

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

INDEPENDENT SAFEGUARDING REVIEW

**An independent report commissioned by the Chief
Officer for Social Care and Health, Monmouthshire
County Council.**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been commissioned by the Council's Chief Officer for Social Care and Health. This post carries with it the Statutory role of Director of Social Services in the Council.

The Brief for the Review can be found in Section 8 of the report.

The Structure of the report is fairly straightforward: -

Context

Summary of Conclusions

Narrative on each element of the Brief on which Conclusions and Recommendations are based i.e.

Leadership & Governance

Relationships

Processes and Practice

Set of Recommendations

Review Brief, list of interviewees, author details

2. CONTEXT

2.1 Impact of Regulators

In October 2012 Estyn reported on an Inspection of the quality of Education Services in Monmouthshire County Council, The outcome of that report sent shock waves through the Council, waves which have continued to ripple and resonate throughout the organisation. There was particular criticism of the whole Authority's grasp of Safeguarding issues corporately as well as in schools.

Subsequently the Monmouthshire Education Service was placed in Special Measures and a Ministerial Recovery Board was created which continues today to monitor progress by the Council in implementing its Improvement Plan.

Estyn returned in February 2014 to consider progress made with Safeguarding since their 2012 Inspection and acknowledged progress had been made at a service and practitioner level but commented,

"The most challenging and significant shortcomings identified in the strategic management of safeguarding have not been addressed well enough"

Estyn will be returning in Autumn 2015 to conduct a further comprehensive Inspection, but with regard to Safeguarding will be asking the big exam question,

'How well has the Authority improved its collection, analysis & evaluation of management information for safeguarding in order to quality assure all safeguarding work and to enable that it is discharging its safeguarding duties appropriately?

This report isn't concerned solely with the Council's response to that question but is heavily at its core.

Other Regulators have entered the arena to make their comments about Safeguarding in Monmouthshire and inevitably issues raised by those agencies have informed the compilation of this report. There have been two Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) reports on Children's Services in August 2014 & February 2015 and a Welsh Audit Office report also published in August 2014.

It has not been the intention of this Review to simply catalogue and report on the Council's response to all the individual recommendations of the reports of the Regulators, however, where there is particular relevance or risk, comment is made.

2.2 Other significant influences

The Council needs to be mindful of the impact on Safeguarding of the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

This report is also written at a time when the current Chief Officer for Social Care & Health has decided to retire. He is a key leader whose role in Safeguarding inside the Authority is absolutely essential. Transitional planning around the recruitment of his replacement will be of significant importance if Safeguarding work within the Council is to continue to strengthen.

2.3 The risk of being overwhelmed

There is a risk for any Council of becoming overwhelmed with the scope of what Safeguarding, as a concept, means. Without analysis and risk assessment, there is every opportunity for Safeguarding to become completely unmanageable. For Monmouthshire, the question is whether the work to identify the risks, prioritise efforts and deliver change is sufficiently well grounded in the organisation.

In terms of the Monmouthshire context, what was very encouraging was that, without exception, amongst the officers and members interviewed, there was clear understanding about what Safeguarding meant for them individually and corporately. Safeguarding in Monmouthshire at the highest levels isn't just seen as something that is the responsibility of the Director of Social Services, Children's Services, or more particularly, the Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Unit.

This is a hugely significant in the development of the culture needed in the Authority to ensure that Safeguarding is truly everyone's responsibility

2.4 A reminder of what Safeguarding is

The most common definition of Safeguarding in use in Wales is,

***“Protecting children from abuse and neglect;
Preventing impairment of their health or development; and
Ensuring that they receive safe and effective care;
... so as to enable them to have optimum life chances. “***

(Safeguarding Children : Working Together under the Children Act 2004)

3. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Governance and Leadership

There is a comprehensive set of mechanisms at Officer and Member level which provide a robust governance framework supported by a performance reporting system that is transparent, on line and capable of providing the information and data for challenging scrutiny by Officers, Members and Regulators.

Two small changes are recommended to strengthen current governance arrangements regarding the Corporate Safeguarding Board and formal reporting of the activity of the South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board to the Council.

3.2 Relationships

The development of the Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Unit has been important in providing expert support, leadership and confidence to the system but care needs to be taken to prevent others thinking they can leave Safeguarding to those experts.

Relationships between Officers and between Officer and Members encourages a strong commitment to Safeguarding.

The size and culture of the Council and current physical and organisational configuration provides excellent opportunities for staff from within different Departments to enable speedy resolution of issues of mutual interest. It's important that both informal and formal communication networks are maintained, so, for example attendance and commitment to joint agency meetings is monitored to avoid complacency and to ensure standards don't slip.

Initiatives to encourage the knowledge and understanding of Members of front line issues and the experiences of Looked After Children are positive developments. There is no current written Engagement Strategy with children & young people to underpin excellent developments involving Members and Looked After Children. It would justify the investment of time in developing this with Children and young people.

3.3 Processes & Practice

Monmouthshire has a number of well conceived policy planning and reporting processes cascading down from the Single Integrated Plan to Service Plans, Reporting mechanisms to report on performance against plan have developed around Report Cards and Service Plans which seem well understood and practical.

In Safeguarding the “trio of reports” relied on by Senior Officers and Members is analytical and evaluative and fit for purpose. It does carry a heavy administrative burden which must warrant review as confidence increases. Scarce resource can then be focussed on areas assessed as of greatest risk.

Quality assurance processes including the Safeguarding Audit Framework (SAFE) audit framework provide encouraging reassurance at service unit level of compliance with the Council’s Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy. This is very important if somewhat painstaking work and just has to be done. Personnel policies in relation to recruitment, Disclosure & Barring Services (DBS) compliance and dealing with allegations of abuse against staff are well understood and actively managed and again provide important reassurance. The Council needs to ensure these are all on-going and not “one off” exercises.

Recently introduced Quality Audit Frameworks have been introduced in Children’s Services to address concerns about consistency of practice as part of the Service Plan improvement actions.

Monmouthshire’s approach to the provision of Safeguarding Training is a model of good practice but challenging to deliver on. Sharper focus on the numbers to be trained at each level is needed.

The process of incorporating agreed external Audit & Inspection recommendations into Service Plans reduces duplication of effort, keeps things simple and appears to work well.

Preparation for the Estyn Self Assessment exercise needs to be initiated and it would be a useful to scan that all previous Estyn recommendations have been addressed

Incorporated into the Head of Children’s Services Service Plan is ongoing work, amongst others, to help staff in all agencies understand threshold levels, improve information sharing and the work of multi agency risk assessment. It’s important Monmouthshire makes its own decision as to how it best does this but there is an alternative multi agency model (Multi Agency Single Hub – MASH) up and running in Wales in Cwm Taf region which should be visited as part of a Regional Multi Agency Safeguarding Board initiative. There’s an opportunity for Monmouthshire to significantly reduce the lead time for it’s implementation with Cwm Taf having tackled issues of Information sharing, IT and service governance.

The new Social Services and Well-being Act will present significant challenges in terms of the provision of community based preventative services to support families at risk of requiring statutory intervention due to

Safeguarding concerns. This will require a review of existing funding streams to ensure current investment matches Council priorities. Monmouthshire has the foundations to meet the needs of the Act with its existing Team around the Family (TAF) and Joint Assessment Framework (JAF) work.

There is need to ensure the speedy recruitment of the replacement for the Chief Officer for Social Care & Health particularly in the lead in period to the next Estyn inspection and for the Council to ensure appropriate levels of support are provided to the Head of Children's Services and the Head of the S&QA Unit during any interim period.

4. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGMENTS

One thing is very clear – the Senior Leadership Team and Senior Members understood that the Regulator's view of Monmouthshire was undeniable and required strong action.

Without clear senior leadership acknowledgement of the seriousness of the problems facing the Authority in 2012, no change, and certainly no learning, could take place inside the organisation.

4.1 Changes introduced to governance arrangements

But there has been change, in fact very significant change, originating from the decision to give very highest priority to Safeguarding in the Authority.

This can be measured by a number of very important developments introduced by the Authority: -

1. Safeguarding embodied in one of the 3 Priorities of the Monmouthshire Single Integrated Plan – "Families are Supported and People feel Safe"
2. The establishment of the Monmouthshire Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy, subsequently revised, which provides clear guidance to staff as to expectations and standards at all levels
3. Safeguarding identified as a Service Plan in its own right – it is the only theme to be afforded this priority in the Service Planning process
4. A Corporate Parenting Panel has been established for Leading Members and others (including Foster Carers and shortly to include Looked After Children) chaired by a Cabinet Member
5. A Whole Authority Corporate Safeguarding Group has been established chaired by the Chief Executive comprising officers from all Departments.
6. Authority wide practice has been introduced that all reports prepared for Members are required to include reference to "Safeguarding Implications" in the same way as "Financial implications" are treated

7. The Safeguarding Service Plan is subjected to challenge and scrutiny on a quarterly basis by the Leader, Cabinet Member, Chief Executive and Policy/Performance Section
8. The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit (S&QA) has been created linking the safeguarding work particularly of Social Care & Health with Children & Young People, but other parts of the Council as well
9. The establishment of a clear line of sight on reporting of performance from front line service to Departmental Management Team, Senior Leadership Team, Select Committee, Cabinet Member, Cabinet & Council supported by transparent access to performance information, available online, to all Members.
10. The establishment of a trio of Safeguarding reports, managed by S&QA, which are subjected to the same challenge and scrutiny process: -

Strategic Report for Safeguarding (High Level Evaluative analysis of performance)

Safeguarding Report Card (Focussed short hand summary of performance data with brief narrative)

Safeguarding Services Plan (Detailed analysis of actions v plans)

This trio of reports form a suite of quantitative and qualitative reports providing insight for the range of interested parties wishing to scrutinise the Council's performance including Members, Senior Managers, Middle Managers, other Officers and Front line staff. This information is published in the public arena so is also freely available for external scrutiny by partner agencies, Regulators, members of the public, service users, Welsh Assembly Government and others.

4.2 The Trio of Reports

It is undoubtedly the case that the Trio of Reports has improved confidence that Senior Managers and Members have a better grip on this extraordinarily complex area of work. Each of the reports provide a different lens on the Safeguarding picture.

They perform this task extremely well and together are a very powerful, valued tool.

The Strategic Report is particularly helpful to Members and other professionals and interested parties perhaps not so closely involved in the day to day operational experience as it provides a strong evaluative element combined with case studies which really do assist understanding of what the work involves. The scoring matrix provides managers with both a historical record of progress but also tests judgement and exposes that for external

scrutiny. Apart from anything else this has to be a very useful learning mechanism for officers.

The other reports are necessary to complete the picture, the Service Plan providing the more detailed story of planned work versus actual achievement and the Report Card providing more short hand but useful narrative.

All three are excellent tools. Over time they need to slim down. The acid test for the content of these types of reports is whether having received a piece of information does it make any difference? Does it, for example, result in any different management action?

If that question can't be answered, unless it's information that's required for a statutory purpose, then it's probably not worth collecting and publishing it. A review and a cull of collected statistics every so often is no bad thing.

It is understandable at this moment in time that everyone in the system wants as much information as they can get, particularly when there has been so much scrutiny, but the burden does need to reduce.

4.3 Member engagement

In addition to the measures outlined above, observation of the contents of the agenda of the regular meetings of the Children & Young People Select Committee demonstrates a breadth of interest and depth of challenge consistent with healthy and appropriate scrutiny as well as support for the service.

The Corporate Parenting Panel is growing in confidence and in reach. It is an excellent and necessary development. The potential engagement of young people in its work would be very beneficial to all involved. Officers and Members were aware how careful this engagement needs to be managed. This has started but would be assisted by the establishment of an Engagement Strategy for Children & Young People. CSSIW recommended the development of Participation Strategy for Looked After Children. An Engagement Strategy would incorporate this work.

4.4 Role of the Statutory Director of Social Services

Inevitably in considering issues of Governance in relation to Safeguarding, the particular role of the Statutory Director of Social Services is worthy of brief reflection. In statute, the Director carries indivisible accountability for the safeguarding of young people and adults in their County. Any Director of Social Services has to satisfy him/herself that children and young people across their Authority are appropriately safeguarded. He/she must therefore hold others to account for their own areas of responsibility.

In Monmouthshire there is a very strong team ethic with matched recognition at the highest level that safeguarding is indeed everyone's responsibility. The Chief Executive has himself provided highly symbolic leadership of the Whole Authority Corporate Safeguarding Board giving a very clear message to all

about the importance he has personally given to this area of work. The list of achievements detailed above suggests that this initiative has been richly rewarded.

It is recommended that having provided that breakthrough, more appropriate leadership of this Corporate body should now be provided by the Chief Officer for Social Care & Health (which incorporates the role of the Director of Social Services in Monmouthshire) and that it is in this forum that he/she can appropriately and legitimately hold his/her colleagues to account for their safeguarding responsibilities.

4.5 Links to South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board

On a Regional basis, very important links exist between the Council and the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB), a body until recently chaired by the Monmouthshire Chief Officer for Social Care & Health.

Officers in Monmouthshire play an active role in SEWSCB activities and there is consistent alignment of priorities and work programmes. In Monmouthshire, a multi agency Local Learning Group sits within the SEWSCB structure to ensure Regional and Local issues are dealt with appropriately. Currently there is no formal reporting of SEWSCB activity at the Council. Closing this gap would be recommended.

5. RELATIONSHIPS

5.1 The Role of the Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Unit

The point was made on more than one occasion that the initiative to establish the Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Unit (S&QA) was in train before the original Estyn Inspection. The Unit is undoubtedly a key element in strengthening Safeguarding activity in Monmouthshire. But in its success lies a risk, recognised by the Senior Leadership, that others might look to the S&QA Unit for all the answers, much like the role that specialist Health & Safety Advisers can sometimes become where the organisational Health & Safety culture is weak.

The fact that the organisation is sensitive to this risk is important but should the forensic eye be taken off its current focus, as other issues inevitably emerge in the Authority, the danger is that people might slip into leaving it "to the experts". The Council needs to be vigilant in preventing this happening.

Having made that point, it is clear that the S&QA Unit play a key role in encouraging active engagement of other parts of the Council in the Safeguarding agenda, an area covered later in the section on Processes and Practice.

In particular the S&QA Unit supports the relationship between the Unit, Children & Young People, Children's Services and the Personnel Department. Regular liaison meetings are held to discuss Safeguarding issues. Senior Management needs to ensure consistent attendance at these meetings is maintained. To encourage commitment to these joint meetings and avoiding complacency, attention to improving the understanding of representatives of

the purpose of these meetings, their role and the importance of their engagement in joint agenda setting and the joint development of forward work programmes is vital.

5.2 Relationship between Members and Officers

There was no evidence to suggest that relationships between Members, Officers and between Departments was anything other than mature and positive. Respecting the roles of others is so important in developing a strong, healthy and appropriately challenging culture that promotes Safeguarding.

There was genuine commitment and understanding of the importance of Safeguarding at Cabinet Member and Select Committee Chair level combined with supportive yet challenging engagement at a formal and informal level. Where reports have not been of sufficient standard the Select Committee has for example referred them back for revision and resubmission.

The Cabinet Member has regular sessions with the Head of S&QA Unit to discuss Safeguarding issues in particular and separately with the Chief Officer for Social Care & Health and Head of Children's Services.

5.3 Relationships between Officers

One of the strengths of the size of Monmouthshire and the organisation's configuration and culture is the ease by which any emerging issues can be quickly discussed by Officers without any obvious organisational or hierarchical barriers. The Physical environment, proximity and regular informal contact of officers from different parts of the Council creates opportunities for better relationship and sharing of information. This indeed is very impressive.

There were examples of how easy staff find it to raise and resolve issues across and up and down the organisation. For example a social worker discussing next morning with the Chief Officer for Children & Young People (i.e. the Director of Education) a case that had blown up during the night.

There is a positive attitude in Children & Young People and Children's Services that emerging issues between them can be dealt with quickly. An example of this was how quickly joint work to identify and work with a group of particularly difficult young people in a town in Monmouthshire was achieved, on this occasion also with the Police.

There was another example where an emerging issue between the Council and an external agency – in this case Gwent Police, was easily escalated by a Head of Service to the Chief Executive who, quickly and appropriately, raised the issue with the Police to develop a joint approach to solving the problem. There's a nimbleness of foot in Monmouthshire which many larger bureaucracies would struggle to match.

These informal networks are important and undoubtedly improve communication and relationships between individuals and Agencies. However this cannot be at the expense of investment in time and commitment to the more formal arrangements that secure long term partnership working. This

would be particularly the case in the relationship between staff in Education and Children's Services.

5.4 Members access to staff and Looked After Children

The Regulators made a number of comments in their reports regarding Members improving their "line of sight". The previous section reflected on the mechanisms introduced by the Council to get access to information and evaluative analysis. Another practical source of information for Members regarding Safeguarding can be provided by Members gaining direct access to staff and Looked after Children. This is entirely legitimate provided it is appropriate and proportionate.

It was clear that this has been an active source of discussion between Senior Members and Senior Officers, the outcome from which is a mature, measured approach to ensuring Members gain that access.

With regards to accessing frontline staff, all Members will be given opportunity to attend a series of Safeguarding Seminars provided by Officers where opportunity to discuss cases, suitably anonymised, will be given by front line staff. The use of case studies to bring the work to life is an extremely helpful communication tool, one which is also embodied in the Strategic Safeguarding report reported on in Section 4.1 (Bullet point 10)

With regards to accessing Looked After Children, the Corporate Parenting Panel will be working with a group of Looked After Young People to encourage representation at the Panel. The Panel has also been important in developing the role of an Apprenticeship post in the Council for a Care Leaver to gain experience of the world of work. Plans are also underway to develop a Looked After Children Council.

There is no current written Engagement Strategy to underpin these excellent developments. It would justify the investment of time in developing this with Children and Young People.

6. PROCESSES & PRACTICE

The Challenge to Monmouthshire after the follow up visit by Estyn in February 2014 was,

'How well has the Authority improved its collection, analysis & evaluation of management information for safeguarding in order to quality assure all safeguarding work and to enable that it is discharging its safeguarding duties appropriately?'

The question is whether the Monmouthshire Performance Management System in which Safeguarding is positioned AND the reporting mechanisms which have been constructed within that system are fit for purpose.

The view from Senior Officers is that there has been a step change in the method, robustness and quality of the information and performance data now being provided for scrutiny by management and Members.

6.1 The Policy Planning Process

The Policy planning process is very clear and it comes from the top corporately supported by the Policy and Partnerships Service.

The starting point is the Council's Single Integrated Plan (SIP) informed by political and professional judgement. Safeguarding sits inside one of the SIP's 3 priorities – "Families are supported and People feel safe"

SIP then informs the priorities expected of each of the Council's Service Plans. Each Head of Service is required to provide a Service Plan. In addition, Safeguarding provides the one themed programme in the Council's Service Plans arrangements. It is difficult to see how the Council can do more to highlight the importance it places in the Safeguarding agenda.

It's also clear that since the new Head of Children Services has been appointed the engagement and commitment of staff to the Children's Services Service Planning process has significantly improved. By itself this will improve the confidence Senior Officers and Members can give to the integrity of this Service Plan in addressing the criticism levelled at Children's Services by CSSIW.

Whilst the process of planning service development is stronger, Officers at all levels need to remain vigilant in ensuring the quality of data collected is robust on which performance is reported. Children's Services Managers were fully aware of this challenge.

6.2 Monitoring Service Performance

Overseen by the Policy and Partnership service, The Council has established a sophisticated performance monitoring system based on regular reporting of service performance at all levels of the organisation through service "report cards" supported by transparent online access to data & information by Members and Officers.

As Safeguarding is considered a Service in its own right for performance management purposes, it attracts the full might of the Council's scrutiny and challenge process.

Elements of Safeguarding are reported on a monthly basis within the Children's Services Report Card to the Chief Officer for Social Care & Health, Chair of Children & Young People's Select Committee and Cabinet Member.

The Safeguarding Service Plan is subjected to challenge and scrutiny on a quarterly basis by the Leader, Cabinet Member, Chief Executive and Policy/Performance Section

Safeguarding is also subject to further scrutiny at the Internal Monitoring Board (IMB) chaired by the Leader and the Ministerial Recovery Board.

The Safeguarding trio of reports are used to service each of these forums

It is certainly not recommended that any further levels of scrutiny or further variations on reporting requirements be added. In reality, as confidence increases, serious thought needs to be given to actually reducing the level of reporting so scarce S & QA Unit resources are spent only on those issues assessed at being of greatest risk.

6.3 Monmouthshire Safeguarding Audit Framework (SAFE)

One of the more important issues raised in the 2012 Estyn report was the absence of a comprehensive Monmouthshire Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy within the Authority. This was addressed quickly and the Policy itself has been subsequently reviewed and revised. The Policy is a comprehensive guide for all involved in Safeguarding and establishes clear standards against which the Authority can measure compliance.

Having established the Policy, the Authority made the next important step forward by developing a tool to test that compliance. The mechanism chosen to do this was the Monmouthshire Safeguarding Audit Framework (SAFE).

SAFE is critically important to the safeguarding of children in the care of the Council, at school, or in other services provided or commissioned by the Authority.

It covers key areas such as adoption of the Policy, the appointment of a Designated Officer, communication with staff, listening to children, inter agency working, staff training, safe recruitment, dealing with allegations of abuse against volunteers and staff, building design and e-safety.

Through the hard work of all involved, the results in terms of completion of the Audit has been excellent and outcomes reported regularly through the Safeguarding Report Card. There is a 2 year programme to roll out this tool to all services in contact with children in the Council and then beyond into the Community.

SAFE contains particular reference to safe recruitment and the requirement of new staff working with children in regulated employment to be Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) compliant. The Council has a Disclosure and Barring Service Policy which is supported by Employee Services practice of annually auditing the compliance of every school with Monmouthshire Recruitment policies (including this Policy) by taking a small sample of completed recruitment files and physically examining their content. In addition, there is further robustness provided by the payroll system which will not pay an employee in a regulated role where a record of DBS compliance is not registered. These are excellent safeguards built in the Quality Assurance process in Monmouthshire.

The only recommendation in this area is to encourage everyone involved in this ongoing process is to see it as just that – it is an ongoing process. It cannot and must not be just a one off exercise. The systematic completion of SAFE on an ongoing and rolling basis is a fundamental building block for Safeguarding in Monmouthshire

6.4 Quality Assurance processes

There are no absolute guarantees in Safeguarding however much the general public, politicians, the media or professionals might wish it. All involved work to make it as safe as it can be.

The most important contributor to a safe system is the staff who work in it. Audit tools and frameworks have their place and they undoubtedly play a very important public assurance role, but the greatest reassurance comes from the quality of the workforce.

Competent, well trained, confident staff who are well supported by good management and good systems are the real key to quality assurance in Safeguarding.

Monmouthshire has good policies and competent methods of recruiting staff safely as described above. So the question of how well Monmouthshire ensures its workforce is well trained is an obvious area to probe.

Monmouthshire adopts a stratified approach to the delivery of Safeguarding training. This is a model of good practice and makes for intelligent use of time and resources. Potential target audiences of people working or in contact with Children are categorised into 3 levels: -

- Level 1 Basic Awareness Training targeted at all staff in contact with children to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities, can recognise basic signs of abuse and neglect and know what to do if they have a concern. Monmouth uses a “Training the Trainer” approach to share workload and encourage wider ownership of meeting the challenge of this enormous task.
- Level 2 Inter Agency Child Protection Training targeted at staff responsible for Child Protection e.g.. Designated teachers updated at least every 3 years
- Level 3 Specialist training for staff responsible for Child Protection to evidence ongoing professional development

It is reported that over 1000 individuals have undertaken Level 1 training in Monmouthshire. This is a significant achievement. However the real question is “what is the size of the target group to be trained at each level and how far has Monmouthshire achieved in reaching them?”. This is a difficult question to answer but one that needs to be addressed, if only to ensure the appropriate risk assessment is carried out in determining where scarce training resources are best deployed.

It would be useful if in reporting activity in this area, the Council was more explicit about the number of people to be trained at each level as well as the number of people actually trained.

The Council may also wish to consider, as a further signal of its intent, whether attendance at Basic Level 1 is now to be considered as mandatory training for all staff in contact with children and their families.

Children's Services have also introduced Quality Audit Frameworks in their response to comments made by CSSIW regarding consistent practice and evidence of supervision of cases. Managers reported increasing confidence in the outcomes of their work with staff in areas of practice chosen to pilot this approach.

6.5 Managing the response to Regulator recommendations

As mentioned earlier it is not the purpose of this Review to catalogue and report on the response made by the Council to the individual criticisms and recommendations made by the Regulators. Of more interest is the existence of a systematic, risk based response to those interventions.

Clearly the Council must face and address issues identified by the respective Regulators and it is incumbent on Senior Officers to ensure coherent and comprehensive analysis is undertaken and consequent action is taken where assessed as necessary.

Monmouthshire commit to all external Inspection/audit reports being scrutinised by Audit Committee and in the case of Safeguarding, the Select Committee for Children and Young People. The Policy and Partnerships service extract any recommendations from every inspection/audit, decisions are taken as to whether to accept recommendations or not and, if accepted, they are transferred into the relevant Service Plan for action and subjected to the performance management regime described above.

So for example the numbered recommendations of the latest CSSIW Inspection are identified and cross referenced in the 2015/16 Children's Service Plan so all can be clear as to what actions are being taken, and by when, to address the recommendations made. This approach avoids a whole set of other performance management arrangements being created simply to manage the outcome of the CSSIW Inspection.

It would be useful in preparation for the next ESTYN Inspection exercise for a scan of recommendations from previous Estyn reports to be carried out to ensure these have all been addressed. Decisions also need to be made quickly as to project management arrangements supporting the completion of the pre Inspection Self Assessment as well as determining any additional support arrangements necessary to support schools in their self evaluation process.

6.6 Multi Agency assessment and information sharing

CSSIW in their 2015 report commented that,

“Children and young people who are, or who are likely to be, at risk of harm were identified and protected’

and

“Children and young people identified as being in need of help or protection, including children looked after, generally experienced timely and effective multi-agency help and protection”

These are clearly very positive statements.

CSSIW also made some less positive statements about access and assessment which impact on Safeguarding which are worthy of comment. These were concerns about the thresholds not being understood or operating effectively, the quality of referral information sharing, consistency of assessment and deficits in multi-agency risk management. They also mentioned the risk of cases being lost and/or of lengthy delays to children and families receiving the help they needed.

The Head of Services for Children’s Services in her Service Plan for 2015/16 describes how the Service have responded and will respond further in responding to these criticisms. But some of the solutions to these problems lie outside of the Council, or rather they can only be resolved by significant multi agency integrated effort. These are not uncommon problems faced by Safeguarding systems.

Below is an example of how one Welsh Region responded to these same issues. Monmouthshire and its partners must find their own solution to these issues, but there are examples emerging of new services in the UK and in Wales designed to minimise the risks caused by failures in this area of work.

In the Cwm Taf Region a particular multi agency solution - MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) has recently been launched under the auspices of the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board which brings together under one roof, front line staff from Social Services (adult & children), Police, Probation, Education, Health, Emergency Duty Team, Domestic Violence and Missing persons services. The MASH team, a 24/7 service, takes all front facing children and adult referrals from whatever source in Cwm Taf, a custom built software package sucks up information and data from each respective IT system that has knowledge about a referral and in one place draws that information together so that a multi agency assessment of risk can be made and decision on disposal taken. So, for example, decisions can be made very quickly as to whether the threshold has been met for access to Children’s Services in Merthyr Tydfil or Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Apart from obvious benefits of speed of decision making, agencies not dumping referrals onto others, better decision making based on knowledge from all agencies, better information about community needs to facilitate planning of services, the MASH system also opens up the opportunity for redirection of referrals into the TAF/JAF systems operating in the Cwm Taf region but in a managed and systematic way. The expectation is that this

approach will significantly improve the safeguarding of vulnerable children and adults in Cwm Taf.

This may not be the right solution for Monmouthshire, but the recommendation is that Senior Officers from Monmouthshire should spend some serious time at the MASH Unit at Pontypridd to see what can be learned. It is also recommend that care is taken to ensure it is a multi-agency approach, under the aegis of the SEWCSB, to ensure a collaborative approach from all partners in the exploration of this initiative. There's an opportunity for Monmouthshire to significantly reduce the lead time for it's implementation with Cwm Taf having successfully tackled barriers to multi-agency working such as of Information sharing, IT and service governance.

6.7 The impact of the Social Services and Well-Being Act

Whilst it is still uncertain how much will be prescribed by Welsh Assembly Government with regard to assessment processes, it is clear that one of the consequences of the Act will be to encourage the growth of non-statutory services to provide alternative methods of support to families who perhaps don't meet the threshold levels to access care and support or with some help will be prevented from requiring statutory intervention in the future.

Monmouthshire has a range of non-statutory, voluntary, provision for families, and a system in place to channel help through the Team Around the Family (TAF)/ Joint Assessment Framework (JAF) process. It also has a mechanism through Families First funding in particular, to support some local community response to needs. There will be other funding routes such as Supporting People funding which also need to be considered.

It is beyond the scope of this Review to comment on the level and range of that provision save that for Safeguarding purposes, it would seem that if the effects of Domestic Violence and Substance Misuse continue to impact on the lives of families and children, consideration of how Monmouthshire can grow the Voluntary sector and in particular services for families and children would be timely.

6.8 The Retirement of the Chief Officer for Social Care & Health

The current Postholder's retirement is a significant event for the Authority and the Council will be taking steps to plan for his succession. Much of this of course is just part and parcel of the normal business of running a large organisation. The unfortunate aspect of his departure, apart from losing a trusted and valued leader, is its timing in relation to the run up to the next Estyn Inspection, the continuing challenge of managing the outcome of the CSSIW reports and the need to maintain appropriate management pressure and support to ensure progress continues to be maintained.

Speedy recruitment is vital and appropriate support mechanisms considered particularly support to the Head of Children's Service and the Head of Safeguarding upon whose leadership much of the work on Safeguarding depends. Their relationship with the postholder of the Chief Officer for Social

Care & Health is critical and any significant gap caused by any recruitment delays would be in nobody's interest.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Following the successful launch and delivery of change inside the Council, it would be appropriate for leadership of the Whole Authority Corporate Safeguarding Group to transfer from the Chief Executive to the Chief Officer for Social Care & Health to support the fulfilment of the statutory duties of the Director of Social Services. Given the imminent departure of the current Director of Social Services clearly such a change should be made only after the newly appointed Director of Social Services has successfully completed their Induction period.
2. The activities of the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB), and at the very least their Annual Report, needs to be reported to the Council on a formal, regular basis.
3. Senior Managers need to be careful to ensure that the success the Council has achieved in making Safeguarding "Everybody's business" does not deteriorate due to the potential for over reliance on the expert role of the Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Unit.
4. Whilst one of the strengths in Monmouthshire is its ability to facilitate informal networks, formal mechanisms need also to be actively managed e.g. ensuring regular Safeguarding meetings have consistent attendance with representatives understanding their role, clear about purpose and committed to joint agenda setting and forward planning of work programmes.
5. The development of an Engagement Strategy for Children & Young People, created with children and young people, would be a useful addition to the Council's range of Safeguarding tools.
6. As confidence increases in the robustness of the Safeguarding systems in place, it would be useful to review the volume of information included in the "trio of reports" with a view to slimming it down to only those areas assessed as being at greatest risk. Management must remain vigilant however in ensuring the accuracy of the data for those statistics that are required.
7. Systematic completion of the SAFE tool on an ongoing and rolling basis needs to be reinforced. It cannot be seen as a "one off" exercise.
8. Target numbers of people requiring Safeguarding training at each level of The Safeguarding Training model need to be estimated to assess the scale and assess monitoring of training achieved at each level. Consideration also needs also to be given as to whether Level 1 training should be made mandatory for Monmouthshire staff
9. Monmouthshire needs to initiate within the South East Wales Safeguarding Board (SEWSCB) a multi agency project to assess the

potential for a Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) response to front line referrals for Monmouthshire.

10. In preparing for the next ESTYN Inspection, an exercise to scan recommendations from previous Estyn reports needs to be carried out to ensure these have all been addressed. Decisions also need to be made quickly as to project management arrangements supporting the completion of the pre Inspection Self Assessment as well as determining any additional support arrangements necessary to support schools in their self evaluation process
11. In preparation for the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being Act, it would be timely for a review of current investment in community based preventive services in order to assess the potential for further development of services and ensuring current resource alignment with Safeguarding priorities.
12. There is a need to ensure speedy recruitment of the Chief Officer for Social Care & Health and provide appropriate support to the Head of Children's Service and Head of Safeguarding in any intervening period.

8. REVIEW BRIEF

8.1 Scope:

This is an internal piece of work that will inform senior officers and members and help us prepare for Estyn's re-inspection in Autumn 2015. The review will focus primarily on safeguarding arrangements and performance rather than child protection.

8.2 Purpose:

To provide an independent external critique to the authority as we embed our whole authority safeguarding arrangements.

To challenge the key question "How well does the authority ensure that children and young people are safeguarded"? What evidence is there to suggest that this is not the case?

8.3 Objectives:

To review whether our leadership and governance arrangements, relationships, processes and practice are sufficiently aligned in order to ensure that children are as safe as they can be.

To use this scan of the 'whole authority arrangements' to identify target areas which require a deeper process of challenge or examination.

To provide advice for how we can improve safeguarding, including how we report performance and demonstrate outcomes. This will focus on how we develop and sustain our learning culture and our ability to self-assess through critical challenge.

To review and identify areas where we could be making better use of our resources in the interests of safeguarding children and young people.

8.4 Methodology:

Pre-examination of key documents including the safeguarding trio of reports to generate questions and challenges.

Interviews with a range of staff/members across the authority depending on the particular lines of enquiry (to include Lead Member for Safeguarding, senior management from CYP and Children's Services and members of the safeguarding unit).

Further discussion with Simon Burch to identify potential areas for further inquiry.

Further inquiries, evidence, observations of practice / events.

Feeding back and discussion.

Writing up into a report format, including recommendations and proposals.

9. INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ellis Williams

Ellis served as a Director of Social Services in Wales for 13 years in a 30 year career in Social Services taking him to Northamptonshire, South Glamorgan, Cardiff and Plymouth before appointment to the role of Statutory Director of Social Services firstly in Newport for six years and most recently Rhondda Cynon Taf.

He was for many years Workforce Lead Director for ADSS Cymru, Board Member of the Care Council for Wales and Board Member of Cwm Taf University Health Board. He brings a wealth of experience gained in Chairing key multi agency strategic partnerships in Children & Adult Safeguarding, Youth Offending, Supporting People, Integrated Family Support Services and the work of the Children & Young People's Partnership. Since leaving Local Government he has established Opening Lines Ltd – a company designed to advise and support staff and organisations working in Social Services in Wales

10. INTERVIEWS

Name	Date	TIME	ROOM
Will McLean – Head of Policy and Partnerships	12 th May 2015	09:30am	First Floor Meeting Room, County Hall, Usk
Jane Rogers – Safeguarding Service Manager and Heather Heaney – Safeguarding	12 th May 2015	12:00pm	As above.
Simon Burch – Chief Officer for Social Care and Health	12 th May 2015	3:00pm	As above.
County Councillor Geoff Burrows and County Councillor Penny Jones	14 th May 2015	10:00am	First Floor Meeting Room, County Hall, Usk
Paul Matthews - CEX	14 th May 2015	12:00pm	As above.
Sally Thomas – People Management Lead	14 th May 2015	2:00pm	As above.
Tracy Jelfs – Head of Children’s Services and Gillian Coz – Service Manager	20 th May 2015	10:00am	As above.
Sarah McGuinness – Chief Officer for Children and Young People	20 th May 2015	1:00pm	As above.