

# Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee

HWLG(3)-10-10-p3: 27 May 2010

## Conwy and Denbighshire Local Safeguarding Children Board Position Paper for the Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee's inquiry into LSCBs on 27 May

Conwy and Denbighshire LSCB welcomes the opportunity to respond to this inquiry into the effective practice for Local Safeguarding Children's Boards

### **1 Appropriateness of existing Welsh Government Policy and Guidance as relevant to LSCBs;**

1.1 LSCBs do need to audit safeguarding across agencies but administrative support and a business manager is required to support such efforts. This means that the funding needs to be available to support those posts. This in turn means that the formula for ascertaining the level of funding required and the proportion requested from each partner is transparent, common to all LSCBs (in order to avoid neighbouring authorities putting widely different requests to common partners), and carries authority. See also section 3, below.

1.2 There is a need to be clear about the main focus of LSCBs and what can be realistically achieved in this economic climate (and with a group of people who sit on several boards and carry day to day portfolios), to ensure that the main priorities are met. Therefore it would be useful to make these clear nationally. See also section 4, below

1.3 Guidance on arrangements for accountability need to be clearer. The guidance states that each local authority has lead responsibility for the establishment and effective working of the LSCB. Some guidance about how that responsibility should be met by the local authority would be useful. Should full Council expect an annual report so that the elected representatives of the area as a whole can ensure their safeguarding responsibilities are being met? The Local Service Board (LSB) should have a role in calling partner agencies, the LSCB and the Local Authority to account, but LSB's have no statutory powers to do this.

1.4 The guidance says the LSCB's activities should fit clearly within the priorities and actions set out in the CYPP. The guidance would be more useful if it also made clear that the LSCB should determine the safeguarding priorities for the CYPP, and the child safeguarding priorities for other partnerships, such as the Community Safety Partnership and the Health, Social Care and Well-being Partnership. There should also be cross-reporting between these partnerships and the LSCB. Currently, the LSCB seems to have rather less power and influence than some other partnerships, there perhaps needs to be some power to require certain actions.

### **2 Appropriateness of the scope and focus of LSCB responsibilities;**

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

2.1 There still exists a problem that the other agencies, with the exception to some extent of health, leave matters to the local authority's Social Services Department between meetings. Clearer accountability arrangements for individual partners regarding their safeguarding responsibilities would be helpful, for example, if Police forces and probation had to have a lead officer for children, and if they had to report annually on their contributions to safeguarding children in partnership to their accountable bodies and the LSCB.

2.2 A requirement for an independent Chair would also help to remove the focus from Local Authorities, as all too often the role falls to the representative from Social Services. This allows other partners to feel the local authority bears most of the responsibility for the functioning of the LSCB, and has the effect of reducing the weight of responsibility felt by other partners. However, there are drawbacks associated with independent chairs too, as they do not have commitment to the LSCB between meetings and so there may be a tendency for no one to feel responsibility. Also in areas where they use independent chairs, sometimes it seems that they try to impose things that are happening on another board they are chairing, without local knowledge, this can be an issue. The responsibility and roles of independent chairs would need to be carefully prescribed. There is also of course a considerable cost given the standing these people have to have.

### **3 Arrangements for funding LSCBs;**

3.1 When the separate Conwy and Denbighshire LSCBs were established, funding arrangements continued as they had been for the old Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs). Estimates of the costs involved were based on expenditure patterns of the ACPCs, and the relative contributions from partners were also based on their historical contributions to the ACPC.

3.2 In May 2008 the separate boards for Conwy and Denbighshire merged to become the Conwy and Denbighshire Local Safeguarding Children Board. When the two Boards merged, the operating budget and the contributions from partners were brought together to provide a single Conwy and Denbighshire budget, and the opportunity was taken to review funding arrangements. Partners were requested to contribute an amount set not only by the estimated expenditure, but also influenced by the relative contributions made to the ACPCs, using the 2007 DfES report as guidance. The UK Government's exhortation for all statutory partners to make an appropriate commitment was also taken into account.

3.4 Conwy & Denbighshire LSCB has taken the Welsh Local Government Association's guidelines for average spend for an LSCB (also

based on the 2007 DfES report) and used them to build the budget up for the future over a period of years. Future years' budgets make provision for employing administrative support and, further into the future, a training manager, as suggested in paragraph 4.41 of 'Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act'.

3.5 As the LSCB's costs have increased, so the amounts requested from partners have also increased. Increases have maintained the relative contributions partners make to the total. Partners are invoiced by the local authority that holds the budget. Payment of the invoices has not always been trouble-free. Certain partners have contested the relative contributions they are asked to make, arguing that they should be contributing a smaller proportion of the whole. Many partners feel that LSCB funding is an additional burden on their budgets. More than one of our statutory partners cover a wider area than our LSCB. Where this is the case and another LSCB is asking for a smaller contribution, partners naturally question the contribution requested from us, although our funding levels remain well below those suggested in the WLGA.

3.6 Since October 2008, the LSCB budget, or the appointment of the business manager and the associated funding of the post, have been agenda items at four out of five ordinary meetings of the Board. If funding arrangements were on a stable and long-term footing, then the board would be free to devote its time to improving the LSCB and the delivery of its business plan. Clearly, LSCB's budgets need to reflect their business plans. However, a basic minimum level of funding and a formula that specifies the relative contributions that partners should make, or how they should be calculated, would remove the need for every LSCB to be spending precious time negotiating this with their partners

#### **4 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.**

4.1 Conwy & Denbighshire LSCB recently held a Partnerships Roles and Responsibilities Session which included representatives from the following partnerships and organisations:

Community Safety Partnership

Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Boards

Youth Justice Service

Police / MAPPA /MARAC

Children and Young People's Partnerships

Elected Members with responsibility for children

Local Service Boards

Discussion clarified that people saw safeguarding as a continuum, from child abuse and protection, to issues such as fireguards in homes. It was recognised that clarifying who was responsible for what on this continuum was a subject for further development. People attending the session agreed:

there is a need to identify the roles and responsibilities of safeguarding at each level, both terminology [ need to define what we mean by safeguarding] and function, including:

Level 1 - Agencies, services, providers

Level 2 - Partnerships

Level 3 - LSCB

There is a need to ensure a degree of responsibility at each of the above levels to allow the LSCB to perform their critical role.

The critical priorities for safeguarding need to be set by the LSCB and allocated to the appropriate partnerships. Each partnership should then have their own priorities for child protection /safeguarding which cascade from the LSCB priorities.

The priorities identified at each level should be owned and incorporated into the Business Plan for that partnership [e.g. LSB - child protection priorities, CYPP - broader safeguarding priorities] to ensure clear monitoring , reporting back and quality assurance.

4.2 Clearly, if the Welsh Assembly Government could begin to identify the roles and responsibilities at each level, then this would help all partnerships and help remove duplication, where resources can be wasted. Of greater concern is the need to be clear that there are no gaps, as this is where children's' safety could be put at risk.

#### **5 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;**

5.1 This is an area of work where the absence of earmarked funding and/or staff directly employed by the LSCB has its effect. The needs of specific groups are recognised by the professionals and organisations who are members of the LSCB. Further work needs to be done to bring together existing knowledge and data so that specific groups relevant to Conwy and Denbighshire can be formally identified

and their needs addressed. This needs to be matched with what is happening in the CYPPs, where there is a similar agenda for hard to reach groups

5.2 Nonetheless, Conwy and Denbighshire LSCB has identified children who are living with domestic violence, parents with mental health and substance misuse problems, and children living in poverty as priority areas for attention.

Last year, following an earlier serious case review involving children of a father with mental health problems, particular attention was given to rolling out a mental health and substance misuse protocol and ensuring training was given to support the protocol.

The All Wales Domestic Violence procedures are available for use, but tailoring of the procedures to local need will have to join the list of procedures awaiting review by the North Wales Safeguarding Forum Protocol Sub-group.

Child poverty has been identified as one of the responsibilities of the Children and Young People's Partnerships.

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

6.1 During the period 2008-10, Conwy and Denbighshire LSCB partners shared information via two operational Groups, where representatives from all agencies involved in the safeguarding agenda around child protection were present. Our revised structure has replaced this with a single 'Practice Development Group', which will continue to have information sharing responsibilities.

6.2 There is an existing inter-agency information sharing protocol for the assessment of children in need and children in need of protection, which is being reviewed on a North-Wales basis. The review is more than a year behind schedule, mainly due to the lack of allocated resources, with officers reviewing these procedures 'in addition to their day jobs'. An existing 'Notification of children becoming looked after or changing circumstances protocol for information sharing between the local authority and health agencies' is also being reviewed and is also behind schedule.

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

Again, this is an area of work where the absence of earmarked funding and/or staff directly employed by the LSCB has its effect.

Involving children and young people in the work of the LSCB is a step beyond the immediate an highest priority, which is to ensure the safety of children and the robustness of multi-agency work, procedures and co-operation. Therefore, it is an area that has been accorded lower priority in the LSCB's previous work plans, and no progress has been made in this area.