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Auditor General for Wales

Whole Authority review of children's safeguarding – **Monmouthshire County Council**

Audit year: 2017-18

Date issued: August 2018

Document reference: 582A2018-19



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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Lisa McCarthy and Ron Price from the Wales Audit Office, in conjunction with Gerard Kerlake and Farrukh Khan from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Training in Wales (Estyn) and Duncan Marshall from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), managed by Non Jenkins and David Wilson under the direction of Huw Rees.

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Appendix 1 – Recommendations :Auditor General for Wales' Review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils, 2015 24

Summary report

- 1 The Auditor General for Wales' 'Review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils' national report in 2015 concluded that **Welsh councils' corporate assurance arrangements for overseeing the safeguarding of children were of variable quality.**
- 2 This national report drew on local work the Wales Audit Office undertook at each of the 22 Welsh Councils during 2014. The national report identified weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements and made nine national recommendations, seven of which were directed at all councils across Wales and these are set out in [Appendix 1](#).
- 3 The local work at Monmouthshire County Council for the review concluded in August 2014 that **the governance, accountability and management arrangements for overseeing whether Monmouthshire Council was meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children had some weaknesses which the Council must address.** The local report made three specific proposals for improvement for the Council and these are also set out in [Appendix 1](#).
- 4 In February 2017, the Wales Audit Office reported further weaknesses in the Council's safeguarding arrangements in its 'Safeguarding arrangements – Kerbcraft scheme' local report. The report concluded that **children were being put at risk because of continuing weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements for the Kerbcraft scheme that the Council had not adequately addressed.**
- 5 The report included three statutory formal recommendations made under Section 25 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 which are set out in [Appendix 2](#).
- 6 The focus of this local Whole Authority Review of Children's Safeguarding was to assess whether the Council has adequate arrangements to safeguard children, and assurance that these arrangements operate effectively across all areas of activity and interactions with children. We examined progress against the previous recommendations made to the Council, and also considered some areas of enhanced risk, such as the Council's approach to looked after children, and some areas where services provided by the Council interact with children.
- 7 We concluded that **children's safeguarding policy and procedures have recently improved, but there are shortcomings in some critical areas of policy and operation.** We say this because:
 - the Council's framework and arrangements for safeguarding children have recently improved; and
 - there are shortcomings in some critical areas of policy and operation.

Proposals for improvement

Exhibit 1: the table below contains our proposals for ways in which the Council could further improve

Proposals for improvement	
P1	<p>Integrate safeguarding across the Council's policy framework. In particular:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Produce a 'project plan' identifying the underpinning work required and associated timescales to fully incorporate the Council's approach to integrating child and adult safeguarding. b. Re-frame the strategic risk register, to enable a SMART-er approach to measuring impact of actions taken in mitigation of identified risk. c. Strengthen safeguarding policy and guidance in the areas identified in this report. Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – data protection arrangements and guidance linked to safeguarding; – embed whistleblowing policy arrangements through training and awareness raising; and – revise taxi licensing arrangements strengthening health and safety requirements.
P2	<p>Embed all aspects of safe recruitment, induction and training consistently. In particular:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improve training records on safeguarding to show why the person received that particular level of training, when the training was received, and when it needs to be reviewed. b. Ensure all people who have a specific role in safeguarding undertake appropriate training. c. Clarify when enhanced DBS checks are required and ensure these are obtained in line with guidance.
P3	<p>Ensure control arrangements are consistently applied and improve performance monitoring arrangements around safeguarding to include all areas of service operation to address all gaps in accountability. This should include issuing clear guidance to managers on information on safeguarding that should be included in reports to Members.</p>
P4	<p>Improve the Council's commissioning and contracting arrangements in relation to safeguarding children by finalising guidance on commissioning, contracting and volunteering from a safeguarding perspective.</p>

Detailed report

The Council's framework and arrangements for safeguarding children have recently improved

Leadership, strategic direction and accountability arrangements have improved for safeguarding children, particularly in education and social services

- 8 The Council's arrangements for children's safeguarding have been strengthened over the last two years. The Council has improved leadership and accountability arrangements for safeguarding children with policies and guidance having been refreshed, safeguarding being linked into Service Improvement Plans (SIPs), and improved risk and mitigation arrangements in place. We also find that the Council is self-aware in relation to the improvement needed in its safeguarding arrangements. The Council provided us with a position statement before we undertook our fieldwork, and it was positive to see that the Council acknowledged where it needed to strengthen its safeguarding framework.
- 9 The Council's position statement recognises that risks and mitigations around safeguarding are ever changing, and that the Council needs to be ever vigilant to identify and mitigate against new risks. Senior staff expressed to us that they want to instil a culture across the organisation that has a clear focus on safeguarding that proactively seeks to mitigate potential risks. We also found a good understanding of the issue of proportionality in regard to children's safeguarding across the Council, with officers and councillors expressing a sense of differing risk factors in differing circumstances.
- 10 The Council's overall approach to children's safeguarding has been strengthened by a new Safeguarding Policy that supports a clearer strategic direction for safeguarding children across council services. There are four cornerstones to the policy:
 - Safe services
 - Safe workforce
 - Robust protection
 - Preventative approachesThese are related to and link into Service Improvement Plans (SIPs) and the Council's Safeguarding Audit Framework for Evaluation (SAFE) guidance.
- 11 The Council has strengthened accountability arrangements for safeguarding by extending the Safeguarding Audit Framework for Evaluation (SAFE) process from Education and Social services to 'all Council services' during 2017. The SAFE process is used to gather information and monitor compliance with the Safeguarding policy by all Departmental Management Teams, schools and other settings working with children, young people and adults at risk. The audit is

undertaken on a bi-annual basis and information is used to improve safeguarding arrangements.

- 12 The service areas of education and social services demonstrate a stronger ethos around safeguarding than others. It is in these areas that we see a focus on improving arrangements being led by senior officers and some examples where accountability arrangements have improved. The Council recognises that it needs to promote this strong ethos and focus on improvement across all services.
- 13 The Chief Officer for children and young people has a strong awareness of safeguarding issues in the directorate and is able to point to secure systems in place to address safeguarding issues.
- 14 Within schools, head teachers express a great deal of confidence in the support provided to them by the Council with regards to safeguarding. Safeguarding is always included in half-termly meetings between head teachers and the Chief officer for children and young people. The Council monitors those schools that have an external provider for Human Resource functions to ensure safeguarding is covered appropriately, and that the Welsh Government's statutory 'Keeping Learners Safe'¹ guidance is collectively followed and monitored.
- 15 The Council's report to Cabinet on 6 December 2017 on 'Delivering Excellence in Children's Services: Multi-agency Early Support and Prevention Referral and Intervention Pathway Including the Realignment of the Team around the Family (TAF)', helpfully includes elements of safeguarding, extending the consideration of the subject across a number of Council areas.
- 16 The Council's safeguarding policy sets out the roles of Councillors and the Leader, and are generally well understood by those postholders as identified through our interviews. Cabinet members and Councillors pay considerable attention to safeguarding and this helps to establish a high corporate importance and awareness. During our interviews we found there to be a clear understanding about the importance of safeguarding and the prominence which it has in corporate policy.
- 17 The Council's Whole Authority Safeguarding Group (WASG) which is an officer group formed in July 2014, is helping to improve safeguarding arrangements across the Council. The WASG has clear terms of reference, and the Statutory Director of Social Services is the chair. The Council's learning and development strategy describes the role of WASG in the context of extending the learning and development associated with safeguarding across the Council.
- 18 The Council's senior social services and education officer leads are very clear about extending safeguarding responsibilities across all services, and were able to give specific examples of the Council addressing concerns and putting additional controls in place. Senior officers confirmed that safeguarding was a standard

¹ Welsh Government, 2015, Keeping learners safe, The role of local authorities, governing bodies and proprietors of independent schools under the Education Act 2002

agenda item at departmental management team meetings, and lead officers were very positive about safeguarding across departments. They were very positive about the way in which the WASG has strengthened connections between departments, in particular the working relationships between education and children's services.

The Council has made progress in responding to recommendations made by the Wales Audit Office in relation to the Kerbcraft service, and in responding to ESTYN and CIW reports

- 19 The Council discussed the Wales Audit Office's Kerbcraft report of February 2017² at its meeting on 20 March 2017³. It was also presented to the Council's Audit Committee and Children's and Young People Select Committee. The Council's response to the recommendations made in our Kerbcraft report are set out in the Council's Safeguarding Service Improvement Plan, and have also been considered by the WASG.
- 20 The Council is continuing to provide updates on progress made in relation to its Kerbcraft service with a further Cabinet report at the end of February 2018, following the completion of an independent external investigation.
- 21 In response to our Kerbcraft report, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks have been undertaken in participating schools for all volunteers and the Council's Internal Audit service has verified this. The Council has strengthened its safeguarding arrangements in its school setting, following its own internal investigation and the external independent investigation it also commissioned. Volunteering practices and compliance monitoring have been made more rigorous, and better controls are now in place. The Council has put in place a new system for centrally recording volunteer DBS and health and safety information.
- 22 The Council has also addressed issues identified in ESTYN's local authority inspection report in November 2012 and follow up monitoring visits between February 2014 and November 2015.
- 23 Also, CIW are of the view that the Council has generally responded positively to its recent feedback. However, the effectiveness and impact of some aspects of this response have yet to be tested in practice.
- 24 The Council's SAFE evaluation process, set up across all services as a response to deficits identified within external regulatory reports, is a strong and well

² In February 2017, the Wales Audit Office in its 'Safeguarding arrangements – Kerbcraft scheme' local report highlighted concerns in the scheme. The report concluded that children were being put at risk because of continuing weaknesses in the Kerbcraft scheme that the Council had not adequately addressed.

³ [Agenda and minutes of Monmouthshire County Council](#)

administered process to help the Council drive further improvements in safeguarding its children.

- 25 The Council's Safeguarding Service Improvement Plan (SIP) appears to be appropriate and covers the relevant areas with actions identified for all parts of the Council. There is a strong link between the safeguarding SIP and the Children's Services and CYP SIPs which are informed by inspection and regulatory reports from CIW and ESTYN.
- 26 Service planning appears to have taken account of both internal and external evaluations. The actions and priorities for improvement in the Safeguarding SIP are drawn from the analysis of performance within the Director of Social Services' safeguarding evaluation report which is reported to members on a bi-annual basis.
- 27 In addition, an Early Intervention paper reported to Cabinet on 6 December is proposing that the focus of the team on 'team Around the Family' (TAF) be retained, as per Welsh Government policy, but that the activity be re-aligned so that the work of the team focusses more on working directly with vulnerable families on the cusp of statutory intervention to prevent them requiring statutory support. The team will be tasked with and supported to delivery brief interventions that are outcomes focussed around what matters to children and families in line with the Social Services and Well-Being Act 2014. The Council anticipates that working in this way should increase productivity from engaging with 60 families a year to 150 families a year.
- 28 The Council has put in place suitable programmes to address areas of early intervention and prevention identified in the Council's position statement. For example, programmes have been put in place to encourage resilience in young people. In addition, the Chief Officer for Children and Young People meets regularly with youth council to identify issues of concern to them.

The Council's safeguarding policy is comprehensive and is supported by Directorate Safeguarding Leads and arrangements

- 29 The Council's new Corporate Safeguarding Policy, which covers both children and adult safeguarding, was approved by the Council in July 2017. The Policy clarifies the relationship between services and the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit. The Council's SAFE Evaluative progress reports confirm the cornerstones that the Council is using to keep people safe in Monmouthshire. The policy and other key strategic documents, such as the volunteering policy, service improvement plans and the Safeguarding Assessment Framework for Evaluation (SAFE) provide a sound hierarchy of policy documents to support the framework of children's safeguarding arrangements in the Council.
- 30 The new Policy makes it clear from the outset that 'safeguarding children and adults from abuse is everybody's responsibility.' It includes a definition of 'children and young people' which is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.

- 31 The Council's safeguarding policy clearly sets out roles and responsibilities and the underpinning arrangements. It includes:
- a. the principles that underpin its actions around safeguarding and the legislative context;
 - b. its underpinning governance arrangements, and the roles of regional boards, chief officers, statutory Director of Social Services, Cabinet members designated lead managers, Directorate Safeguarding leads and heads of service across all Council services;
 - c. broad outline procedures for safe recruitment and training; and
 - d. suitable references to radicalisation, child sexual exploitation, self-harm, trafficking and domestic abuse.
- 32 As well as setting out the arrangements in place, the policy clearly sets out the services and personnel covered by it, including:
- a. those engaged by the Council, including permanent and temporary employees, students, volunteers, workers employed by employment agencies, contractors and consultants;
 - b. commissioned services meeting Monmouthshire's safeguarding standards; and
 - c. external providers, partners and stakeholders.
- 33 An important underpinning of any safeguarding policy is the arrangements for reporting of any concerns in a safe and supported way. The Council has made improvements to its Public Interest Disclosure Arrangements (PIDA), commonly known as whistleblowing. The Council approved a new whistleblowing policy in June 2017 and held a briefing session for senior managers in December 2017. The policy sets out the legislative context of PIDA, covers roles and responsibilities, who can report concerns, and includes where contractors are used. It is similar to a number of other whistle blowing policies, and is broadly comprehensive and clear. The Council has identified that it now needs to produce further guidance to managers on the implementation of the policy.

Safe recruitment of staff and volunteers is improving and increasing resilience through additional controls and awareness raising

- 34 The Council has strengthened safe recruiting arrangements in recent years. The Council's new Safeguarding policy (2017) includes safe recruitment standards and is supported by a safe recruitment process on which recruiting managers are trained. The Council's SAFE evaluation reports set out its progress on safe recruiting, and provide updates on specific areas of recruitment.
- 35 The Council's Volunteering Policy, which was approved by Cabinet in November 2017, sets out standards for safe recruitment of the volunteer workforce. Each service area that intends to use volunteers must appoint a volunteer coordinator

and this person must attend initial 'leading volunteering training'. This 'leading volunteering training' outlines safe recruitment requirements for volunteers. Volunteer recruitment has been strengthened since the Council recognised that gaps existed following the Kerbcraft report and subsequent internal audit reviews.

- 36 The Council has introduced more rigorous controls to monitor compliance with Volunteering policy and practice. There is now a new system in place for centrally recording volunteer DBS and health and safety information.
- 37 In advance of the introduction of this new system, the Council carried out a full review of compliance of volunteers, aiming to achieve 100% compliance with all aspects of the standards for a safe workforce. These requirements are set out in the newly adopted Volunteering Policy and strengthen the previous volunteering arrangements and controls. A supportive but comprehensive induction will be provided to all volunteers and each Service area must provide a volunteer coordinator. The role of the coordinator has been clearly defined and set out. Guidance indicates that under no circumstances should a volunteer be engaged without the necessary checks being undertaken prior to the commencement of the volunteering activity. This will provide greater clarity and assurance about the role of volunteers in the future.
- 38 Policy and control arrangements around DBS processes have been strengthened. The Council approved an updated DBS policy in December 2017 that clearly sets out expectations of procedures to be followed. The Council's People's service send DBS exception reports for staff and volunteers, including school governors, to Directorate DBS champions for follow up. Their role is to review, check and alert the necessary managers to take action.
- 39 The Council has acted to strengthen controls in schools. All school governors have now undergone DBS checks. School Head teachers are positive about arrangements for ensuring taxi drivers and bus drivers are suitably checked. Schools have suitable processes in place to monitor these and ensure that the correct people are involved in picking up children in the school setting.
- 40 The Educational Achievement Service (EAS)⁴ supports safe recruitment of staff. EAS makes sure that their staff, for example, challenge advisers, have undertaken suitable training and undergone the relevant checks. EAS also provides safeguarding training for school governors and keeps records.
- 41 Between April and October 2017, 49 of the Council's managers were trained on safe recruiting. The Council works to obtain 100% safe recruitment compliance for all employees. People's Service notify the recruitment manager of any potential breaches and any exceptions would be reported as a significant event via the SBAR system. Within Children's Services, all the managers we spoke with were aware of how to recruit safely.

⁴ The five local authorities of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen have formed a regional education consortium – the Education Achievement Service (EAS) – which is designed to raise education standards in South East Wales.

- 42 Sufficient information is provided to challenge job applicants at an early stage in the recruitment process. The Council's Safe recruitment protocol is clear that recruitment managers should 'Ensure candidate knows appointment is subject to 2 satisfactory references; medical and a DBS check (where applicable) BEFORE their start date with MCC'. If the post requires a DBS check People's Services ensure the successful candidate receives a DBS application form and returns it as soon as possible in order that identity can be checked, and information passed to People Services Support Team for processing.
- 43 Our discussions with the Council's team managers in Social Services clearly identified that they understood how allegations against professionals are handled. Sound arrangements are in place across the Council to deal with allegations against professionals and services follow internal guidance.
- 44 Training arrangements have been improved. Safeguarding basic awareness training has been expanded to include both adults and children at risk and is part of all corporate induction days. The Council has made efforts to raise the profile of safeguarding in a variety of ways. It has, for example, produced a Monmouthshire specific basic awareness raising film for safeguarding. The Council's Learning and development strategy provides a high level corporate framework for taking forward training and development on safeguarding. It sets out the roles of the various groups including WASG, safeguarding leads and the safeguarding unit.
- 45 All members of the workforce are responsible for their own Continuous Professional Development and to ensure that their safeguarding training is current and up to date. Each Directorate is required to keep a record of workforce safeguarding training using a template provided.
- 46 The training standards set in the July 2017 Corporate Safeguarding Policy cover the whole Council workforce duty to report and safeguard children and adults at risk in line with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act and all safeguarding training records are now in one place.
- 47 There are well developed arrangements in public protection. Safeguarding training is a requirement for licensed taxi hackney cab drivers and private hire drivers. Voluntary safeguarding training is offered to alcohol and entertainment and late night refreshment licensees, but it is not a mandatory requirement.
- 48 All the teams and managers we spoke to were positive about both their own experience of induction and ongoing training in relation to safeguarding, and also that of colleagues and others recruited to work as part of their teams.
- 49 The more experienced staff we spoke with mentioned that they felt safeguarding procedures in general, and safeguarding training in particular, have become more embedded and robust, following ESTYN's 2012 inspection report and the establishment of the Council's WASG. Policy and guidance have been strengthened further since the Wales Audit Office report on Kerbcraft in 2016.

The Council engages effectively with external partners and the Regional Safeguarding Board

- 50 The regional structure for safeguarding in South East Wales is well articulated in the Council's corporate safeguarding policy documents. The South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB) has the statutory responsibility to provide the strategic lead in the region in relation to the safeguarding of children and promotion of their welfare. The SEWSCB has replaced the five former Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) in the region.
- 51 It is evident from the SEWSCB strategic plan, annual report, and through interviews and focus groups that Monmouthshire Council plays a full and active role on the Safeguarding Board, alongside other partner councils across the region. Senior managers from Monmouthshire are well represented on the Board with both the Head of Adult and Head of Children's services representing the Council, with the presence of Monmouthshire's Head of Housing reflecting both their level of commitment, and appreciation that its safeguarding responsibilities extend across the Council.
- 52 External partners are generally very supportive of the direction of travel taken regarding safeguarding, as evidenced via the SEWSCB. An example of regional action and collaboration identified from our focus groups with external partners was Operation Quartz, previously piloted in Newport, and now being rolled out across Monmouthshire and other South East Wales authorities, linked to Multi-Agency Child Sexual Exploitation group (MASE) and aimed at increasing multi-agency awareness and information-sharing and response to Child Sexual Exploitation and related risks.
- 53 There is substantial dissemination of information across the Gwent regional safeguarding partners and examination of lessons learnt from recent child practice reviews. The need to ensure that child protection overrides any concerns relating to Data Protection was particularly emphasised. The Council has played a key role in the formation of the Missing Children's Hub. The Hub is an initiative of Gwent Police and was formed in 2014 and includes The Missing Children's Team. This team incorporates the Police and representatives of health, education and social services and not only provides an extensive and comprehensive risk assessment for missing children, but also conducts debriefs with those children who have been missing, in order to understand why they went missing in order to prevent recurrence. In addition, the recent Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Act has resulted in local 'champions', leading to greater awareness of and response to these issues.
- 54 Each constituent council of the SEWSCB has its own Local safeguarding network. Monmouthshire's is chaired by the safeguarding service manager, and has progressed well to date. The network is a useful forum to raise group members' awareness of developments in different aspects of safeguarding which they can then share with their service areas and teams. Impact of this group has been for

example to develop a new multi-agency referral form and to help ensure consistency in interpretation of safeguarding protocols and procedures.

- 55 Estyn's view was that the system for processing and following-up Multi-Agency Referral Forms was seen to be effective, undertaken by staff who were clearly competent and confident in their work, with back up on hand to support and inform decision-making when necessary.
- 56 The position statement provided by the Council indicates its willingness to play a full role across regional arrangements for safeguarding and it recognises the importance and statutory role of the Regional Safeguarding Boards. The Council recognises that 'more work is required to strengthen the links between national, regional and local safeguarding activity, and ensure the learning from the regional boards and sub groups is embedded in practice and operations in Monmouthshire'.

Arrangements to monitor, scrutinise and manage performance and risk are generally sound

- 57 The Council's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit supports the Council and its partners in achieving best safeguarding practice. The unit was established in Autumn 2012 and has a workforce comprising of the Safeguarding Manager, Lead Officer for Safeguarding In Education (LOSIE), Child Protection Coordinator, Independent Reviewing Officer, and 2 Child Protection Administrators. The Council intends that the unit will ensure that safeguarding is strongly aligned with operational children's and adult's services as well as providing an effective link to the activities of the multi-agency regional safeguarding boards.
- 58 The Unit is the lead on the implementation of the corporate safeguarding strategy and implementation of safeguarding policy. The unit will commence the joining of both adults and children's safeguarding service as well as the wider responsibility for safeguarding Monmouthshire citizens. It is intended to be an active partner on South East Wales Safeguarding boards and Groups in order to ensure national and regional guidance is implemented.
- 59 The Safeguarding Audit Framework for Evaluation (SAFE) process is used by the Council to monitor compliance with the Safeguarding policy by all Departmental Management Teams, schools and other settings working with children, young people and adults at risk. The audit is undertaken on a bi-annual basis and information is used to improve safeguarding arrangements. The SAFE process was extended from Education and Social Services to 'all Council services' during 2017. The extended SAFE methodology was included in the 2017 safeguarding policy. The deadline for completion of SAFEs across all council services was 31 July 2017.
- 60 The Strategic risk register reflects ownership of, and responsibility for, risk at an appropriately senior management and cabinet level. Safeguarding in general, and children's in particular, is given an appropriately high profile, embedded alongside good governance, preventative approach, and a safe workforce.

- 61 Potential breaches of the safeguarding policy are managed as significant events via the Council's Situation Background Analysis Recommendation (SBAR) process. This process produces a structured report setting out the issues, risk and circumstances. SBARs are only closed down once there are adequate assurances in place that the risks are being managed in a sustainable way. Eight SBARs have been completed since the system was introduced between April 2017 and September 2017. An example of an SBAR could include where there was a breach of policy regulation around the requirement for an enhanced DBS check, or a failure to comply with policy by an employee starting employment without appropriate checks being in place. The Council's SBAR guidance note provides useful support to managers for reporting significant events where a service area has acted in a manner that is outside of the Council's own policy and standards for safeguarding.
- 62 There is sound evidence of auditing of Safeguarding information, identification of trends, and emerging themes and issues in relation to Children and Young People on the Child Protection Register. Reference is made to Safeguarding strengths and areas for improvement in formal reporting, including recognition of the need to address the issue of rising Child Protection Register numbers.
- 63 A Child Protection Register (CPR) audit is undertaken on a six-monthly basis, aimed at identifying patterns and trends, which includes recommendations on improving practice to the Children and Young People Select Committee. This acts as quality assurance in relation to rates of referrals to the CPR and the need to increase elements of early intervention and prevention work (approved by cabinet in December 2017) in order to reverse the trend of increasing referrals. It is too early as yet to test the effectiveness of this approach and response.
- 64 The Council's Multi-Agency Referral Form (MARF), and the referral and decision-making flow chart observed in use by the Early Help, Duty and Assessment team are effective in supporting and evaluating the decision-making process linked to safeguarding referrals made in to the Child Safeguarding team.
- 65 The Council has put information technology systems in place to support retention of data on children in need of prevention and child protection. The Council's PLANT system is a comprehensive database that usefully allows case management and record keeping, and can be accessed securely by relevant staff including head teachers.
- 66 The Council's new Corporate Safeguarding policy 2017 states that safeguarding is considered as an integral part of all reports requiring decisions. The Council's standard report template for all committee reports includes a specific section detailing any 'safeguarding implications'.
- 67 Proposals for having a 'dashboard' of performance information were made to WASG on 24 January 2018. This is basic information with a mix of 'contextual' and performance measures, but will enable a better degree of overall control. Senior managers and staff spoke positively about the quality and range of information

available to inform their work, citing the dashboard and the PLANT database as examples.

- 68 The role of the Council's Internal Audit function in relation to children's safeguarding is set out on page 10 of the Corporate Safeguarding Policy. The 2018-19 Internal Audit plan is currently being developed. However, early information indicates that it will include reviews of safer recruitment, volunteering, primary schools, and DBS and agency staff. Internal audit and the Safeguarding and QA unit will also be testing the links between action plans and SAFE during 2018-19. The Internal Audit plan for 2018-19 was considered by the Council's Audit Committee on 8 March 2018.

There are shortcomings in some critical areas of policy and operation

Safeguarding policy is not yet sufficiently integrated across the Council's policy framework

- 69 Children's safeguarding arrangements are stronger, more systematic and well embedded in services that have had a more defined structure relating to safeguarding for many years such as education and children and young people social services. Safeguarding is less well embedded in other areas such as housing, transport and corporate services.
- 70 Service improvement planning processes have been in place for many years at the Council, and safeguarding risks should be embedded in that process. There are variances in how prominent safeguarding features in the service improvement planning process.
- 71 The Council's Service Improvement Plans (SIPs) are not sufficiently SMART⁵ or set out resource implications in all areas. For example, in some cases there is an over-emphasis on stating that specific items are 'Core budget'. The plans would benefit from a clearer breakdown of cost information. SIPs are variable in quality and content, and the consistency of the SIPs is not uniform. There is an absence of a systemic baseline position for each service area on what standards and controls are in place on commissioned services. The safeguarding Service Improvement Plan does not bring safeguarding together in one place.
- 72 The Council has not systematically tracked SIPs or audited the content to ensure risks are universally mitigated and that gaps, in particular services' approach to children's safeguarding, are not present. This is an important area for improvement so that the Council can demonstrate that it has a clear strategic overview of

⁵ Specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic and time-bound

safeguarding across all its service improvement plans. During 2018-19 Internal Audit intend to test the effectiveness of links between SIPs and the corporate plan.

- 73 Some of the identified mitigating actions in SIPs are high level, unspecific and difficult to measure. For example, 'Continually monitor and evaluate process and practice and review accountability for safeguarding and implement actions identified particularly better use of information'. It is not clear how this may be implemented, or its effectiveness measured.
- 74 Issues related to housing should be considered as part of an integrated approach to safeguarding. For example:
- living in unsettled or unsuitable accommodation can have an effect on children's health, wellbeing and safety;
 - prioritising access to adaptations through Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) for those that need them can significantly improve a child's welfare; and
 - checks on bed and breakfast accommodation for families with children should consider safeguarding.
- 75 Whilst the Council at the time of our review did not have a housing strategy in place which sets an overarching framework for housing in Monmouthshire, it has advised us that it intends to produce a Local Housing Strategy and has included this as an action in the forthcoming three-year Service Business Plan 2018-2021.
- 76 There is limited guidance to managers on information on safeguarding that should be included in reports to members. Additional guidance would help to ensure the prominence of safeguarding through all the Council's reporting routes. In addition, some aspects of guidance are dated and require renewal. For example, guidance provided to managers on the completion of Equality Impact assessments is weak and appears out of date.
- 77 There is very limited information within policy guidance about how anonymous complaints about inappropriate actions against children would be recorded, monitored or performance managed.
- 78 The Council's senior staff we spoke with identified that the integration of aspects of their adult and children's safeguarding arrangements was 'work in progress'.
- 79 The whole landscape of DBS checks is complex for all Councils and public bodies. In Monmouthshire the policy is that it rechecks DBS only for professionals who require a recheck for the purpose of their registration who renew their DBS. We identified differing requirements in the Council's different services. These differences relate to double checking and renewing arrangements, a lack of clarity about checking of overseas identification information, and on checking where people have been absent from the UK for extended periods. Within home to school transport, drivers can go longer than three years without rechecking, whilst certain bus drivers on public routes do not have a requirement to have a DBS check at all.
- 80 Data protection is not given sufficient coverage in the Council's safeguarding policy documents. This makes it hard for everyone to be clear about how the Council expects its staff and members to use and protect personal data in relation to

safeguarding. The Council's Corporate Safeguarding Policy 2017 does not reference data protection arrangements. Although staff that we interviewed mentioned WASPI (Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information), WASPI is not referred to in the Council's Safeguarding policy, or in other key documents. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which became enforceable in May 2018, significantly affects data protection requirements. In particular, the Council will need to meet the accountability principle of the GDPR; it will need to maintain proper documentation of its arrangements for processing personal information, including policies and staff training. Failure to comply with these requirements could expose the Council to significant financial penalties, as well as reputational harm.

- 81 Despite the Council being clear that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, many job descriptions do not mention it, and the senior officers that we spoke to do not know which job descriptions include safeguarding and which do not. Therefore, specific responsibilities such as the duty to report concerns, may or may not be in a person's job description despite its particular relevance to their role. Specifically, Directorate Safeguarding Leads do not have safeguarding lead arrangements included in their job descriptions. Whilst the Corporate Safeguarding policy mentions all staff having a duty of care, and a duty to report, it is not covered equally in Job Descriptions. This potentially creates confusion among staff, and could be a barrier to effectively challenging awareness of children's safeguarding issues.
- 82 There are some administrative and technical improvements that could be made to the Council's documents and policies. For example, whilst the safeguarding policy makes suitable references to other relevant council documents, for example the volunteering policy and DBS policy, not all links work, and the connections, dates and references are not always consistent. This restricts clarity about the comprehensive nature of children's safeguarding arrangements that the Council is seeking to achieve.
- 83 The prominence of guidance could be enhanced in some areas. For example, the link on the Council's website to safeguarding information is placed under the heading of 'social services'. This is at odds with the Council's whole authority approach to safeguarding, and the notion that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. In addition the 'Monmouthshire leaflet' includes the Council's referral process set out in a flowchart but which does not give guidance on what to do if you have a referral or concern about the Council's safeguarding lead.

Not all aspects of safe recruitment, induction and training are consistently embedded

- 84 The Council acknowledges in its position statement that it completed prior to our review that there are gaps in safeguarding children's training strategies and plans, and that a whole authority system to record training is needed. Senior officers we

spoke with were unable to confirm the level of training undertaken across all departments. Whilst a central database is being created, at present, the responsibility rests with each department within the Council rather than training administration being centrally controlled, monitored and managed. This limits the extent to which the Council can ensure that a high level of training on safeguarding is maintained.

- 85 The Council's approach to the provision of safeguarding training has the potential to result in variable levels of take up. General details about training requirements are set out in the Council's Safeguarding policy for differing parts of the workforce, but as it is not specific the level of safeguarding training is left at the discretion of individual managers.
- 86 The 'my view' training system provides a list of job titles and the level of safeguarding training received. However, it is not clear why the person received that particular level of training, when the training was received, and when it needs to be reviewed. In addition, there are a few gaps where people have received no training at all and no commentary as to the reasons behind this or when it will be addressed.
- 87 The Council does not have a mechanism of sample checking to determine if a person's circumstances has changed where they have held a DBS certificate over a number of years. For example, in taxi licensing the Council's guidance is that it is the taxi driver's responsibility to say if circumstances change, rather than the Council proactively checking on an individual.
- 88 There are some inconsistencies in the Council's use of the Government's online DBS checking tool, and some gaps in the Council's guidance on information about what constitutes a 'regulated activity' that requires an enhanced DBS check. This has led to one Situation Background Analysis Recommendation (SBAR) where the online tool says that a person does not need an enhanced DBS check, but policy and guidance says they do. The Council would benefit from clarifying its policy and guidance about what constitutes a 'regulated activity' that requires an enhanced DBS check.
- 89 The Council's volunteering policy and other documents need a full and clearer definition of regulated activity, what 'Working towards Safeguarding Level 1 Training' means in practice and what volunteers should do if they have concerns regarding their supervisor.
- 90 It was clear in the interviews we held as part of this review that staff give the DBS check significant prominence as the primary control mechanism for safe recruiting and risk mitigation. Staff were less able to articulate that they had actively considered the full extent of risk in the area of children's safeguarding, for example references and health checks.

Control arrangements are inconsistently applied exposing some gaps in accountability

- 91 Whilst the Council has a corporate safeguarding children's framework, there are gaps in its application, implementation and control in some areas, and some other arrangements are not yet consistently embedded in practice.
- 92 Performance management arrangements are in the process of being strengthened. The Council has the relevant information to manage its safeguarding performance, but this is not yet set out in a clear and transparent way.
- 93 Some aspects of performance management in relation to children's safeguarding have yet to be developed and implemented. For example, measuring the impact of preventative activity has still to be defined and developed. Target setting on some safeguarding measures have not been fully established with the group yet to agree the full range of core data performance measures and reporting cycles.
- 94 Information management on safeguarding may be a barrier to improvement. Senior Officers do not have an 'overarching' means to assess performance impact and outcomes around safeguarding that is easily accessible or all 'in one place'.
- 95 The Council does not always demonstrate how safeguarding is an inherent and ongoing part of its activity. The Council has not done a 'root and branch' examination of every point at which a child interacts with it to establish what information may be required to assess whether potential risks exist. This limits the overall effectiveness of performance monitoring arrangements to mitigate risk.

Weaknesses exist in the Council's commissioning and contracting arrangements for safeguarding children

- 96 Commissioning or contracting arrangements are where services are provided on behalf of councils by other organisations, such as private companies or voluntary sector organisations. The Council will enter into an agreement or contract with the organisation, with the terms of the agreement set out in contract or commissioning documents.
- 97 Additional clarity and safeguards are required in the area of commissioning and contract procurement to ensure that risks are mitigated wherever possible. The Council recognises this and for the past 12 months has been focussed on commissioned services, and making improvements in arrangements which it had identified needed strengthening. Our review found some weaknesses that the Council will need to incorporate within their work in strengthening safeguarding arrangements.
- 98 The Council has not yet finalised the minimum safeguarding standards for commissioning, contracting and volunteering. A draft of a minimum standards document was tabled at a meeting of WASG in January 2018. However, it does not contain specific guidance on data sharing and data use and protection.

- 99 In the last year the Council has identified safeguarding weaknesses in commissioning arrangements for external placements of children. The Council put in place an action plan in response to an internal audit report on the issue. The action plan was also presented to WASG in January 2018 but has not yet been formally agreed. However, most of the weaknesses have now been addressed, but a number of other actions in the plan remain incomplete.
- 100 Currently the Council does not require partners, commissioned or contracted, to use the SAFE process of self-evaluation. Establishing a similar regime for these other arrangements could be part of contract procedures which would give a common structure for safeguarding evaluation and assurance.
- 101 Further clarity around checking that safe recruitment practices are being fully complied with by contractors is required. For example, in the Council's safeguarding policy it states that 'All contractors, sub-contractors or other organisations funded by the Council are responsible for arranging checks through the safe recruitment process and for ensuring that staff comply with regulatory and contractual arrangements relating to their safeguarding responsibilities'. However, it is not clear who in the Council has responsibility for monitoring that this is complied with. In addition, the role and responsibilities for Employment agencies need further clarity and risk mitigation by monitoring that they undertake the relevant safe recruitment checks and references on any staff members offered employment and placements within the Council.
- 102 The Council recognises the need for an in-depth understanding of the baseline position across the whole of the Council in respect of commissioning. It has been agreed that internal audit will undertake work in this area during their 2017-18 audit programme.
- 103 The Council's Taxi licensing guidance and policy indicate that each case will be considered on its merits, and based partially on interviews held with the applicant to decide on individuals' cases. The Council will need to assure itself that it has appropriate and adequate arrangements to safeguard children being transported from their homes to/from school in taxis. This includes proactively reviewing its policy, and auditing and checking disclosures, reviewing cases where disclosures have been made and where taxis are being used to transport children.
- 104 The Council does not have a system of proactively checking drivers' DBS certificates at regular intervals, but does ask for independent operators to sign up to the government DBS 'update service'. We understand that spot checks used to be done on taxi firms' compliance, but are no longer carried out. However, it is positive that all internal staff are trained to level one in the Passenger Transport Unit and will provide training to level one for all external contractors.
- 105 Training is offered to external contractors, specifically taxi firms, but Safeguarding level one training is not a requirement in contractual arrangements for taxi drivers being used by the Council. Escorts are employed by the taxi firms and the Council rely on the taxi firms to decide on the suitability of the escort. Responsibility for checking the DBS criteria at taxi firms rests with the taxi firm itself.

- 106 In addition to arrangements for normal operation, the Council would need to assure itself that it has adequate contingency arrangements in place to protect children using taxis for home to school transport. Given the rural context and lack of mobile phone coverage in some areas, we believe that contingency arrangements need to be considered and procedures documented.
- 107 Actions to provide additional protection to children using home to school transport are not comprehensive. Senior Officers told us that the Council issues a 'Passenger rule book' to parents. However, the Passenger rule book is out of date and contains references to Criminal Record Bureau checks, not the Disclosure and Barring Service, is undated and gives inconsistent information.

Appendix 1

Recommendations: Auditor General for Wales' Review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils, 2015

Exhibit 2: National recommendations from the Auditor General for Wales' Review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils 2015 report relevant to all councils in Wales

Recommendations	
R1	<p>Improve corporate leadership and comply with Welsh Government policy on safeguarding through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the appointment of a senior lead officer who is accountable for safeguarding and protecting children and young people with corporate responsibilities for planning improvements;• the appointment of a lead member for safeguarding; and• regularly disseminating and updating information on these appointments to all staff and stakeholders.
R2	<p>Ensure there is a corporate-wide policy on safeguarding covering all council services to provide a clear strategic direction and clear lines of accountability across the council.</p>
R3	<p>Strengthen safe recruitment of staff and volunteers by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensuring that Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and compliance with safe recruitment policies cover all services that come into contact with children;• creating an integrated corporate compliance system to record and monitor compliance levels on DBS checks; and• requiring safe recruitment practices amongst partners in the third sector and for volunteers who provide services commissioned and/or used by the council which are underpinned by a contract or service level agreement.
R4	<p>Ensure all relevant staff, members and partners understand their safeguarding responsibilities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensuring safeguarding training is mandated and coverage extended to all relevant council service areas, and is included as standard on induction programmes;• creating a corporate-wide system to identify, track and monitor compliance on attending safeguarding training in all council departments, elected members, schools, governors and volunteers; and• requiring relevant staff in partner organisations who are commissioned to work for the council in delivering services to children and young people to undertake safeguarding training.

Recommendations

- R5 Improve accountability for corporate safeguarding by regularly reporting safeguarding issues and assurances to scrutiny committee(s) against a balanced and council-wide set of performance information covering:
- benchmarking and comparisons with others;
 - conclusions of internal and external audit/inspection reviews;
 - service-based performance data;
 - key personnel data such as safeguarding training, and DBS recruitment checks; and
 - the performance of contractors and commissioned services on compliance with council safeguarding responsibilities.
- R6 Establish a rolling programme of internal audit reviews to undertake systems testing and compliance reviews on the council's safeguarding practices.
- R7 Ensure the risks associated with safeguarding are considered at both a corporate and service level in developing and agreeing risk management plans across the council.

Exhibit 3: Local proposals for improvement for Monmouthshire County Council from the Auditor General for Wales' 2015 Review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils.

Proposals for improvement

- P1 Review the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy to ensure it adequately covers all Council services.
- P2 Ensure development of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit enables it to deliver its planned objectives.
- P3 Improve the range, quality and coverage of safeguarding performance reporting to provide adequate assurance that systems are working effectively.

Appendix 2

Statutory recommendations: Auditor General for Wales' Safeguarding arrangements – Kerbcraft scheme local report, 2017

Exhibit 4: Statutory recommendations

Recommendations	
R1	The Council should keep complete records in relation to volunteers, including evidence of DBS checks, occupational health questionnaires, safeguarding training, and reference details.
R2	The Council should develop specific internal guidance and procedures for the operation of its Kerbcraft scheme so that staff are clear about how the scheme should operate.
R3	The Council should establish effective performance management and scrutiny arrangements for the Kerbcraft scheme, and clarify the roles of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit and Internal Audit in those arrangements.

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