

Government Review of LSCBs

In June 2007 the Government published a priority review of LSCBs undertaken by the DfES. The review covered a survey of all LSCBs, interviewed stakeholders and LSCB partner agencies, and visited 8 LSCBs for in-depth discussions. It is intended to repeat the survey annually, and conduct a further review at the end of 2008. Inevitably, with LSCBs in start-up mode for their first year, the review produced a limited picture of activity and something of an emphasis on process and structure as opposed to any evaluation of effectiveness at this stage. It showed the Wandsworth SCB measured up well to the original DfES expectations.

Findings

There were 12 main findings noted in the Executive Summary, although many further detailed points were also noted in the main report, These 12 points were as follows, with Wandsworth's position given in italics.

(i) **Statutory Partners were generally represented on LSCBs, and generally showed commitment to their LSCBs.** *This is the position in Wandsworth.*

(ii) **There was little evidence of Strategic Health Authority (SHA) engagement, although they were reducing from 28 to 10 in number.**

SHA involvement is not to be expected in London LSCBs: the London SHA's role will be to oversee PCT involvement and engage at the pan-London Safeguarding Children Board level

(iii) **Most LSCBs were chaired by the DCS or another local authority officer, although some were considering an independent chair.**

This is the situation in Wandsworth where the WSCB has been chaired by the Council's Chief Executive who was initially also the Interim Director of Children's Services.

(iv) **It is critical that the Chair has the right skills and aptitudes.**

The current arrangement was accepted by the WSCB as the best basis for commencement of the Board's operation: the Chair will be reviewed in 2007/08 (and at least every two years thereafter) and alternatives considered.

(v) **The accountability arrangements of some LSCBs might limit their ability to challenge The Children's Trust partners and their performance.**

This is not seen as a problem as yet in Wandsworth. The WSCB is adopting an independent regulatory posture and is carefully following Government and Pan-London guidance without interference. The monitoring role covers all local partners including the Children's Trust component agencies and in particular the Department of Children's Services.

- (vi) **Some LSCBs were struggling to demonstrate their independent voice.**

Possibly because of the strong child protection track record and sound commitment from local agencies, this is not seen as a Wandsworth issue.

- (vii) **There was little evidence that Overview and Scrutiny Committees were taking an interest in LSCBs, although Lead members for Children were.**

Good interest has been shown by both the OSC and the Lead Member in Wandsworth. However it must be recognised that the Government's Review, in expecting the WSCB to be fully independent of the Children's Trust, and yet the Trust's Lead Member to show 'engagement' with the WSCB, is proposing involvement which must be necessarily limited. The WSCB in fact has an independent accountability to the Government. Local scrutiny and involvement is to be fully encouraged, to ensure that each LSCB is performing as an effective regulator and promoter of safeguarding. Equally, the benefits of Lead Member engagement with an LSCB is that they will thus gain a clear understanding of the nature and extent of safeguarding initiatives and priorities their Children's Trust and CYP should adopt. Over close involvement in an LSCB either by an OSC or a Lead Member could be detrimental to proper independent regulation and monitoring of the Children's service authority's performance.

- (viii) **LSCBs may be defaulting to an operational rather than a strategic role.**

Wandsworth, during its start up year, has rightly concentrated on establishing processes, policies and initiating the main work programmes and regulatory and monitoring regime. Nevertheless there is an ongoing operational element to the LSCBs work, particularly that of case reviews. The correct approach would appear to be that followed here: delegating operational work to sub-groups with the LSCB taking policy and strategic decisions.

- (ix) **LSCBs are at various stages in making the transition from child protection to the wider safeguarding agenda, covering prevention and promotional activity.**

This seems inevitable, given the time taken to recruit support staff, assess local needs, develop policies and strategies, and commission new work programmes from agencies who are already fully stretched. The safeguarding agenda is extremely broad and progress is dependent on work by local agencies, schools and community organisations and projects. It is considered Wandsworth has made a good start but it will inevitably take time to broaden the safeguarding work stream fully without losing essential focus on child protection at the same time.

- (x) **LSCB budgets were variable and all took a substantial time to agree, potentially distracting LSCBs from real business.**

Wandsworth SCB has an upper quartile budget. There were no problems agreeing the budget and no distractions.

(xi) **No evidence was found of performance management arrangements for LSCBs.**

Again it may be ambitious to expect evidence of this in the first year of a demanding start-up and development task. Wandsworth's SCB has however given reasonable priority to performance and monitoring, and has five initial elements of performance management in place:-

- (a) The performance indicator set with quarterly monitoring;*
- (b) The annual self-assessment and audit of partner agencies' progress and compliance (by definition not available until the first year's activity was completed);*
- (c) Allegations management procedures are in place with oversight by an appointed officer;*
- (d) Serious case reviews are initiated where needed and action programmes are adopted and monitored; and*
- (e) Compliance with external monitoring of serious cases and other aspects by GOL and DCFS, plus JAR inspections and Annual Performance Assessments.*

The WSCB and its Executive Board also receive reports annually (at least) on progress on their own action programmes and it is also intended to present Annual Reports to the OSC.

The London Safeguarding Children Board is addressing this issue through a Government of London initiative, "London Board Datasets Project". This aims to provide a consistent and practical high quality dataset for all London LSCBs to use to monitor their performance and evaluate the effectiveness of what is done by the Local Authority and partners both individually and collectively. The project, being co-ordinated through London Borough of Waltham Forest, has a steering group and a nine- month timescale.

(xii) **There was substantial variation over how LSCBs handled Serious Case Reviews.**

Again, this is perhaps inevitable at this stage of evolution. In London, it can be expected that the Pan London Safeguarding Children Board, which has now issued its Pan-London procedures, will bring harmonisation and exchange of best practice. Similarly GOL has a safeguarding advisor who is providing advice.

Conclusion

Generally Wandsworth LSCB seems to measure up well against the concerns identified in the Government's review. Detailed comments will be studied carefully and improvements adopted based on recommended best practice wherever possible.
