

REPORT TO: Health Policy & Performance Board
DATE: 23rd February 2021
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People
PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing
SUBJECT: Safeguarding
WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To update the Board and highlight key issues with respect to the impact of Covid 19 on safeguarding in care homes.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

The report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The current global Covid 19 pandemic is unprecedented and the impact for individuals, families, communities and wider society is significant and long lasting. It has touched every part of people's lives and has required individuals and organisations to adapt to new daily interactions, social distancing, shielding, undertaking assessments by phone or using digital solutions to continue essential business. Many of the existing protective factors in the lives of adults at risk of abuse and harm have been temporarily absent or limited.

3.2 COVID-19 has had a significant and sustained impact on the care homes and domiciliary care sectors, for both residents and staff. There is concern that both sectors are under pressure in terms of current sustainability and longer term financial viability, as well as issues around Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the risks associated with a reduction in visiting and face-to-face contact.

3.3 There is a high potential for compassion fatigue as well as emotional and physical stresses among all those continuing to provide support, both formal and informal, in highly volatile times leading to increases in safeguarding risks.

3.4 The insight project was established to understand the national picture regarding safeguarding adults' activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The report was developed from voluntary contributions

from 92 single tiered or county councils who shared their quantitative data. Of these, 45 local authorities also provided qualitative information, which informed the narrative about safeguarding activity and more in-depth insights into either trends that were emerging or disparities that were developing. Information compared data and trends between 2019 and 2020. They concluded that:

- 3.5 The majority of local authorities saw a marked drop in safeguarding concerns during the initial weeks of the COVID-19 lockdown period, only to return to, and then exceed, normal levels by June 2020. This surge was anticipated by local authorities as lockdown restrictions were relaxed. A few local authorities, conversely, experienced significant increases in safeguarding concerns early on during the lockdown. These concerns were mainly attributed to high levels of anxiety and distress and often did not meet the criteria for a safeguarding enquiry (under Section 42(2)). There was some evidence that one of the sources of increased levels of reporting came from blue light services, who were often at the forefront of dealing face-to-face with the public.
- 3.6 The trend of safeguarding enquiries showed a similar decline during the initial weeks of the COVID-19 lockdown period. Contributors suggested that this may have been due to being unable to undertake and complete safeguarding enquiries during this period, or that practitioners were still catching up on the backlog of safeguarding concerns generated in the lockdown period. Along with the lower number of local authorities submitting June 2020 data than for any other month, this suggests that it is too soon to accurately gauge the full impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown on safeguarding enquiries. There was some evidence of increased levels of complexities of safeguarding enquiries under lockdown conditions. There was an upturn of enquiries in June, although this upturn did not increase at the same rate as the number of safeguarding concerns.
- 3.7 The percentage distribution of types of abuse identified in safeguarding enquiries did not appear to change considerably overall. There was evidence that some forms of abuse, particularly domestic abuse, increased slightly overall and significantly within some local authorities, as well as psychological abuse and self-neglect. The percentage of safeguarding enquiries, where the risk is located in the individual's own home has increased markedly since the start of the COVID-19 lockdown period, with evidence from local authorities that this is a direct result of the confinement of people in their homes. Enquiries with risk located in care homes has decreased as a percentage in the same period; the narrative suggests that this is because of the relative lack of outside scrutiny in those environments during the lockdown period.

- 3.8 Halton supported the project and the findings reflected the activity locally. During the first lockdown CQC changed their approach to inspection and monitoring of care providers. Implementing a risk based approach to visiting and only approving visits if there is a risk to life and limb. This was also reflected locally with Quality Assurance team limiting visits and developed a risk based approach to assessing the requirements of a visit.
- 3.9 In order to address the potential gap in reporting 'Every Covid Visit' approach was devised to target professionals visiting care homes to encourage them to report on what they saw both positive practice and areas that may need improvement. This has enabled the Quality Assurance team access to additional information to support analysis and inform risk ratings.
- 3.10 A Care Home Resilience Group has been established chaired by Sue Wallace Bonner and oversees the work undertaken by all partners within the Borough in relation to care homes. This includes Identifying key pieces of work to bring systems together for the benefit of residents and proactive support for care homes at increased risk and harnessing the learning to share across the sector.
- 3.11 The pandemic has also impacted on the implementation of the replacement for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS). The Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) has been delayed until April 2022. The impact assessment had been promised for December and has yet to be published and the Code of Practice for the Spring.
- 3.12 During the pandemic the requirement for DoLS had not been amended and the restrictions remain robust. During the first wave there were lower number of referrals as the care homes battled with the virus and addressed essential care needs. The referrals started to increase from June and have continued to do so to normal levels.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 New policies in respect of LPS will be developed once the Code of Practice is published.

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 None identified at present.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

Halton Safeguarding Adults Board (HSAB) membership includes a Manager from the Children and Enterprise Directorate, as a link to

Halton Children and Young People Safeguarding Partnership (HCYPSP). Halton Children and Young People Safeguarding Partnership membership includes adult social care representation. Joint protocols exist between Council services for adults and children. The SAB chair and sub-group chairs ensure a strong interface between, for example, Safeguarding Adults, Safeguarding Children, Domestic Abuse, Hate Crime, Community Safety, Personalisation, Mental Capacity & Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None Identified.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

The safeguarding adults whose circumstances make them vulnerable to abuse is fundamental to their health and well-being. People are likely to be more vulnerable when they experience ill-health.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

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6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Failure to consider and address the Statutory duty of the Local Authority could expose individuals to abuse and the Council as the Statutory Body vulnerable to complaint, criticism, and potential litigation.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 It is essential that the Council addresses issues of equality, in particular those regarding age, disability, gender, sexuality, race, culture and religious belief, when considering its safeguarding

policies and plans. Policies and procedures relating to Safeguarding Adults are impact assessed with regard to equality.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.