
LGA Peer Review – Children’s Safeguarding

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	22 May 2025
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Heather Codling
Report Author:	Rebecca Wilshire
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4688

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report is to share the feedback, findings and recommendation from a recent LGA Peer Review in Children’s Services.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Executive
- 2.2 Review the report written by the LGA peer review team and give due consideration to areas for action (recommendations) whilst also acknowledging areas of strength in the Family safeguarding Service.
- 2.3 Share the LGA Peer Review Report with the relevant scrutiny committee to explore next steps in the ongoing development of children’s social care.
- 2.4 Agree to the West Berkshire Council publication of the LGA report in line with the standing agreement with the LGA following the conclusion of a peer review.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial	<p>There are no financial implications in this report, the report is feeding back the findings from a recent LGA Peer Review</p> <p>However, some recommendations may require financial support, and this would be explored further if needed as some area will be addressed within the Transformation Funding already agreed.</p>
Human Resource:	There are no HR implications in this report

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Legal:	There are no legal implications in this report			
Risk Management:	There are no risk management implications in this report			
Property:	There are no property implications in this report			
Policy:				
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		There is no impact on equalities within this report. The report and its attachments are intended to feedback on a recent LGA Peer Review
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		
Environmental Impact:		X		There is no environment impact from report
Health Impact:		X		There is no health impact from this report
ICT Impact:		X		There are no ICT implications with this report

Digital Services Impact:		x		
Council Strategy Priorities:		X		<p>This report supports Council Priorities:</p> <p>1) Services we are proud of</p> <p>2) Fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all</p>
Core Business:	X			<p>The findings of the LGA Peer Review fully support core business relating to the safeguarding of children.</p>
Data Impact:		X		<p>There is no data impact.</p>
Consultation and Engagement:	<p>The LGA Peer Review engaged with a variety of practitioners, social workers and partners. The review also included the engagement of children and families across the family safeguarding service.</p>			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 Over the last 18 months there have been issues raised relating to social work and management practice. These concerns relate to the application and fulfilment of statutory duties. Changes in leadership and management, building a culture across the family safeguarding service based on high support, high challenge and high expectations have started to take effect. The LGA Peer Review was deemed the most suitable option for external review at this time.
- 4.2 West Berkshire Council requested a LGA Peer Review on their Family Safeguarding Service to take place in early 2025. The rationale for this was to ensure we have the correct safeguards in place for children and families and to explore any areas of weakness or gaps there may be.
- 4.3 Many areas of children’s services are under regular and rigorous scrutiny. This takes many forms including quality assurance auditing, focussed visits from Ofsted, small scale inspection activity, internal audit and multi-agency audit. We consider we know ourselves well and this activity informs our twice-yearly Self Evaluation update.

- 4.4 The final report from the LGA covers in detail the strengths and areas for improvement across the family safeguarding service. It also provides prompts for reflection in the leadership and management of the service.

5 Background Information

- 5.1 Over the past 18 months, there has been a focus on Children in Care, Care Leavers (Focus visit from Ofsted), the Front Door (Southeast Sector Led Improvement), and Children with Disability who from January - March 2025 had an independent audit of children’s files due to concerns raised in this area. Therefore, the area of focus for the LGA was to Family Safeguarding Teams.
- 5.2 West Berkshire Council are currently within the Ofsted Inspection window for a full children’s social care inspection. The LGA peer review provided much needed insight and opportunity to prepare for the Ofsted inspection as the format for individual social work interviews and children’s case reviews was based upon the operating model of an Ofsted inspection.
- 5.3 In partnership with the LGA Children’s Services designed the Key Lines of Enquiry.
- 5.4 **Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE)**
- (a) Is there evidence that the Family Safeguarding Model is being utilised to its full potential
 - (b) Is there evidence of Management Oversight, Case Supervision, which is child led, and child centred and of good quality, with evidence of the child's voice throughout
 - (c) Is there evidence of good decision making when children are considered to be at risk of harm
 - (d) Is there evidence of Child Protection oversight from Child Protection Chairs
 - (e) Is there evidence of children being safeguarded who are not in full time education?
- 5.5 The Feedback Letter (Appendix 2) provides the full detail of their findings.
- 5.6 The peer review made a series of recommendations that will be progressed and overseen by the Children’s Social Care Performance and Quality Assurance Board chaired by the Service Director for Children’s Social Care.

6 Proposals/Recommendations

- 6.1 **Recommendation 1: Clarify and strengthen the governance and delivery arrangements for early help with partners**
- (a) Early help is a key area to be developed to ensure a positive impact on the numbers of children in need, child protection plans and the stability to deliver the family safeguarding model. Addressing the strategy, action plan, and partnership buy-in as a priority is necessary to ensure that the impact is clearly demonstrated.

6.2 Use governance structures to develop resilience; not just a one council approach, a whole West Berkshire approach.

- (a) Ensure full engagement from the integrated care board (ICB) to shared priorities, actions and possibly funding. A partnership rich, strategic SEND board could be put in place to map out joint commissioning work as well as the development of shared priorities related to health, SEND and voluntary services support. A review of Education Partnership arrangements may be prudent to explore a forum to agree joint endeavours between schools and the local authority outside of statutory and school led forums. Agreements need to be in place for complex needs with a shared commitment to partnership solutions and shared funding agreements.

6.3 Review governance and programme management arrangements:

- (a) There are a number of initiatives being taken forward at the same time, including workforce development, the embedding of the family safeguarding model and the child in need pilot (CiN). Determine which areas of work are priorities at any one moment. Ensure that attention is given to these and outcomes achieved against defined strategic objectives, so that focus can then shift to another area.

6.4 Undertake a desktop review of children missing education.

- (a) Consider commissioning an independent and external review of existing practices and governance arrangements so you are satisfied that they are fit for purpose.

6.5 Review the SEF to fully reflect achievements, developments and future direction.

- (a) The current SEF document does not provide a full and evidenced portrait of the challenges for children and their families in West Berkshire - and how these are being addressed. There is a clear self-awareness within the service that is not fully replicated in the SEF, which should be redrafted as a priority.

7 Other options considered.

- 7.1 No other options considered at this stage

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 This report it to share with Snr Leaders the outcome of the LGA Peer Review which took place in January 2025.
- 8.2 There are many positives within this, and it demonstrates the hard work which has taken place over the last 18 months to address practice issues, safeguarding children and build a service we can all be proud off.
- 8.3 There is still work to do, we know what this is and what we need to do to achieve it, the timescales are urgent as we are anticipating our next inspection soon.
- 8.4 This briefing aims to ensure that Senior Leaders are well informed and committed to overseeing continuous improvement in children's services.

9 Appendices

Appendix 1 – LGA Peer Review Slides

Appendix 2 – LGA Peer Review Feedback Letter

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☒ No: ☐

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval. ☐

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council. ☐

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council’s position. ☐

Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months. ☐

Item is Urgent Key Decision ☐

Report is to note only ☐

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