



Cabinet
13 March 2017

**Report from the Director of Policy,
Performance and Partnerships**

Wards affected: ALL

Signs of Safety - Scrutiny Task Group Report

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the recommendations agreed by the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, which were developed as a result of a scrutiny task group established to look at the implementation of Signs of Safety in Brent.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to note the recommendations agreed by the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee as set out in Appendix A.
- 2.2 Cabinet is asked to note the scrutiny task group's report which is published in Appendix B.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Signs of Safety is a practice framework for working with children and families and child protection which was developed in Australia in the 1990s and is used today by a large number of children's services departments in local authorities in the United Kingdom as well as in the United States, Australia and Canada.
- 3.2 In 2014, Brent Council was awarded funding from the England Innovations Project, which is managed by the Department of Education, to introduce Signs of Safety as a practice model in children's services. Since early 2015 the Children and Young People department has begun implementation of Signs of Safety.
- 3.3 Participation in the England Innovations Project and introduction of Signs of Safety is a corporate priority for Brent Council. It was identified in the Corporate Plan 2015 as a key priority, and a commitment to the effective implementation of Signs of Safety was signed by the then Chief Executive and Council Leader in 2015.
- 3.4 In November 2015 Ofsted's SIF (Single Inspection Framework) published its report of Brent Council's services for children in need of help and protection, looked after children and care leavers. A consistent observation in the report was that where Signs of Safety was being used there had been improvements. However, Ofsted's view was that the work programme for 2015/16 of the then

Scrutiny Committee had been too focused on education, health and early years, but had given too little consideration to children's social care and safeguarding. Members of the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, which superseded the former Scrutiny Committee in May 2016, wanted to set up a task group to look at Signs of Safety to address this gap and ensure oversight by scrutiny is maintained of an important area of children's social care services.

3.5 The task group was set up on 20 September 2016 and completed its work by January 2017, which was done using the methodology as set out in the report. It was chaired by Councillor Aisha Hoda-Benn, a member of Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, and the other members were Councillor Shama Tatler, Councillor Bhawanji Chohan, Councillor Suresh Kansagra and Councillor Dr Amer Agha.

3.6 On 1 February 2017 the report was presented to the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee by Councillor Aisha-Benn and there was a further discussion about implementing Signs of Safety in Brent and the task group's recommendations, which were agreed as they had been set out in the report.

4.0 Detail

4.1 The recommendations were based on findings and evidence collated during the task group's enquiries. Recommendation 1 was put forward because the task group felt that it would help implementation and development if a wider group of professionals in Brent such as GPs, schools and other health professionals with whom social workers work with have a better understanding of the approach.

4.2 The task group spent a lot of time considering the training in Signs of Safety. Recommendation 2 has been put forward because it's felt to be important to keep on top of how well the training was perceived by social workers. The task group isn't expecting the department to 'reinvent the wheel' but believes it would be helpful if existing workplace surveys asked specifically about Signs of Safety, which would then highlight the successes or challenges in the training.

4.3 While the task group felt that the department has made considerable strides in implementation there is not as yet consistently good practice across all teams. Its view is that the council needs to keep on top of the situation and find out about implementation in 2017/18 as well. In addition, the task group was made aware of factors such as the hot-desking environment and staff retention, which while not related to Signs of Safety may impact on successful implementation. As part of the Cabinet member for Children and Young People reporting back about Signs of Safety, it would be helpful for these factors to be addressed as well. Recommendation 3 proposes that the Cabinet member for Children and Young People reports back to the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee in 2017/18 about implementation of Signs of Safety and these other factors.

4.4 Recommendation 4 has been split into 4a and 4b which address the question of measuring and measurements in implementing Signs of Safety. The task group felt this to be an important strand of the project. At present this is an emerging area of work and the task group's view is that the council needs to think now about how it measures Signs of Safety so it has a more developed understanding of how successfully the practice model is being implemented.

The task group felt it would be useful if this work was developed with the other local authorities using Signs of Safety.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 All reports and cases have mentioned in the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Signs of Safety in Brent, Scope for Scrutiny Task Group have been fully anonymised in accordance with the Data Protections Act. Members can be assured that any discussions of these reports and cases at the meeting must be conducted on the same basis.
- 6.2 Reports provided to the task group did not include family court proceedings papers which require authorisation from the court before disclosure under the Family Procedure Rules 12.73(1) (b).

7.0 Diversity Implications

- 7.1 There are no diversity implications immediately arising from this report. It is anticipated; however, that the more effective and consistent application of the Signs of Safety framework will enhance the safety and protection of the borough's children who are most at risk of harm and will ensure a child-centred and needs-based approach to assessments.

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