained in the Auditor General's national and local reports published in 2014-15?*
- 2.5 WAO overall conclusion was **that the Council made limited progress in addressing our previous recommendations and proposals for improvement and safeguarding arrangements are not consistent enough to provide assurance across all areas.**

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 The management response at appendix 2 has been agreed by CLT.

Option 1

That Members of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee:

- (i) Consider the WAO follow up review of corporate arrangements for the safeguarding of children and the management response and accept the report and appendices as provided prior to it being submitted to the Executive Committee;
- (ii) Following approval by the Executive Committee the report will be presented to Audit Committee for assurance; and
- (iii) Receive a 6 monthly review of the progress of the management response as part of the Committee's Forward Work programme.

Option 2

That Members of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee:

- (i) Consider the WAO follow up review of corporate arrangements for the safeguarding of children and the management response and provide comment prior to it being submitted to the Executive Committee;
- (ii) Following approval by the Executive Committee the report will be presented to Audit Committee for assurance; and
- (iii) Receive a 6 monthly review of the progress of the management response as part of the Committee's Forward Work programme.

4. Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

The Safeguarding agenda is considered as part of the Council's Corporate Strategies that includes:

- Corporate Plan;
- Corporate Risk Register and Directorate Risk Register;
- Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy.

Social Services work to a number of regional and national safeguarding procedures which can be located on the South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board website: <http://sewsc.org.uk>

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)

There are potentially financial options if Members should agree to mandatory safeguarding training for the Council. Training within Social Services can be funded through the Workforce Development Grant which is provided to Social Services. However, other directorates will have to financially contributed towards this training programme, which will be ongoing to ensure there is regular refresher training every 3 years.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The Directorate Risk Register within Social Services identifies safeguarding as the highest risk and this is monitored as part of the quarterly report of the Director of Social Services. This risk will be considered by Corporate Leadership Team to consider whether it should be escalated on to the Corporate Risk Register in light of the WAO review.

5.3 ***Legal***

There are no legal implications.

5.4 ***Personnel***

There are no potential implications for personnel, however to ensure all staff are mandatory trained then staff will have to be taken out of their daily work which may impact on service delivery.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

6.2 The findings of the WAO follow up review of *Corporate Arrangements for the Safeguarding of Children* is attached as Appendix 1.

6.3 A number of findings sat under the overall WAO conclusion **that the Council made limited progress in addressing our previous recommendations and proposals for improvement and safeguarding arrangements are not consistent enough to provide assurance across all areas** including:

- The Council does not currently include safeguarding in its corporate risk register;
- The information provided through its self-assessment and documentary evidence was limited to in its focus on safeguarding arrangements for its education and social services directorates;
- The Council needs to urgently strengthen oversight and assurance of corporate safeguarding arrangements across all directorates, and particularly for services delivered by third parties and stakeholders.

6.4 The WAO provided a number of suggestions on ways they thought the Council could improve corporate safeguarding of children. The management response to these is attached at Appendix 2.

6.5 ***Expected outcome for the public***

Those children who are assessed to be at risk of harm are protected and safeguarded, and that the Local Authority adheres to legislation regarding statutory intervention.

6.6 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

The development of the Corporate Safeguarding Policy and the Departmental Safeguarding Leads meetings will help ensure all departments within the Authority are aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding and are kept updated with any emerging issues or trends within safeguarding.

Termly meetings also take place with the Safeguarding Leads from all the schools and monthly meetings take place between the safeguarding team and lead education staff.

The SEWSCB local Safeguarding Network group also reviews the safeguarding information to ensure all partner agencies are as fully aware as possible.

6.7 *Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)*

The Annual Council Reporting Framework (ACRF) enables Social Services to plan for the future as spend, risk and performance is continuously reported on and provides a baseline of where the Council is currently and where it needs to be in the future. Implementation of the recommendations will ensure that we are appropriately corporately safeguarding children to the best of our ability moving forward.

6.8 *Preventative focus*

The work being undertaken by the Social Services Directorate and Education Directorate looks to promote a preventative approach to practice through early identification and intervention. Having a proactive rather than reactive approach to service planning can also help with planning resources.

Providing this report and the level of detailed safeguarding information to Scrutiny Committee enables members to ensure risks are identified and acted on.

6.9 *Collaboration / partnership working*

The South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board and its sub groups ensure a multi-agency collaborative approach to safeguarding. Blaenau Gwent fully participates in the Children's and Adults Safeguarding Boards.

Additionally, the Corporate Safeguarding Policy ensures each department has safeguarding leads and these meet together on a quarterly basis looking at safeguarding across the whole Authority. The Leisure Trust lead also participates in this meeting.

6.10 *Integration (across service areas)*

All local authorities and partner agencies work together on safeguarding through the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board and Gwent wide Adult Safeguarding Board.

6.11 *EqlA(screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)*

There is no need to submit an impact assessment.

7. *Monitoring Arrangements*

7.1 The implementation of the management response and action plan will be monitored quarterly by Corporate Leadership Team and reported every 6 monthly to the Corporate Scrutiny Overview and Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix 1 – Follow-up Review of Corporate Arrangements for the Safeguarding of Children – Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council*
- *Appendix 2 – Management Reponse*