

Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee

HWLG(3)-10-10-p2: 27 May 2010

Committee Inquiry into Local Safeguarding Children Boards: Evidence from Newport Safeguarding Children Board

This is the response from the Newport Safeguarding Children Board to the request for information for the inquiry, which will be examining the performance of LSCBs throughout Wales.

Appropriateness of existing Welsh Government Policy and Guidance as relevant to LSCBs.

Working Together 2010 provides statutory guidance regarding the role and function of LSCBs. This guidance has been developed in the light of experience in respect of Working Together 2006, the report of Lord Laming and HM Government's response, thinking that has developed in the light of "Baby P" and other developments. In other words, the LSCBs must not operate as they did as ACPCs.

Working Together 2010 provides detailed guidance, and compliance is crucial to achieving sound and safe practice, and ensuring the 7 core aims for children.

The nature and importance of the relationship between LSCBs and Children's Social Services has now been clearly identified, and represents a considerable challenge for the immediate future.

However, further guidance in how the LSCB manage and evaluate their role in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and the effectiveness of lines of accountability would be useful, although there is an internal SAIT audit.

Appropriateness of the scope and focus of LSCB responsibilities.

Statutory guidance identifies the responsibilities of LSCBs - in respect of policy and procedures, promoting safeguarding, serious case review, child deaths, and (most importantly) monitoring and evaluating work done by partner agencies. This guidance requires a primary focus on "child protection" - but only insofar as approaches to achieving this with success should be in place, prior to widening the brief to encompass the wider safeguarding agenda. However, as LSCBs have been in existence since 2006, they should now be in a position to move forward to address the wider agenda.

The primary issue is whether LSCBs are successfully addressing their statutory functions. This means operating strategically and powerfully to ensure that partner organisations, and Social Services in general, are effective in safeguarding children.

LSCBs need to take great care to ensure that they are not operating as the training, procedure writing, or quality assurance arms of any of their partner organisations - as many were or still are.

Membership of LSCBs with reference to both the role of statutory partners and also the voluntary sector and smaller / specialist organisations.

Statutory guidance specifically determines membership, and requires that members give priority and afford independence to the role of their nominees as board partners. The requirements regarding membership of Boards and Trusts represents a considerable challenge - since both require input from senior management and separate, independent membership. It is important to work to achieve this locally without compromising the essentially sound requirements of the guidance. Small unitary authorities may experience particular challenges in achieving this balance.

It is crucial that LSCBs are able to operate with credibility to ensure that partner organisations are effective in meeting the LSCB's statutory responsibilities.

It is important to clarify Board Members' roles and responsibilities and the distinction between 'representing the agency' versus 'representing the Board.'

Representatives on LSCB Boards need to be of sufficient seniority to speak for their organisation with authority, commit their organisation on policy and practice matters and hold their organisation to account, but sometimes this is difficult in securing the right level of seniority.

Securing appropriate levels of participation by Board Members in LSCB meetings remains a challenge. Changes in agency representation on the Board and lack of attendance can make it difficult to maintain a shaped vision to sustain progress and development.

It can also limit the establishment of relationships, trust and effective networking and operation.

Arrangements for funding LSCBs.

Working Together 2010 requires that LSCBs are appropriately funded. Given that even a small LSCB is unlikely to be able to begin to achieve its statutory functions without a budget of £100K - and that £150K may be more realistic - it is perhaps vital that action is

taken to ensure appropriate contributions are forthcoming. Without adequate funding and the release of staff to attend meetings and undertake activities to take forward the work, the LSCB is unable to operate effectively. LSCBs are a required necessity, not an optional possibility.

The relationship of LSCBs to other local partnerships, including Children and Young People's Partnerships; Community Safety Partnerships; Local Service Boards; the planned Integrated Family Support Teams.

As stated above, LSCBs have a crucial statutory role in local safeguarding arrangements. They are key players, and they have a primary responsibility to act powerfully to monitor and evaluate work done by partner organisations. They are not required to act as agents of their partners in doing the work. LSCBs advise and act to enable, but they are not providers of services to partner organisations, or directly to children and families. For example, training is a key responsibility for LSCBs only insofar as the LSCB must ensure that appropriate training is provided to an appropriate standard.

Professional cultures and practices are difficult to challenge but this is evidenced from a recent SAIT that progress is being made and that LSCBs are making a contribution to improvement in interagency working.

Interagency training is considered in annual plans and is a core area of activity for LSCBs.

The effectiveness of LSCBs in promoting the protection and welfare of specific groups of vulnerable children such as children with disabilities, asylum seeker and trafficked children, black and minority ethnic children.

A Practitioner's and Sexual Exploitation Forum have been developed in promoting good practice in protecting vulnerable children, besides a NSCB Sub Group for black and minority ethnic children. In addition LSCBs have provided information, protocols and procedures in supporting frontline and managerial staff in respect of their work with more vulnerable groups of children.

LSCBs have a clear responsibility to ensure that partner agencies learn from experience - especially through Serious Case Reviews and Child Death Overview activity. This means more than simply ensuring lessons learnt from Serious Case Reviews are disseminated about vulnerable children by the LSCB.

In addition a format for learning lessons from near misses/ serious incidents is being introduced within LSCBs to protect more vulnerable groups.

The effectiveness of LSCBs in their specific role with regard to promoting the information sharing responsibilities and duties of LSCB partner agencies.

LSCBs have a specific statutory responsibility to promote safeguarding. This goes well beyond simply providing information and promoting the work of the Board.

The Board must operate with authority and confidence to communicate critical messages to partner organisations - and indeed to produce meaningful annual reporting to the Board.

Effective communication is critical if the LSCB is to be effective. This is reliant on good communication and agreements about who is responsible for ensuring that information reaches the appropriate professionals.

There is an expectation that Board Members will take a central role in communicating critical messages from the LSCB to their own agencies. However, sometimes Board Members think that it is the Board, as a collective, that should be responsible for this rather than individuals.

Ongoing challenges concerning interagency working includes information sharing and engagement with GPs.

The effectiveness of LSCBs in involving children and young people in their work.

Engagement and consultation with children and young people is under-developed, although they are informed about the work of the Board.

It is still unusual for them to be actively involved or for their views and opinions to influence LSCB business and priorities.

The use of a tool called the 'Hear by Rights Standards' is one mechanism that could be used to encourage participation at all levels by children and young people.

Anyone wishing to submit evidence to the inquiry can either email the Clerk of the Committee: health.wellbeing.localgovt.comm@wales.gsi.gov.uk, or by post: Clerk, Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff, CF99 1NA.