



**To/
Councillor Louise Gibbard
Cabinet Member for Care Services**

BY EMAIL

cc: Cabinet Members

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:*

*Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:*

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

*Our Ref
Ein Cyf:*

*Your Ref
Eich Cyf:*

*Date
Dyddiad:*

Scrutiny

01792 637257

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

SPC/2023-24/6

06 December 2023

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 14 November 2023 It is about the Annual Report on Corporate Safeguarding. A formal written response is not required.

Dear Councillor Gibbard,

Annual Report – Corporate Safeguarding 2022/23

We are writing to you following our Scrutiny session to monitor and challenge Council action in relation to Corporate Safeguarding. The Annual Report is a standing item within the Committee work plan given Safeguarding is the Council's top priority, so we can comment on progress, achievements, and implementation of policy.

We thank you and officers for attending the Committee to present the Annual Report which reflected on activities during 2022/23. You highlighted improvements carried out in support of the Council's corporate safeguarding policy and corporate arrangements for Safeguarding across the whole Council, covering six key areas of activity, making sure that safeguarding remains 'everyone's business'.

This letter reflects on what we learnt from the information presented, questions, and discussion. It shares the views of the Committee and highlights any outstanding issues / actions for your response - key issues summarised below.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU
SWANSEA COUNCIL / CYNGOR ABERTAWE
GUILDHALL, SWANSEA, SA1 4PE / NEUADD Y DDINAS, ABERTAWE, SA1 4PE
www.swansea.gov.uk / www.abertawe.gov.uk

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We noted that the Council's Corporate Safeguarding policy has been updated, now with a greater focus on prevention and duty to report placed on all public service officers. The policy aims to make sure our work covers the full extent of potential, contextual safeguarding risks and concerns posed to vulnerable people, such as child sexual exploitation, modern slavery, radicalisation, etc. The new Policy incorporates All Wales Safeguarding Procedures introduced by the Welsh Government.

We took the opportunity to follow up on our previous discussion last November, which focussed on compliance by those carrying out work for the Council with the Council's Safeguarding Policies; Mandatory Training Compliance; Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks; and Advocacy.

Working with Suppliers and Contractors

Corporate Safeguarding extends to how we work with suppliers and contractors to ensure safety of vulnerable children and adults. We expect that all staff employed by suppliers and contractors carrying out work on the Council's behalf are fully aware of their broader responsibilities and duties. The Committee is aware that there are different levels of conditions and monitoring, depending on the nature of services contracted.

We acknowledged that this is an aspect which you have been focusing on and working to strengthen, and sought assurance around the level of compliance / arrangements for checking, so that we can be certain that suppliers and contractors do understand their responsibilities and duties in relation to safeguarding. We noted that contract monitoring arrangements are in place and checks are carried out, for example through suitability questionnaires to ensure that all expectations are fully understood, and where necessary staff are given safeguarding awareness training. We were informed that there is better evidence of compliance in the more obvious areas of practice where safeguarding is at the forefront of this work, e.g., in Care settings, but concluded that challenges still exist in being able to evidence compliance across other areas, and this remains 'work in progress. You stated that this was in the Corporate Safeguarding Group's work plan, and it was indicated that efforts would be made to provide further information to Scrutiny about this, during the year, to provide assurance.

Mandatory Safeguarding Training

You stated that new mandatory Group A Safeguarding eLearning has recently been launched for all Council employees, which combines the previous eLearning's for both Children and Adults Safeguarding into one module. It also incorporates the new Social Care Wales National Safeguarding Training, Learning and Development Standards. Recognising there is a hierarchy of training depending on the individual's role within the Council, Group A is the basic level, which covers the core safeguarding principle and aims to increase awareness of safeguarding, i.e.:

- I know what the term safeguarding means.
- I know what to look out for.
- I know who to report to.

You told us that this is strongly promoted across the Authority however it was remarked that the new eLearning has not yet been rolled out to all Councillors. As the new eLearning uses the new Oracle Fusion system, which would be less familiar to Councillors than employees, we noted that a step-by-step guide was being developed by the Head of Digital & Customer Services, which will shortly be communicated to Councillors. We noted that training is to be completed by 31 March 2024. Of course, staff and Councillors have had previous versions of Safeguarding Training over the years, and it has always been disappointing that the Authority has been unable to accurately report the level of take up / compliance with what is mandatory training. We were pleased to hear that the new Oracle system will now provide us with better management information and more effective oversight of training compliance across the Council. We look forward to this being reported in the future.

DBS Checks

We understood that the Council must ensure DBS checks are undertaken for all roles that have identified as needing one. You reported that the DBS Policy has been reviewed and updated. Alongside policy development, work is underway reviewing the procedure guide to assist Council managers, School Governors, Head teachers in making safer recruitment decisions and prevent unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups, including children.

We queried whether Councillors should be subject to DBS Checks. We noted that there have been changes over time in relation to national guidance, expectations and eligibility requirements, and things have been reviewed locally to ensure there are no obvious omissions. Whilst you acknowledged it may make sense, you confirmed that the Council is compliant with Welsh Government Guidance. We would appreciate any update on developments in this regard.

Work for the Year Ahead

We look forward to next year's Annual Report when we can follow up on these issues. We can also follow up on work you have identified within this year's report for the year ahead:

Safe Governance & Performance:

- *To continue the annual review of performance, quarterly performance monitoring of key indicators, performance reporting at service level (to P&FM and scrutiny performance panels) and annual reporting on corporate safeguarding.*

Safe Employment

- *To publish, communicate and implement revised HR policies relating to recruitment and selection, DBS reflecting national procedures.*
- *To ensure council-wide volunteering policy currently in development led by Tackling Poverty Service and to reflect wider safeguarding responsibilities expectations and training offer.*

Safe Workforce

- *Continue roll out of new blended programme of mandatory and progression training courses across Council available to meet diverse needs of service areas, employees learning needs and responsibilities.*
- *Managers to work within Oracle Fusion to ensure safe and accurate reporting on staff learning records, keeping records updated and tracking compliance.*

Safe Practice

- *To continue to implement quality assurance frameworks within child and family and adult services.*
- *To continue to refresh the work programme using self-assessment and involving leads from all Council Departments within the Corporate Safeguarding Operational group.*

Safe Partnerships

- *To continue to embed corporate safeguarding policy procedures into how we work with suppliers in carrying out checks, specifying contracts, building awareness in the wider workforce and contract monitoring.*

Safe Voice

- *Working within families, communities, and schools to promote safeguarding awareness.*
- *Continue to develop language and communication guidance and training opportunities for Council employees to support ACE awareness, promote inclusivity and embed trauma informed practice.*
- *Continuing to improve our advocacy offer, best interest decisions, equalities, inclusion and promote human rights.*

Your Response

Overall, the Committee thanked you and lead officers for the report and were pleased to see the continuing efforts of the Corporate Safeguarding Group which is jointly chaired by yourself and the Director of Social Services. We hope that you find the contents of this letter helpful and would welcome comments, however we do not expect you to provide a formal response. However, we will follow up on the issues within when we next discuss.

We will make sure that consideration of the next Annual Report is scheduled into the Scrutiny Programme Committee's work plan for 2024/25, presumably for November 2024.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Black', written in a cursive style.

COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK
Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee
✉ cllr.peter.black@swansea.gov.uk