

Committee: **Audit Committee**

Date of meeting: **17<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

Report Subject: **WAO Action Plan update**

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

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

Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
			17.11.20					

## 1. Purpose of the Report

To update the Audit Committee regarding the formation of the Corporate Safeguarding Leads group and on the developments in respect of the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) recommendations following their review of the corporate arrangements for the safeguarding of children.

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Members may recall a previous report to Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020 regarding a WAO review of Corporate Safeguarding during the latter part of 2019. The recommendations were that progress would be reported back to the Audit Committee.
- 2.2 WAO undertook a review during June 2019 to seek assurance that the Council had acted upon their previous national and local recommendations. 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.
- 2.3 WAO 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 That members of the Audit Committee

### **Option 1**

Accept the WAO revised Action Plan timescales.

### **Option 2**

Consider the WAO revised Action Plan timescales and provide further comment.

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 councils Strategies that includes:

- Corporate Plan
- Corporate Risk Register and Directorate Risk Register
- Safe Reduction of Looked after Children Strategy
- Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget***

Whilst the training framework has yet to be finalised there will likely be financial costs should Members agree to mandatory safeguarding training for all Council employees.

On completion of the corporate safeguarding training framework, it is anticipated that mandatory training commensurate to role and responsibility will be proposed.

In order to deliver on the proposed safeguarding training framework, there will need to be a council wide commitment and council wide investment into the proposed programme. Directorates within the Council will have to financially contribute towards the newly proposed training programme as well as ensure that all staff across the Council are given sufficient time to undertake the mandatory training which will be commensurate to their role/responsibility.

5.2 ***Risk***

As part of the WAO Action Plan safeguarding needs to be reflected in the corporate risk register.

5.3 ***Legal***

There are no legal implications.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

If it is agreed that mandatory safeguarding training is a requirement, 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***

The WAO recommendations were formulated into an Action Plan (appendix 2) which was accepted by Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020. As a result, the action plan was then passed to the Corporate Safeguarding Leads (CSL) group for their oversight and management.

The CSL initially reviewed the terms of reference for these meetings and revisited the core membership from across the council. These meetings were necessary to ensure that the corporate safeguarding arrangements and requirements were being addressed and managed in accordance with statutory requirements.

Terms of Reference were redrafted and agreed (appendix 1) and an initial work plan was formulated that prioritised:

- Updating the Corporate Safeguarding Policy which included the Education Safeguarding Policy;
- Undertaking a review of the current corporate safeguarding training plan;
- Draft a proposal for a new corporate safeguarding training framework commensurate to role and responsibilities.

As a direct result of the COVID 19 pandemic the schedule of the CSL meetings needed to be revised. This resulted in the April CSL meeting being cancelled and these have only been able to resume in July 2020. However, as a direct result of the COVID 19 the Action Plan in response to the WAO recommendations has been amended to allow for the timescales for the completion of the actions to be extended. (Appendix 3).

#### 6.2 ***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 legislations regarding statutory intervention.

#### 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

The development of the Corporate Safeguarding Policy and the Departmental Safeguarding Leads Meeting was developed to 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. During COVID 19 the Departmental Safeguarding Leads meetings were put on hold however work continued on updating the Corporate Safeguarding Policy.

The Corporate Safeguarding Leads meetings resumed during July and it was agreed that the WAO Action Plan would take priority for forward work planning.

#### 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

Implementation of the recommendations of the WAO Corporate Safeguarding review will ensure that we are appropriately corporately safeguarding children to the best of our ability moving forward.

#### 6.5 ***Preventative focus***

Providing this report and the level of detailed safeguarding information and progress on the WAO Action Plan to Scrutiny Committee enables Members to ensure risk are identified and acted on

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The updated Corporate Safeguarding Policy ensures that each department has identified Safeguarding Leads and that these leads meet together on a quarterly basis looking at safeguarding across the whole Authority.

6.7 ***EqIA***

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 the Corporate Leadership Team and reported to the Corporate Scrutiny Overview and Safeguarding Scrutiny Committees.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- **Appendix 1: Terms of Reference**
- **Appendix 2: previous WAO Action Pan**
- **Appendix 3: revised WAO Work Plan**