City of Wolverhampton Council

Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together (WST) 360-Partnership appraisal and Additional Independent Scrutiny of the Executive Group

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Purpose of the Review

The author, as independent scrutineer, has been commissioned to complete a comprehensive 360 partnership appraisal *and must include all areas of governance and our [Wolverhampton's Safeguarding Together, WST] commitment to 'Experts by Experience'* within WST's Scrutiny and Assurance Co-ordination Group (SACG). In addition, the Independent scrutineer has been commissioned to provide *"additional scrutiny ….to ensure a comprehensive appraisal at a strategic level"*, of the Executive Group of WST (WST EG).

In order to complete this process, the independent scrutineer has employed a number of methods including a number of '*one to one*' interviews with members of the EG and the SACG members as well as *bite sized* workshops with the respective sub-groups which report into the SACG (6 plus the Education Providers Safeguarding Group). A copy of the template questions asked are highlighted in Appendix A (WST EG), Appendix B (WST SACG), and Appendix C (WST Scrutiny and Assurance Sub Groups, WST SACG SG).

This document will firstly deal with the independent scrutiny of the EG, followed by a 360 appraisal of the SACG.

Finally, this document, with respective findings, will be presented to both the Chair of The EG and the Chair of the SACG for further dissemination and discussion.

I would like to thank Emma Cleary, Victoria Bowles and Bev McCalla for supplying the documents requested, setting up the meetings with key individuals / groups and their general support. I would also like to thank all the children and adult partners and their respective organisations, who have participated, for their thoughtful and frank evaluation of the current partnership, ideas and suggestions for improvements and what works well.

The scrutineer has had the opportunity to meet with a wide range of partners /practitioners, individually and in focus group, to ascertain a range of views from partner agencies on the impact of the new arrangements at EG and SACG.

Process/methodology of review

The review appraisal has focused on understanding strengths and where there might be opportunities to further improve on current practice. A list of documents, policies, minutes, processes and Terms of Reference for each group have been provided and reviewed. These are outlined in Appendix D.

Statutory Responsibilities – The Safeguarding of Adults and Children

Local authorities have a number of statutory responsibilities as regards adults and children in terms of safeguarding within the *Care Act 2014* (Adults) and *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018*.

The Care Act 2014 requires that local authorities set up safeguarding adults board (SAB) in their geographic area, defining in law who should sit on this Board - the local authority, the NHS (CCG) and the police - and that they should meet regularly to discuss and act upon local safeguarding issues, develop shared plans for safeguarding including working with local people in how to protect adults in vulnerable situations and to make sure that different organisations work together effectively.

In terms of *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)*, the Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASAs), statutory legislation dictates who the three lead bodies are and their representatives - Local Authority (Director of Children's Services), Chief Nurses (Clinical Commissioning Group) and Chief Constable / Accountable Officer of Police (Police).

Para 12 of the Act requires that *all three safeguarding partners have equal and joint responsibility for local safeguarding arrangements. In situations that require a clear, single point of leadership, all three safeguarding partners should decide who would take the lead on issues that arise.*

The Conducting of group member interviews (WST EG and WST SACG / SACG Sub Groups)

The WST SACG panel members and the respective WST SACG SG seven (7) sub groups were interviewed over a period of approximately 12 weeks between 4 September and 24 November 2020. In total, fourteen (14) members of the SACG have been interviewed and 7 *bite sized* workshops of sub groups took place. Appendix B outlines the standard template questions utilised.

The WST EG were contacted via email over a 2 week period between 13 January 2021 and 27 January 2021 and their respective responses were received within this timescale. Appendix A outlines the question template utilised by the WST EG. In total, there were 4 (four) responses received by all three statutory partners.

Scrutiny of the WST EG

The first part of the commissioned work has been to scrutinise and appraise the WST EG.

Materials acquired and reviewed include all previous meeting minutes, the WST EG Terms of Reference (ToR) and the completion of *1 to 1* interviews via questionnaires (Appendix B) as discussed previously to be the three standing members representing the statutory organisations defined as City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC), West Midlands Police (WMP) and Wolverhampton CCG (WCCG).

In summary, the WST EG is an extremely well-established group and all members are very familiar with each other having worked together over a significant number of years. There is a good complement of skills and experience as would be expected – excellent knowledge of health, social care and public services.

The *1 to 1* feedback by all members of the group was consistently positive with a great deal of mutual respect between all partners in what is an extremely challenging area. The issues raised in order to build upon this group's successes were also consistent and explored below.

Prior to discussing this, the independent scrutineer felt that it was important to highlight a number of direct quotes from members of the WST EG outlining the overall positivity of its members.

"The task and finish approach to carrying out pieces of work and having a clear mandate from any groups has proven to be invaluable to keeping on task and producing an outcome. We have also had favourable comments from external consultants about the clarity provided by the mandates" (WST EG member).

"There is a clear and simplified governance arrangement that supports the work of the WST EG and SACG" (WST EG member)

There was evidence of respectful challenge between the three key partners stated in all the *1 to 1* interviews, as well as within the minutes and of holding each other to account. By keeping the

Executive group size quite small, it can be seen that decision making is clear and effective. There is strong communication and engagement flow both in and out of the WST Executive group, holding the SACG to account. The strategic direction from the EG to the WST SACG is also excellent due in part to the Chair of the SACG also being a member of the WST EG – messaging from the EG to the SACG and vice versa is further strengthened.

Review of the EG Terms of Reference (ToR)

In general, the ToR is very well written, comprehensive in its objectives giving a strong steer to the safeguarding professional and the lay person alike.

A comprehensive review of the ToR highlights the focus on the group's statutory responsibilities; there are clear routes to dispute resolution which in this case is the respective Chief Executives of each organisation. Each member has delegated authority and is able to act on behalf of their respective organisations and it is also clear in the overall aims (Section 2), of the ToR, that the EG are able to seek assurance and oversight on the work of the SACG providing support, challenge and direction. This is evidenced in the meeting minutes provided to the author.

Review of the Meeting Minutes

The EG meeting minutes suggest a well run and ordered group providing strong strategic direction to the SACG. It is a well attended group and is taken seriously as an important forum as illustrated by the regular attendance of either the Director of Adult Social Care / Director of Children's Services (CWC), Chief Nurse (WCCG) and Chief Superintendent (WMP) and the agenda is well structured. It is also clear that the communication channels to disseminate / receive information to / from the SACG is effective.

Feedback following *1 to 1* interviews

This section captures certain areas / points of discussion as fed back to the independent scrutineer with an acceptance that these areas are important to build upon within the EG.

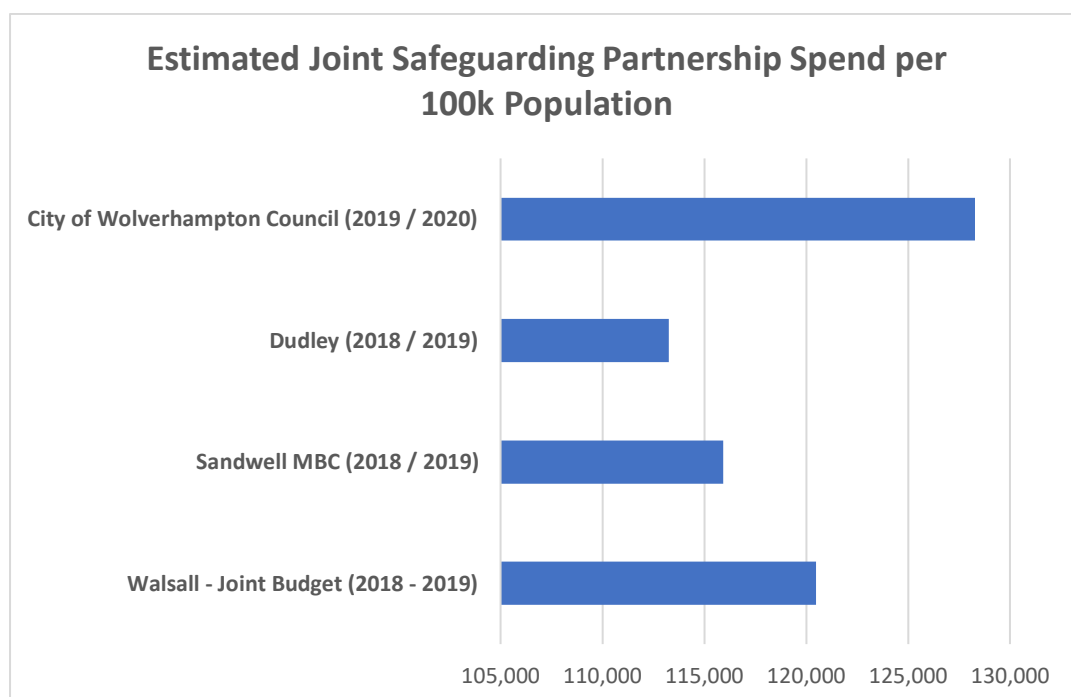1) **Joint Safeguarding Partnership - Budget**

It is noted that the bulk of the annual joint partnership safeguarding board budget is provided by the CWC with smaller contributions provided by health and police partners. This arrangement is not uncommon with other safeguarding arrangements across England.

However, since the *Care Act 2014* and the more recent Working Together 2018 statutory legislation, it is very explicit in that all partners are equally responsible for safeguarding activities / work and as such, funding should be more equitably split.

It is noted that the total WST Joint Safeguarding Partnership budget is £329,170 for 2019 / 2020 *(Source, N Preece, Feb 2021).* In Figure 1, a benchmark comparison was made via publicly available financial data against three (3) other West Midlands Safeguarding Partnership Boards and weighted via a 100,000 population. It is clear that per 100,000 population, CWC spend approximately £128k v's £113k spent by Dudley Council, which is the lowest spend per within this sample.

Figure 1

Estimated Joint Safeguarding Partnership Spend per 100k Population

Category	Value
City of Wolverhampton Council (2019 / 2020)	~128,000
Dudley (2018 / 2019)	~113,000
Sandwell MBC (2018 / 2019)	~116,000
Walsall - Joint Budget (2018 - 2019)	~120,500

Axis: 105,000 110,000 115,000 120,000 125,000 130,000

This is a clear positive message in that the WST partnership is well funded relative to local safeguarding peers, which is this case is an increase of 13.27% relative to the lowest safeguarding partnership in the sample (Dudley). Nevertheless, there is still a discussion which needs to be had with other statutory partners regarding equitable contributions. Figure 2 outlines the percentage split by the three statutory partners against the three sample local authorities.

Figure 2

Adults and Children's Safeguarding Board - % Total Budget Partner Split - 2018 / 2019
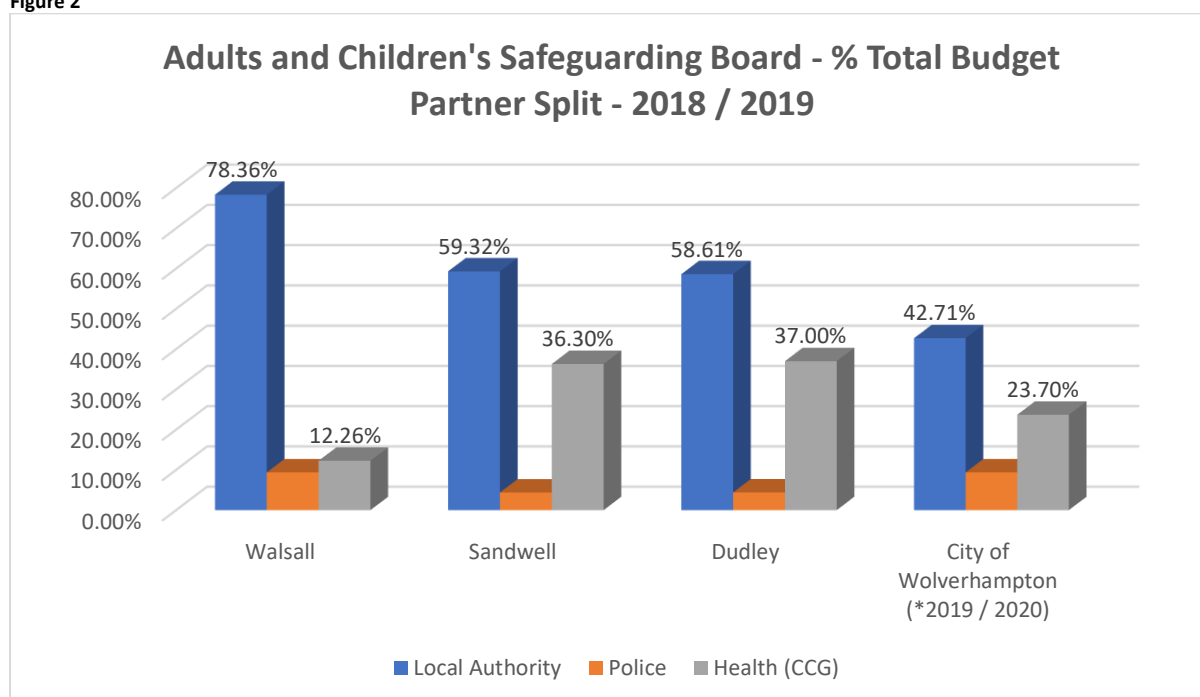
Whilst there are wide discrepancies across each safeguarding partnership, there is a prevailing theme that local authorities are the predominant contributor to the total safeguarding budget and that health typically are the second largest contributors. It is worth considering equality of funding arrangements between all three statutory partners.

Action – EG to discuss equality of funding arrangements with all statutory partners

2) **Challenge**

The very nature of a group of individuals who have worked together for a significant amount of time (in excess of 5 years), within the same forum, naturally leads to continuity, familiarity, friendship, trust and respect – these are important strengths. However, the very nature of safeguarding work requires professionals to challenge each other, particularly when outside their comfort zones; Independence of thought and action can be impeded when personal relationships are at stake – this is not to suggest that this is the case within the EG but best practice would suggest that outside input (excluding an independent scrutineer) may provide

fresh impetus / ideas and stimulate challenge. It is also noted that there are no elected members appointed to either the EG (or SACG) partnerships in order to provide further challenge to decisions made by the EG. However, it has been highlighted that there is a Safeguarding Assurance meeting which updates Cabinet / Elected members on the EG and SACG activities on a regular basis centred around progress, challenges and concerns. Cursory analysis of other safeguarding partnerships do highlight the membership of elected members within their safeguarding forums.

Action – EG to ascertain whether there could be scope to incorporate Cabinet / Elected members into the membership of either the EG or SACG

3) Governance Structure

The EG respondents have demonstrated that the governance structure in place does ensure that conflict and competing priorities can be managed at the right level and there was widespread and consistent feedback from all members.

The EG members were also clear that they had an escalation process in place to assist with dealing with partner conflicts and that this would be taken at chief executive level but they were unaware of this course of action being actioned in the last 3 years.

The work of the WST EG is fed into a number of internal governance processes within the local authority; the work of the WST is considered through councillor scrutiny processes, as well as through briefings to the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council and other Cabinet members through the relevant leadership meetings/transformation boards.

Action – No Action. Governance structure is very robust, fit for purpose and extremely effective

4) Transparency

Following a widespread search via both the WST website and the City of Wolverhampton Council website, publicly available minutes provided on EG meetings were not available. The author accepts that this is at the prerogative of the Chair and the EG. However, it was noted by a number of SACG respondents that there is a strong feeling that these minutes need to be shared with them and that potentially these could be made available on the WST website, dependent on appetite.

Action – EG to consider a) publishing the minutes on their website and b) disseminate the EG minutes for the attention of the SACG.

5) **Continuation of Programme Management Methodology**

It is very clear that the adoption of a programme manager for both the EG and the SACG has created a strong and robust structure with programme management oversight; this has also complemented and assisted the WST Partnership manager in completing their tasks. By having a project discipline within the groups, clear plans and the requirement to monitor against this plan, all groups are very effective forums. Both groups and sub groups have consequently become more productive and effective - the task and finish approach to carrying out pieces of work and having a clear mandate has proven to be invaluable to keeping on task and producing good outcomes. Currently, the business manager and the Programme Manager work across five days providing support to the partnerships.

Action – The EG should look to continue to support the partnership with both a programme manager and a business manager.

6) **Improved External Communication**

Whilst it is noted that the new WST website has been recently launched and provides excellent information, with the ability to report safeguarding concerns, feedback from a number of the EG members clearly felt that there was more scope to communicate the Group's work within the wider Wolverhampton community. To a certain extent, there has been enforced restrictions due to the Covid pandemic but there is a strong feeling that there needs to be more proactive engagement with vulnerable individuals through wider community engagement (e.g. community events on Safeguarding days, White Ribbon events etc).

Action – EG in conjunction with the SACG (Notably the Communities Engagement Group sub group) to plan wide ranging Safeguarding events within a number of communities.

SACG and Sub Groups – 360 Findings

The SACG is a recently established multi agency partnership group formerly known as both the Adult Safeguarding Board and the Children's Safeguarding Board. It also has up to seven (7) sub-groups:- Communities and Engagement; Early Help and Prevention - Priority group;

Exploitation- Priority group; Learning and Improvement; Mental Health- Priority group; One Panel as well as an Education Providers Safeguarding Group.

These groups report directly into the SACG. Despite being a relatively new group, the responses from all *1 to 1* interviewees and from the *bite sized* workshops of the seven (7) sub groups have been extremely positive.

A number of direct statements made during the *1 to 1* interviews have been quoted below, demonstrating the positive feedback from members.

"The SACG is a very active group and is made up of people with a passion for the work that they do – this is clear from the conversations, actions and outcomes from the meetings that I have attended." (Non statutory member of the WST SACG).

"We have regular meetings and there is excellent partnership working, with good relationships, leading to open, honest, transparent and good communication" (Statutory member of the WST SACG)

However, there were a number of comments and concerns, distilled into a number of themes below. There are strong and positive relationships between all members in the group and there is an overwhelming feeling that the governance arrangements in place are robust and effective with members knowing where to escalate concern(s) to senior safeguarding partners within the EG.

The three statutory partners (City of Wolverhampton Council, Wolverhampton CCG and West Midlands Police) worked particularly well together and this has been highlighted in the responses received from their representatives.

Nevertheless, there were a number of recurring themes in the *1 to 1* feedback sessions outlined and grouped below where further improvements could be made:

7) **Theme 1 – Non-Statutory members of WST SACG Feedback**

There was an appreciation by all members of the effective hard work that all three of the statutory partners contributed but a small number of non-statutory partners felt less engaged and that potentially they had more capacity to undertake more safeguarding work on behalf of the partnership.

Action – Initiate an online survey (via Survey Monkey) to all members of the SACG and SACG SG's around skill mixes and identify what all partners could contribute.

8) **Theme 2 – That Safeguarding 'language' of the SACG can be challenging to non-Safeguarding Professionals**

Some of this was linked to a belief that "safeguarding language was quite challenging at times", especially to non-safeguarding professionals. From time to time, safeguarding discussions were challenging to follow for the non-safeguarding professionals and it was understandable as the statutory partners had at times a great volume of information to discuss, digest and make prompt decisions on.

Action - Definition of Safeguarding terms to be provided with every set of minutes.

9) **Theme 3 - Workload not shared equally by all members of the group**

There was overwhelming feedback from a number of partners that the workload seemed to sit with the "same old individuals, month after month". To a certain extent, this can be quite challenging to change as there are statutory requirements for certain partners to meet and so it is not always possible to task other partner agencies with certain workloads. Nevertheless, it was a general comment by a number of individuals that some of the actions / workloads should be more equitably spread to other partners, wherever possible.

Action - Supplement skill mix – Develop a matrix relating to the contribution of each party towards the SACG. Define tasks to complete and hours to be matched with partner hours committed, skills, hours to completion etc. This will provide the basis for conversations with all partners.

10) **Theme 4 – Consistent Quality Control of Safeguarding data and Utilising Data from other Safeguarding Partners**

A number of partners felt that they had data sources which, as yet, had not been fully explored and that could be utilised by the SACG in improving safeguarding priorities. The independent scrutineer did not receive sight of any of this information but it was felt that this could be reviewed by the statutory partners to see if further value could be obtained. Additionally, some safeguarding data is currently provided to the partnership which may not have gone through the same rigorous quality control internally prior to external publication. The Chair of the SACG partnership may need to review this as part of their ongoing review.

Action – Explore additional sources of data as well as quality control current data provided to the SACG review.

11) Theme 5 – WST website – *"Information rich but challenging to find information"*

The dedicated WST website (Home - Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together) is a recent 'one stop shop' enhancement to communicating to the people of Wolverhampton, safeguarding information / reports for Adults and Children. It is a very useful repository both for citizens as well as safeguarding professionals within Wolverhampton with important links to policies, procedures, the reporting of suspected safeguarding issues and other documents, training and safeguarding events / campaigns which Wolverhampton focused their attentions on.

What was fed back to the scrutineer was the difficulty in finding safeguarding information, which was described as "clunky" via the search engine and sometimes required memory as to where the information was held, not necessarily in the logical place as per the headings on the website.

Action – A review of key safeguarding information and its location on the WST website

12) Theme 6 – Lack of City of Wolverhampton Voice within SACG – *Experts by Experience*

There was a consistent message from a large majority of interviewees in that there was not enough input from *Experts by Experience*. It was acknowledged that it had proved extremely challenging to encourage those with real life experiences to participate in the formal safeguarding structures but that it was invaluable that children, young people, adults their families and supporters had input into these groups. It was suggested that more creative solutions should be explored to encourage this.

Action – Need to engage with *Experts by Experience*; a planned approach is required for some form of feedback into the groups (Comms and Engagement and the main SACG)

WST SACG Sub Groups – General Comment(s)

The subgroups of the previous Board arrangements were reviewed as part of the development of the new Partnership arrangements and a new structure of subgroups was put in place, as described above.

All ToR's were reviewed / evaluated and these were well constructed, robust and fit for purpose. There was a strong sense of partnership between agencies, good co-operation and working relationships at strategic and operational level noted throughout the review. Subgroups were well attended with the right representation at the right level.

13) Creation of new adhoc Sub Group(s)

As part of the new safeguarding partnership arrangements, there is the ability to create a temporary new sub-group to meet any new WST SACG requirements. This is a strong and proactive method of resolving issues outside of the WST SACG structures.

Action – No Action required

14) Covid-19

There has been considerable positive work undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic which has put all services under significant pressure but the strength of the partnership and working together has supported these new ways of working and the coordinated responses to children, young people, adults and families in Wolverhampton. The virtual nature of meetings and training has shown great participation and engagement.

Action – Consider commissioning external review /peer review to assess the WST EG / WST SACG Covid response

Conclusions - WST EG / WST SACG / WST SACG SG

The composite recommendations stated in the table below are recommended easy to view actions as outlined in the main body of the report which the respective Groups may wish to consider and implement following the independent scrutineers' analysis.

In summary, the WST EG is an effective group which provides strong leadership and challenge both to its constituent members, as well as the SACG. There is also clear strategic direction and oversight for the WST SACG; it has clear lines of governance where all members understand the process should disputes arise. Members have comprehensive levels of safeguarding knowledge and practice. Data is in the main correctly utilised in order to oversee decisions. However, the WST EG and WST SACG do require more external input from the wider Wolverhampton community – it is notable that there is no representation from the wider Wolverhampton community on the SACG.

Composite Recommendations

Action	Group
Health (CCG) and Police (West Midlands Police) gradually increase their contribution over next two years to ensure equality of funding.	WST Executive Group
The continuation of the Business Manager and Programme Manager structure providing robust arrangements for both groups. The EG should look to review this arrangement in the future.	WST Executive Group / WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co Ordination Group
EG in conjunction with the SACG (Notably the Communities Engagement Group sub group) to plan wide ranging Safeguarding events within a number of communities.	WST Executive Group / WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co Ordination Group
EG to ascertain whether there could be scope to incorporate Cabinet / Elected members into the membership of either the EG or SACG	WST Executive Group
EG to consider a) publishing the minutes on their website and b) disseminate the EG minutes for the attention of the SACG.	WST Executive Group
Initiate an online survey (via Survey Monkey) to all members of the SACG and SACG SG's around skill mixes and identify what all partners could contribute	WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co Ordination Group and all 7 sub groups
Workload not shared equally by all members of the group. A more equal and effective mechanism to be employed to distribute tasks.	WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co Ordination Group
Definition of Safeguarding terms to be provided with every set of minutes.	WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co Ordination Group and all 7 sub groups
Supplement skill mix – Develop a matrix relating to the contribution of each party towards the SACG. Define tasks to complete and hours to be matched with agency hours committed, skills, hours to completion etc. This will provide the basis for conversations with all partners.	WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co Ordination Group
Explore additional sources of data as well as quality control current data provided to the SACG review	WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co Ordination Group

Need to engage with *Experts by Experience*; a planned approach is required for some form of feedback into the groups (Comms and Engagement and the main SACG)	WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co Ordination Group
A review of key safeguarding information and its location on the WST website	WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co Ordination Group
Consider commissioning external review /peer review to assess the WST EG / WST SACG Covid response	WST Executive Group

APPENDIX A – Standard *1 to 1* Questions to Members of the Executive Group posed during January 2021

1)   Does your organisation communicate effectively internally the priorities of the WST partnership and how does it do it?

2)   How do you deal with conflict of interest, organisation priorities or challenges that compromise relationships?

3)   Do you have delegated authority to make decisions on behalf of your organisation?

4)   Does the work of WST partnership feed into any other internal Boards/governance within your organisation?

5)   What works really well?

6)   What improvements could be made?

APPENDIX B – Standard *1 to 1* Questions to Members of the WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co-ordination Group completed between 4 September and 30 September 2020

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been a member of the WST Scrutiny and in what remit?

2. What are the challenges from your perspective?

3. Does the scrutiny sets clear direction that aligns with strategy for WST?

4. Does your organisation communicate internally with the requirements of WST's strategic direction and how do you do this?

5. Does the WST Scrutiny have the facilitation to listen to your organisations concerns/success stories and how does it do this?

6. What data / methods of service quality do you provide and does this cause any challenges?

7. Does your organisation receive helpful and constructive feedback from WST Scrutiny?

8. What does the governance feel like for you as a member?

9. Tell me about what is working really well?

10. Tell me of any improvements you feel could be made?

APPENDIX C – Standard 1 to 1 Questions to Scrutiny and Assurance Co-ordination SUB GROUPS (Bite sized workshops) posed between 4 September and 31 October 2020

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been a member of the WST Scrutiny and in what remit?

2. What are the challenges from your perspective?

3. Does the scrutiny sets clear direction that aligns with strategy for WST?

4. Does your organisation communicate internally with the requirements of WST's strategic direction and how do you do this?

5. Does the WST Scrutiny have the facilitation to listen to your organisations concerns/success stories and how does it do this?

6. What data / methods of service quality do you provide and does this cause any challenges?

7. Does your organisation receive helpful and constructive feedback from WST Scrutiny?

8. What does the governance feel like for you as a member?

9. Tell me about what is working really well?

10. Tell me of any improvements you feel could be made?

APPENDIX D – Documentation Provided / Reviewed

- Wolverhampton – 2019 / 2020. *Safeguarding Together – Our arrangements for Safeguarding Children and Young people in Wolverhampton.* Wolverhampton_Safeguarding_Together_document_FINAL.pdf
- Meeting Minutes – Executive Group
- Meeting Minutes – Scrutiny Assurance and Co-ordination Group
- Terms of Reference (ToR) – Executive Group
- Terms of Reference (ToR) – Scrutiny and Assurance Co-ordination Group
- Adult Safeguarding. Multi-agency policy & procedures for the protection of adults with care & support needs in the West Midlands.WM_Adult_Safeguarding_PP_v20_Nov_2019.pdf (safeguardingwarwickshire.co.uk)
- *1 to 1* Interview transcripts – WST Executive Group members; WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co-ordination Group; WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co-ordination Group – 6 sub groups Exploitation; Early Help and Prevention; Mental Health; One Panel Leads; Learning and Improvement; Community and Engagement; Education Provider Safeguarding Group

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