

Children and Families Committee

Date of Meeting:	16 January 2023
Report Title:	Update on progress against the Joint Targeted Area Inspection action plan
Report of:	Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services
Report Reference No:	CF/63/22-23
Ward(s) Affected:	All Wards

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1.** This report provides the Children and Families Committee with an update on the partnership progress against the action plan from the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to the criminal exploitation of children in Cheshire East. This relates to the priority in the council's Corporate Plan 2021-2025 to protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk, and families from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1** The partnership fully accepted all the inspectors' recommendations and apologised for the gaps in our collective work to protect these children and young people.
- 2.2** A comprehensive multi-agency action plan has been developed following the inspection to address each of the areas for priority action and areas for improvement. New governance arrangements have been established to ensure there is dedicated oversight and scrutiny of progress against the plan by the chief officers from the three statutory partners (the local authority, Cheshire Constabulary and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside).

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. The Children and Families Committee is recommended to consider the Action Plan appended (appendix 1) to this report and scrutinise the progress to date against the JTAI recommendations.
- 3.2. The committee to agree to receive 6 monthly reports on progress against this action plan

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1. The local authority, as one of three statutory safeguarding partners under Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018), has a legal duty to work with partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in the local area. The JTAI demonstrated that there are areas the partnership need to address to improve outcomes for children. Cheshire East needs to ensure the recommendations and findings from the JTAI are addressed to ensure we achieve good outcomes for children and young people, and effectively protect them from harm.

5. Other Options Considered

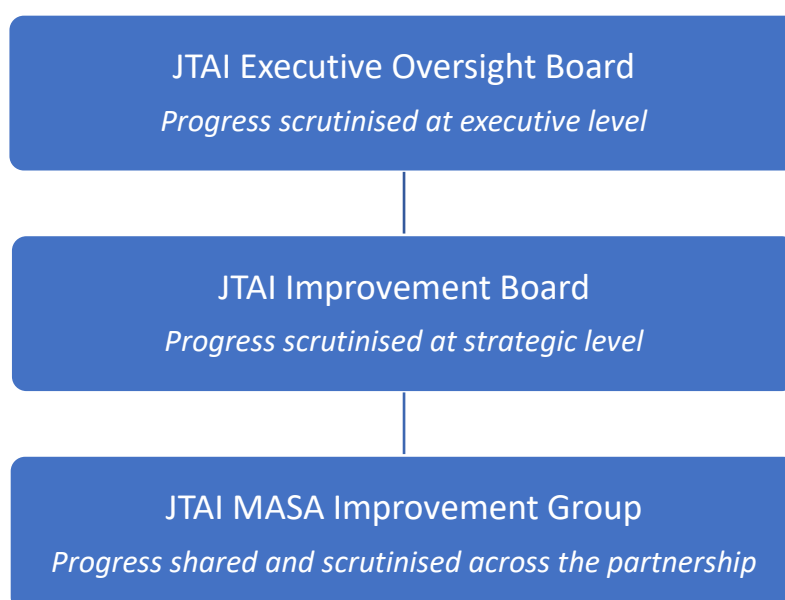
- 5.1. Not applicable as this is an update report.

6. Background

- 6.1. The joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to the criminal exploitation of children in Cheshire East took place from 27 June to 15 July 2022. It was carried out by Inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).
- 6.2. The [findings of the inspection](#) were published on 26 September 2022 and three areas for priority action were identified with further areas that required improvement.
- 6.3. The three areas for priority action were identified as
 - Leaders of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership should address the strategic weaknesses in the leadership, function, purpose and impact of the work of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership and its sub-groups. This should include gaining a full understanding of the risks of exploitation to children across the local area, and ensuring that this understanding leads to analysis, provision and commissioning of services that reduce risk for children effectively.
 - Across the partnership, leaders should ensure that operational practice reduces risk of exploitation of children.
 - East Cheshire NHS Trust should improve wider safeguarding practice in emergency departments so that risks to children with additional complex needs are identified, understood and responded to.

7. Progress against the recommendations from the JTAI

- 7.1. A comprehensive multi-agency action plan has been developed following the inspection to address each of the areas for priority action and the findings from the inspection (please see Appendix A). Cheshire East Council is required to submit this to Ofsted by 5 January 2023.
- 7.2. Governance arrangements have been established to ensure there is dedicated oversight and scrutiny of progress against the plan by the chief officers from the three statutory partners (the local authority, Cheshire Constabulary and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside). This includes a chief officers group (JTAI Executive Oversight Board) consisting of the Chief Constable of Cheshire Constabulary, the Chief Executive of Cheshire East Council, the Chief Nurse and the Place Director. This scrutiny will ensure improvements are made at pace, and there is continual evaluation of the impact of improvements on children and young people's outcomes.



- 7.3. The Safeguarding Children's Partnership has appointed an independent scrutineer who is reviewing the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for children and young people in Cheshire East to ensure that they are effective and comply with statutory guidance set out in Working Together 2018. The independent scrutineer will complete a report with recommendations, which will support leaders of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership to strengthen the strategic leadership, function, purpose, and impact of the work of the partnership and its sub-groups.
- 7.4. The improvement board will be independently chaired by an improvement advisor appointed by the Department for Education. This advisor will support and monitor the improvement work of the partnership and report back to the Department for Education periodically. The advisor is due to start work with the partnership in late December 2022 for 12 months.

- 7.5.** There has been considerable work on the comprehensive action plan which can be seen within appendix 1. The following paragraphs (6.10-6.13) sets out details of some of these actions relating to the priority actions identified.
- 7.6.** As of 13 July 2022 (during inspection) several operational changes were made to ensure that the multi-agency response to children at risk of exploitation is timely. This includes all exploitation screening tools received into the integrated 'front door' being managed without delay and within 24 hours as per statutory guidance. A decision is made on the same day to either progress to a referral to children's social care and allocate to a social worker or into early help and prevention and allocate to an early help practitioner. Statutory intervention is defined in Working Together 2018 and the Children Act 1989 as commencing immediately. This includes a visit to the child and the initiation of a child and family assessment; specific risk mitigation now begins without delay.
- 7.7.** The integrated front door (IFD) meeting now retrospectively reviews the immediate safety planning for all children at risk of exploitation (as identified in the above process) who have been referred into either children's social care or early help in the previous 7 days. This reviews and monitors that the risk to children has been identified by statutory agencies swiftly and that safety planning has been implemented immediately. This also ensures that actions are owned by partner agencies with clear timescales.
- 7.8.** Local authority social work teams now receive police intelligence, vulnerable person assessments and screening tools on the same day they are submitted to the integrated front door which ensures that swift action is taken at the point of identification of new risk.
- 7.9.** The Safeguarding Children's Partnership, within 10 days of the inspection, took immediate action to complete multi-agency reviews of the cohort of children at risk of criminal exploitation to ensure that the risk mitigation plans in place were effective in reducing risk. No child was identified as having experienced further harm or as being at immediate risk during this review.
- 7.10.** Further progress against the actions in the plan is detailed within the action plan at Appendix A.

8. Consultation and Engagement

- 8.1.** The three statutory partners (the local authority, Cheshire Constabulary and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board) developed the multi-agency action plan in response to the JTAI findings and recommendations. The action plan has been shared with the wider membership of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership Executive. The Independent Scrutineer has provided constructive feedback on the plan to ensure it will drive change for children and young people in Cheshire East.

9. Implications

9.1. Legal

9.1.1. JTAI inspections are carried out under section 20 of the Children Act 2004.

9.1.2. The Safeguarding Children's Partnership has a statutory responsibility to safeguard children and young people within the borough and the services operate within the relevant legal framework.

9.2. Finance

9.2.1. The Safeguarding Children's Partnership is funded primarily by the three statutory partners with an additional contribution provided by Probation Services and schools. The funding arrangements are currently under review to ensure that the partnership has sufficient resources to fulfil its responsibilities.

10. Policy

There are no policy implications.

11. Equality

Good quality practice with families ensures that all children and young people's needs are considered and supported.

12. Human Resources

Recruiting and retaining high quality social workers and managers is crucial in supporting the local authority to fulfil its safeguarding responsibilities. This is also applicable to the Safeguarding Children's Partnership Business Support Team to ensure that the partnership can fulfil its obligations.

13. Risk Management

We need to have an effective Safeguarding Children's Partnership in place to deliver effective partnership services that support children, young people and families in a holistic way and help them achieve good outcomes. There are reputational and financial risks to not providing a good Safeguarding Children's Partnership, as well as risks to individual children and young people. The council must continue to ensure that these risks are mitigated by ensuring effective plans are in place to improve where areas for development are identified. Progress against the JTAI action plan is on the council's corporate risk register.

14. Rural Communities

Vulnerable children and young people are present in all communities in Cheshire East.

15. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

The multi-agency action plan intends to improve the experiences and outcomes for children and young people across the borough, those that are

most vulnerable. Cheshire East Council has a corporate parenting responsibility for children in their care.

16. Public Health

Exploitation of children is a public health issue and tackling it and the impact of it cuts across many agencies and partnerships.

17. Climate Change

Children’s services continue to support the council with climate change objectives. There are no implications for climate change as a result of this report.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Nabeel Chaudhry – Head of Safeguarding Nabeel.chaudhry@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	A. JTAI Improvement Plan
Background Papers:	Published inspection report for the joint targeted area inspection of Cheshire East