

HEALTH & WELLBEING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 66

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Sexual Exploitation of Children: Response from the Local Children's Safeguarding Board		
Date of Meeting:	23 April 2013		
Report of:	Head of Law/Monitoring Officer		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 At its December 2012 meeting, the Health & Wellbeing Overview & Scrutiny Committee (HWOSC) considered a request from Cllr Phillips to establish a scrutiny panel to examine issues relating to the sexual exploitation of children. HWOSC members agreed that, before deciding whether to set up a panel, they would request an update from the Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LSCB), the body responsible for overseeing children's safeguarding services across the city.
- 1.2 **Appendix 1** to this report contains the LSCB response to the HWOSC.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That HWOSC members note the information provided by the LSCB (**Appendix 1**);
- 2.2 That HWOSC members agree that they are satisfied by the approach taken by the LSCB in relation to preventing the sexual exploitation of children, and do not choose at this time to establish a scrutiny panel.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 Cllr Phillips wrote to the Chair of the HWOSC requesting the establishment of a scrutiny panel to look at the issue of the sexual exploitation of children. This request was considered at the December 2012 HWOSC meeting, where members agreed that they would seek the input of the LSCB before deciding whether to establish a panel.
- 3.2 The LSCB brings together senior professionals from across the city to oversee and co-ordinate children's safeguarding services. The LSCB is therefore the body responsible for assuring the quality and effectiveness of services to protect children against sexual exploitation.
- 3.3 In light of the assurances provided by the LSCB it is recommended that members choose not to establish a scrutiny panel to look at these issues in more detail. It is clear that the LSCB has done a good deal of work on this issue, and that there is good buy-in from a range of organisations. Ultimately, of course, this is a decision for HWOSC members, bearing in mind both the other demands on members in terms of the existing programme of scrutiny panels, and the potential demands on safeguarding services that a scrutiny panel would impose.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 4.1 None directly at this stage,

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 There are no direct financial considerations for the HWOSC. Should the committee choose to establish a scrutiny panel, this would be supported within agreed Scrutiny Team budgets.

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 None directly – the only decision for HWOSC members is whether or not to agree to establish a scrutiny panel, which the committee is free to do under the terms of the Council's constitution.

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 There is some evidence from other localities that, where there has been systemic or widespread sexual exploitation of children, the victims have been disproportionately from equalities groups or other 'vulnerable' groups, such as children from deprived communities, children in care etc. Members may wish to seek assurances that city safeguarding services are designed with these vulnerable groups in mind.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 None identified

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 There are obvious criminal implications to the sexual exploitation of children. The local police are active members of the LSCB and LSCB planning in this context is fully informed by police concerns.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 Recent events in Rochdale, Derby and elsewhere have shown that the systemic and/or widespread sexual exploitation of children can occur across a local area. Knowing this, there is an obvious risk in not taking all reasonable steps to assure that local safeguarding services are fit for purpose.

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 Should sexual exploitation occur, it is bound to have a major impact upon its victims, with potentially lifelong effects upon both mental and physical wellbeing. The degree to which this impacts upon public (i.e. population) health will depend on how widespread the abuse is, but given the seriousness of its consequences, it is likely that even a relatively low level of abuse will have an adverse and measurable impact on city health and wellbeing in the longer term.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 Safeguarding children is a core corporate responsibility. It also relates directly to the corporate priority to Tackle Inequality, and specifically to the commitments within this priority to ensure that children have the best start in life.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 This report recommends that a scrutiny panel is not established, arguing that the LSCB has provided compelling evidence that local safeguarding services for child sexual exploitation are well run and that this is a priority issue for the LSCB and its constituent partners. A scrutiny panel would therefore be relatively unlikely to lead to service improvements.
- 6.2 The alternative option would be for members to agree to establish a scrutiny panel, and this remains an option, if members are not satisfied with the assurances provided by the LSCB. However, members should consider where they think they might add value to the process of safeguarding children from sexual exploitation before establishing such a panel.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 HWOSC members are asked to decide whether or not to establish a scrutiny panel on the sexual exploitation of children. In this instance the recommendation is that a panel should not be established. This does not reflect the gravity or timeliness of the subject matter, but rather recognises the fact that we already

have excellent cross-partner working on this area, as demonstrated by the LSCB submissions to this report.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Information provided by the Brighton & Hove LSCB

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

1. Report to December 2012 HWOSC: "Scrutiny Request: Sexual Exploitation of Children"