

	<b>Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b> <b>8 April 2015</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 6</b>
<b>Title</b>	Member Children's Champions: End of Year Report	
<b>For further information about this report please contact</b>	Judith Falp <a href="mailto:Judith.falp@warwickdc.gov.uk">Judith.falp@warwickdc.gov.uk</a> Susan Gallagher <a href="mailto:Susan.gallagher@warwickdc.gov.uk">Susan.gallagher@warwickdc.gov.uk</a>	
<b>Wards of the District directly affected</b>	All	
<b>Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?</b>	No	
<b>Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number</b>	Executive 3/9/14, Minute number 40	
<b>Background Papers</b>	Children's Safeguarding and the future role of Member Children Champions: Overview & Scrutiny Committee 29/7/14; Member Children's Champions: Executive 3/9/14; Self-assessment audit of compliance with Children's Safeguarding duties: Executive 3/9/14	

<b>Contrary to the policy framework:</b>	No
<b>Contrary to the budgetary framework:</b>	No
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No
<b>Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)</b>	No
<b>Equality and Sustainability Impact Assessment Undertaken</b>	n/a

<b>Officer/Councillor Approval</b>		
<b>Officer Approval</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	20/3/15	Bill Hunt
Head of Service		n/a
CMT	23/3/15	
Section 151 Officer		
Monitoring Officer	23/3/15	
Finance		
Portfolio Holder(s)	23/3/15	Councillor Mobbs
<b>Consultation &amp; Community Engagement</b>		
<b>Final Decision?</b>	Yes	
<b>Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)</b>		

## 1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Executive agreed in September 2014 that two Member Children's Champions should be appointed, to work with the Officer Children's Champion in ensuring that the Council is delivering its children's safeguarding responsibilities. Overview and Scrutiny Committee also decided that it should have an annual end of year report from the Member Children's Champions as part of its scrutiny of the safeguarding function and this is the first of those reports.

## 2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That Committee notes the end of year report.
- 2.2 That Committee determines whether it wishes to recommend to the new Overview & Scrutiny Committee whether further scrutiny activity of the Council's children's safeguarding activities should be undertaken.

## 3. **REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The Children's Act 2004 created statutory responsibilities for district councils in the field of Children's Safeguarding. Section 10 of the Act places a reciprocal duty on the Children's Services Authority for an area (in our case the County Council) and local district councils within that area to co-operate in inter-agency work to improve children's well-being. Section 11 places a duty on named agencies, including district councils, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- 3.2 The Act also required Children's Services Authorities (in our case the County Council) to establish and maintain local Safeguarding Children Boards and for those agencies with Section 10 responsibilities to support the operation of those Boards. Consequently this Council has been a member of the Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) since its inception in October 2005. The WSCB's role is to coordinate the activities of all of its members in relation to safeguarding and child welfare issues within the county and to ensure the effectiveness of the work being undertaken by each individual organisation. In order to discharge this role the WSCB undertakes periodic audits of all its member organisations, using a standard self-assessment tool to assess compliance with all aspects of their Section 11 duties against the national minimum standard.
- 3.3 The Executive considered the Council's Section 11 self-assessment audit report in September 2014 and agreed an Improvement Action Plan based on its outcomes. One of the findings of the audit was that although the Council had previously identified two councillors to act as Member Children's Champions, Councillors Falp and Gallagher, the role was ill-defined and should be strengthened.
- 3.4 The September Executive consequently considered recommendations to formalise the role of Member Children's Champions and agreed that the role would be to:
- Assure themselves that the Council has sound arrangements in place to protect children and promote their welfare and is promoting and engaging in effective interagency cooperation and collaboration in these fields;

- Undertake reasonable investigations so as to be able to form a view of the quality of the Council's child safeguarding activities and work with the officer Children's Champion to assist the Council to improve the quality and/or effectiveness of those activities whenever appropriate;
- Act as a 'critical friend' to constructively challenge officers and elected members on child safeguarding and welfare issues as appropriate;
- Promote awareness of child safeguarding and welfare issues and the activities and processes undertaken by this Council amongst elected members.

3.5 The Executive formally appointed Councillors Falp and Gallagher as Member Children's Champions, with the role as described above, until May 2015. The new Council will then appoint two Councillors to undertake the role for the four year period of the newly elected administration.

3.6 Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that they would receive an annual report from the Member Children's Champions and although the current Champions have only been in their role for c6 months this is the first of those reports. The work that has been undertaken and the learning gained during these months is set out in sections 8 and 9 of this report

3.7 An annual end of year report will become a feature of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's workplan but it is within the gift of the outgoing Committee to recommend to the new Committee that will be formed after the May elections whether they consider any additional scrutiny of this area of the Council's work would be beneficial.

#### **4. POLICY FRAMEWORK**

4.1 The Council's statutory duties are set out within the Children's Act 2004. However, the principles of child safeguarding and the promotion of children's welfare are relevant to all the Council's activities.

#### **5. BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK**

5.1 There are no budgetary implications arising from this report.

#### **6. RISKS**

6.1 Whilst there is no specific or statutory requirement for a local authority to have a Member Children's Champion(s) there is a risk that, if they don't, elected members will become disconnected from, and unaware of, the Council's statutory responsibilities and the actions and activities that need to be in place to discharge them.

#### **7. ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S) CONSIDERED**

7.1 No alternative options have been considered as the end of year report was an agreed item on the Committee's workplan.

#### **8. WORK UNDERTAKEN**

8.1 The Council has a senior officer (Deputy Chief Executive BH) fulfilling the role of Children's Champion, who attends the WSCB and is responsible for ensuring the Council is fulfilling its Section 10 and 11 responsibilities. This officer supports

the Member Children's Champions in their work and since their formal appointment there have been a number of meetings to agree priorities and discuss specific issues. Close liaison between the Officer and Member Children's Champions is critical to ensuring that the Council is properly monitoring the discharge of its responsibilities in this area.

- 8.2 An early topic of discussion for these meetings was the issue of how to raise awareness of the safeguarding agenda and the Council's role in it amongst elected members. The Member Children's Champions view this as a top priority but felt that, given the imminence of full Council elections, the maximum benefit from a comprehensive awareness raising training programme would be gained if it were to commence after the May elections.
- 8.3 Consequently, an open session on the safeguarding agenda, to be jointly designed and delivered by the Officer and Member Children's Champions has been incorporated in to the Member Training Programme that will commence in May 2015. This will be supplemented by access to other training and awareness raising activities delivered by the WSCB.
- 8.4 To raise member awareness of the WSCB itself the Member Champions asked for a report to be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This was considered by Committee as its January meeting. The Member Champions have been extremely keen to observe a WSCB meeting but although this has been agreed by the independent Chair of the WSCB have been disappointed that it has not been possible to make a firm arrangement for them to attend until the 23 April meeting.
- 8.5 Prior to their formal appointment the Member Children's Champions were aware of the safeguarding failures highlighted by the sexual exploitation of children in Rochdale and had been keen to ensure that robust information sharing procedures were in place in Warwickshire and that all staff and members of this Council were alert to potential issues. Since then further notable failures in the prevention of large scale child sexual exploitation (CSE) have come to light in Rotherham and Oxford and a national awareness raising campaign has been launched. Locally, the Police and County Council have taken the lead in an awareness raising campaign called 'Something's not right' (see <http://warwickshirecse.co.uk/> for further details)
- 8.6 The Member Champions have taken the lead role in promoting this campaign within the Council, circulating details to all members and agreeing a programme of action with the officer Champion. As a result the Council has:
- Publicised the campaign via its website
  - Placed a prominent 'big button' item on the intranet, which will be reinforced by an item in the next Core Brief
  - Printed details of the campaign on the April pay slips (and will feature it again in May and June)
  - Devised wording for officers and members to use, on a voluntary basis, at the bottom of external e-mails to promote awareness outside of the Council
  - Agreed that details of the campaign will be included in the next newsletter to Council tenants and as part of other external promotional campaigns
  - Agreed that all Council contractors will be provided with information on the campaign
  - Obtained posters for display at all operational buildings
  - Briefed Senior Officers and Staff Voice representatives to enable them to cascade information through staff and team briefings

- Agreed with Warwick Town Council that information will be circulated to hotels and guest houses on the Visitor Information Centre database
- Worked with officers from Warwickshire County Council to raise awareness of the campaign and the issues around CSE with taxi drivers operating in the district

8.7 A striking example of the effectiveness of this work was recently provided when a councillor contacted both of the Member Champions over a weekend to alert them to possible suspicious behaviour that could be linked to CSE activity. The Member Champions both contacted the Officer Champion who set in train activity to investigate the concerns. After consultation with the Police by close of play on the Tuesday feedback had been provided that the concerns were historic and had been properly investigated. The fact that this proved to be a false alarm is irrelevant as the example demonstrates that an individual was fully prepared to decide that something did feel 'not right' and do the right thing by speaking out and telling an appropriate person. The Member Champions passed the information on in an exemplary fashion and officers took prompt and appropriate action. This is exactly what is needed to tackle the scourge of CSE and should give comfort to everyone in the Council that we are prepared and able to take action whenever it seems to be appropriate.

8.8 Another aspect of the Member Champions work has been to monitor the delivery of the s11 audit Improvement Action Plan. The latest update on this work is attached as **Appendix One**. The Champions have been particularly keen to ensure that all staff receive a simple pocket sized information card on who to contact with any safeguarding concerns and are pleased to note that this should be in place by May.

8.9 A major benefit of the Member Champion role is that their interest in the safeguarding agenda and their increasing knowledge and understanding is allowing them to begin to investigate linked issues. For example, although youth homelessness is not a safeguarding issue in its own right it can often be linked in either cause or effect. At their last meeting with officers the Champions asked for further information in this area which is currently being provided.

## 9. LESSONS LEARNT

9.1 The Member Children's Champions have proved to be very effective in the short space of time since their formal appointment. However, the advantage of appointing Champions in May to serve in the role for a full four year period is that they will be able to develop both their knowledge and a full programme of work that has not been possible in the time available before the elections for the current Champions.

9.2 Training and awareness raising is needed for all members, as it is for staff, but this equally applies to the Children's Champions themselves. Observing a WSCB meeting would assist this process considerably and it has been extremely frustrating that this has not proved possible. If the Member Children's Champions were to change after May this would be an early requirement to assist a new Champion to be effective in their role.

9.3 Possibly the main learning point has been that although the Council has Children's Champions on both the officer and member side of the organisation children's safeguarding is a collective responsibility amongst every single

person associated with the Council. Awareness raising and monitoring the effectiveness of the arrangements that are in place will continue to be the primary role for the Member Champions.