

Safeguarding Update

Introduction

The following information covers the responsibilities and actions of the Council with regards to safeguarding children, young people and adults during the later part of 2021, the whole of 2022 and so far in 2023.

Driven by legislation from the Childrens Act (2004), and the requirements of the Working Together to Safeguarding Children (2018) statutory guidance, as well as the Care Act (2014), the Council continues to be part of the safeguarding arrangements in Gloucestershire - this includes being a partner of the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Childrens Partnership (GSCP), and a stakeholder of the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Adult Board (GSAB).

Our corporate work this year has included conducting self-assessment audits for both children, young people and adults safeguarding. We have also reset our internal safeguarding officer group and started the review process of our policy and procedures.

Progress from 2021 to 2023

Gloucestershire Safeguarding Childrens Partnership (GSCP): In response to the Working Together to Safeguarding Children (2018) statutory guidance, the GSCP evolved from its previous incarnation (as the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Childrens Board) in 2019. Subsequently, this Council and other District Councils in Gloucestershire, became a formal partner of the GSCP and became more actively involved with the work of the partnership. We gained a dedicated 'District Safeguarding Sub-Group' within the governance structure of the GSCP, meaning our responsibilities sat within a dedicated management framework. We also gained support from the GSCP's Business Unit. This arrangement continues today.

The District Safeguarding Sub-Group, meet four times a year and primarily report to the GSCP Management Group alongside other sub-groups. Some adult safeguarding matters are also included in our sub-group work programme. The other sub-groups include statutory partners and service teams from a range of different public sectors.

Each District Council has two representatives on the GSCP - these take on respective lead roles on a rota basis for the Chairing and Deputy Chair / Adult Lead work. Stroud District Council handed over the Chairperson role in May 2022 after a two-year term.

Gloucestershire Safeguarding Adult Board (GSAB): The governance of the GSAB is different to that of the GSCP and has changed little in its function over the years.

We have representation to the 'Board' conducted by our Strategic Director of Communities who also now acts as our Strategic Lead for Safeguarding. We also have the addition of a representative from the District Safeguarding Sub-Group to support collective matters of district council's at GSAB meetings.

Referrals and Multi-Agency Work: Our referrals to the respective 'Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs / Help Desks' continue in line with our current statutory responsibilities, policy, and procedures. Whilst we do not have statutory responsibilities to investigate safeguarding concerns or incidents in the wider context, we do so with regards to reporting them correctly. In this respect, our many services continue to engage with the respective referral systems – the nature of safeguarding matters, means the work can be arduous and complex, but essential. In circumstances that require us as a Council to be represented at a multi-agency meeting, be that (for example) a case management or a housing matter, officers deal with to ensure we collaborate appropriately.

Self-Assessment Audits: Both the GSCP and the GSAB require us to conduct self-assessment audits for safeguarding children, young people, and adults – this is a statutory requirement under Section 11 of the Childrens Act (2004) and Section 47 of the Care Act (2014) respectively. Both reports, whilst submitted separately, receive independent scrutiny from safeguarding professionals of the GSCP and the GSAB – both appoint an independent chairperson to oversee this work, who appoint a panel of people to assist them.

With regards to the Section 11 Audit, GSCP partners are invited to present to the panel, their audit report and discuss its content. Stroud District Youth Council (SDYC) participated alongside the Independent Scrutineer (the chairperson) and safeguarding professionals, in the audit panel sitting for 2021 and 2022. This was of huge mutual benefit and considered to be exemplary practice in safeguarding audit work. The formal public report for 2022 will be published soon.

SDYC reviewed Standard 4 of the Section 11 Audit indicators following their work on the panel in 2021. Subsequently, changes to the title of the standard and the objectives were offered and then consulted upon as part of the 2022 audit panel discussion with partners. The changes will be implemented in 2023.

SDC Safeguarding Group: We have reset our internal officer group, which is chaired by our Strategic Lead for Safeguarding. This group now consists of officers from across the Council, representing different services and directorates - it has met twice so far in 2023. Many of the officers involved are 'safeguarding reporting leads' for their

service. The group has agreed updated terms of reference and has commenced a review of the Council's safeguarding policy and procedures.

Review of Policy and Procedures: As referenced above, the Council has begun a review of its safeguarding policy and procedures. There is research currently being done on current and emerging legislation, policies of other authorities, and emerging practices and procedures. A draft of the revised policy and procedures will be shared with elected members in August. The plan is to present the final draft to the Community Services and Licensing Committee on or before the meeting in January 2024.