

Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny: Safeguarding children partnership arrangements

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Note: Those familiar with the background context for statutory safeguarding children arrangements please go straight to Section Four 'The Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny: Safeguarding children partnership arrangements' (page 6) and Section Five 'Guidance for using the Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny: Safeguarding children partnership arrangements' (page 8).

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Section 1: Introduction

This paper emerges from the author's independent consideration of scrutiny of safeguarding children partnerships under the new arrangements for safeguarding children as outlined in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (DfE, 2018). The author holds sole responsibility for the contents of the paper. The Six Steps model (Section 4, page 6) can be adapted in any way needed, extending or reducing the number of steps and extending or reducing the number of questions in each step. If it is adapted, please reference as: 'Adapted from Pearce, J (2019) *Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny: Safeguarding children arrangements*. Institute of Applied Social Research, Luton, University of Bedfordshire'.

This paper provides:

- a brief overview of the background to the current requirements for Independent Scrutiny of multi-agency safeguarding children arrangements (Section 2)
- commentary on recent reviews of current arrangements for Independent Scrutiny (Section 3)
- a suggested standalone: Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny of local safeguarding children partnership arrangements (Section 4)
- a short guidance for use of the Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny of local safeguarding children partnership arrangements (Section 5)
- a list of questions that may help in developing understanding of the context for Independent Scrutiny (Section 6)
- references (Section 7).

Section 2: The context to the current requirements for Independent Scrutiny of multi-agency safeguarding children arrangements

The Wood Review 2016

In 2016, the Department for Education (England) published the ‘Wood Report: Review of the Role and Functions of Local Safeguarding Children Boards’ (DfE, 2016). In his executive summary Wood notes the case for ‘fundamental reform’ of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs), ‘...based on a widely held view that LSCBs, for a variety of reasons, are not sufficiently effective...’. He notes need for a higher degree of confidence that the strategic multi-agency arrangements ‘...are fit for purpose, consistently reliable and able to ensure children are being protected effectively’ (Wood 2016: 5-6). Wood refers to research identifying lack of clarity of the role of the LSCB, with varying levels of effectiveness often ‘...determined to the ability of the LSCB Chair’ (Baginsky and Holmes, 2015, in Wood 2016: 12-13). Wood advocated ‘...replacing the existing arrangements for the LSCB with...strategic multi-agency arrangements for child protection...key agencies being health, the police and local government’ (Wood, 2016: 7).

The Children and Social Work Act, 2017, and the DfE guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to interagency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, 2018.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 embedded these recommendations into legislation, abolishing LSCBs and introducing multi-agency safeguarding children arrangements with three partner leads:

- a. the local authority;
- b. a clinical commissioning group for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area;
- c. the chief officer of police for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area (DfE, 2018: Chapter 3, paragraph 5).

In addition, it established a National Child Safeguarding Practice review panel and gave responsibility for child death reviews to new Child Death Review partners. The three partner leads are to agree safeguarding budgets and plans for the local areas they represent. The multi-agency arrangements are to be independently scrutinized. The guidance commits five paragraphs to explaining how scrutiny could take place (DfE, 2018: Paragraphs 31 to 35). It notes that (bold my insertion):

- 31. The role of independent scrutiny is to **provide assurance in judging the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in a local area**, including arrangements to identify and review serious child safeguarding cases. This independent scrutiny will be part of a wider system which includes the independent inspectorates' single assessment of the individual safeguarding partners and the Joint Targeted Area Inspections
- 32. Whilst the decision on how best to implement a robust system of independent scrutiny is to be made locally, **safeguarding partners should ensure that the scrutiny is objective, acts as a constructive critical friend and promotes reflection** to drive continuous improvement
- 33. The independent scrutineer should **consider how effectively the arrangements are working for children and families as well as for practitioners**, and how well the safeguarding partners are providing strong leadership and agree with the safeguarding partners how this will be reported
- 34. The published arrangements should **set out the plans for independent scrutiny; how the arrangements will be reviewed; and how any recommendations will be taken forward**. This might include, for example, the process and timescales for ongoing review of the arrangements
- 35. Safeguarding partners should also agree **arrangements for independent scrutiny of the report they must publish at least once a year**.

In addition, 'relevant agencies' are to be included in implementing safeguarding plans (details are published in UK Government (2018) available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2018/789/made>). The DfE allocated funding for local authorities to bid to be an 'early adopter' of the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including early adoption of Independent Scrutiny. Seventeen areas were funded as early adopters and the National Children's Bureau (NCB) was appointed to work with them to share learning and offer peer and national implementation support.

Section 3: Learning about Independent Scrutiny from the 'Early Adopters of Multi-agency Safeguarding Children Partnership Arrangements' report

At the time of writing, the NCB have published lessons from early adopters within an interim report (Bennett et al, 2018), available at: <https://www.ncb.org.uk/resources-publications/resources/safeguarding-early-adopters-interim-report>

The report shows wide variation in **how scrutiny is taking place**, with some areas

- employing one independent scrutineer for their local area safeguarding children partnership
- planning to appoint more than one scrutineer, with responsibility for different aspects of the multi-agency partnership arrangements
- sharing one independent scrutineer with other local area safeguarding partnerships
- creating service-user informed approach to independent scrutiny, with family led multi-agency auditing and local reviews
- instigating peer review processes with neighbouring partnerships: peers scrutinizing each other
- creating a system of internal peer reviews within the area covered by the partnership arrangements
- buying in 'national experts' to scrutinize particular aspects of the partnership arrangements, safeguarding plan and implementation
- combining scrutiny of children and adult safeguarding through a governance and assurance model that provides a whole family response, combining a strategic approach to safeguarding partnership arrangements across children and adult safeguarding agendas
- focusing independent scrutiny on partnership priorities
- giving scrutineers specifically targeted responsibility to resolve conflict as the final arbiter of the escalation processes and for dispute resolution (should it be necessary) between the safeguarding leads.

(See Bennett et al, 2018: pages 13 and 14 for specific details and Section 6, page 9 below).

The report identifies **three key considerations** for local authorities who are developing arrangements for scrutiny:

- how the scrutiny work of the partnership adds value to the independent scrutiny processes already in place in individual agencies
- how the scrutiny functions undertake quality assurance across the safeguarding work of the partnership
- what training and support may be required for all involved.

In addition to the above, reference to Ofsted inspections of LSCBs (2011); Munro and France's evaluation of LSCBs (2012); an NSPCC review of LSCBs (McElearney and Cunningham, 2016); the Association of Independent LSCB Chairs' Review of Ofsted LSCB Inspection Reports (2016) and other related research (Beckett et al, 2017) provide lessons for good safeguarding practice from the past. These include the need for:

- awareness of how the wider political and economic context influences the development of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- strong leadership facilitating ongoing positive partnership relationships
- focus on developing a learning versus a compliance culture
- shared and transparent discussion of what 'good outcomes for children' are, engaging with the child's voice in the process
- awareness that good processes are needed to ensure good outcomes (while the focus is on improving outcomes for children, the enabling processes needed to achieve this needs to be effective)
- awareness of the full range of partners in 'contextual safeguarding' www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk of older children outside the home, including local business and private sector providers
- shared resourcing of leadership of partnership meetings and sub-group activities
- effective resourcing of the infrastructure underpinning safeguarding activities: allocating resources to ensure multi agency training takes place; reviews take place to assess effective engagement with front line staff; emerging concerns are identified and communicated; audits are undertaken; actions are tracked and delivery held to account and records are available for review and inspection.

(For further details, see Section 6, page 9 below).

Section 4: Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny: Safeguarding children partnership arrangements

The three core partner leads are actively involved in strategic planning and implementation	The wider safeguarding partners (including relevant agencies) are actively involved in safeguarding children	Children, young people and families are aware of and involved with plans for safeguarding children	Appropriate quality assurance procedures are in place for data collection, audit and information sharing	There is a process for identifying and investigating learning from local and national case reviews	There is an active program of multi-agency safeguarding children training
Have the three partners agreed a process for developing, reviewing and funding a child centred strategic safeguarding children plan: identifying agreed desired outcomes in line with national guidelines and recent research findings, including contextual safeguarding?	Is the wider safeguarding children partnership, including all relevant agencies and the private and business sector, appropriately informed of and engaged with the safeguarding children partnership arrangements and safeguarding children plan?	Are children and young people consulted, inputting into, and influencing the development, implementation and review of the safeguarding plan and related activities?	Are mechanisms in place for the three core partners to collect and analyse relevant data pertaining to safeguarding children?	Are all safeguarding partners aware of the criteria and process for referral of cases for consideration of meeting the threshold for local or national review?	Is there a transparent and clearly understood process for identifying, providing and evaluating training needs for safeguarding children with all safeguarding partners, including children, families and communities?
Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green
Are representatives of the three lead partners strategically	Is the wider safeguarding children partnership	Is there an outreach (engagement) strategy to ensure that those	Are agencies from the wider partnership	Are case reviews adequately resourced to enhance learning,	Is the planning and delivery of multi-agency training informed by the

placed on relevant partnership meetings, sub groups, and working groups, reviewing progress against the questions within this 'Six Steps' model?	research informed and adhering to national guidelines regarding issues impacting on safeguarding children, including contextual safeguarding?	impacted most by safeguarding concerns are aware of their right to be safeguarded and to play a part in developing initiatives to prevent, respond to and report about safeguarding threats?	undertaking and sharing their own audits of data pertaining to safeguarding children?	to embrace contextual as well as individual and family concerns and to involve the full range of personnel to extract learning?	local safeguarding children plan; review of local data; local and national policy; legislative contexts; and up to date research findings?
Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green
Are the three partners assured that the safeguarding children partnership works effectively alongside other partnerships: for example the safeguarding adults board; community safety partnership; health and wellbeing board?	Are all safeguarding partners engaging with safeguarding children information sharing and staff training protocols?	Are opportunities in place for children and young people to lead or co-lead safeguarding initiatives; safeguarding training for adults and children; and attending relevant meetings, working groups, and sub groups?	Is all relevant data from within the core and wider partnership being used to review the impact of safeguarding initiatives on desired outcomes for children?	Is learning from reviews being cascaded and used to improve outcomes for children, their families and community?	Is the take up and use of safeguarding children training reviewed in both core and wider partnership agencies including take up and use of training by children, young people and communities?
Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green

Are necessary reporting and scrutiny processes in place, with review of required outcomes, and forward planning procedures?	Are all safeguarding partners engaged with identifying and reviewing safeguarding children priorities: facilitating safeguarding concerns up to and down from the three lead partners?	Do young people play a role in assessing and representing safeguarding concerns in their transition to adult services?	Is all relevant data shared across the partnership and used to inform: an assessment of gaps in data, identification of priorities, and future safeguarding plans?	Is there evidence of the integration of learning from case reviews into future training, policy and practice for safeguarding children, young people and communities?	Are the core partners assessing the impact of safeguarding children training (impact on practice and desired safeguarding outcomes) and using this to inform future training needs?
Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green	Red/Amber/Green
Actions	Actions	Actions	Actions	Actions	Actions

Section Five: Guidance for using the Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny: Safeguarding children partnership arrangements

This Six Steps model can be adapted in any way needed, extending or reducing the number of steps and extending or reducing the number of questions in each step. If it is adapted, please reference as: 'Adapted from Pearce, J (2019) *Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny: Safeguarding children arrangements*. Institute of Applied Social Research, Luton, University of Bedfordshire'.

The Six Steps model can be used by the multi-agency safeguarding partners and/or by independent scrutineers as a model for

- the safeguarding partnership and/or independent scrutineer(s) to structure their scrutiny
- the three core partners to engage with a self-assessment exercise in preparation for independent scrutiny
- the wider range of safeguarding partners to assess their engagement and activity with safeguarding children initiatives.

Each question in each of the six steps can be answered with

Green: a positive affirmation that the question can be answered with evidence to illustrate the positive response

Amber: acknowledgement that some parts of the question can be answered positively (with evidence to illustrate the positive response) but that there is still work to be done for full positive affirmation

Red: it is not possible to confirm that any part of the question can be answered with a positive response.

Any response (green, amber or red) will still require an action plan to ensure reaching and maintaining desired outcomes.

Section Six: Context questions for Independent Scrutiny

The questions below are for consideration by the three partner leads and the independent scrutineer(s) when developing Independent Scrutiny arrangements: either when safeguarding partners are considering self-assessment (self-scrutiny) or scrutiny by independent scrutineer(s).

Questions for three safeguarding children partner leads to consider for using the Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny of multi-agency safeguarding children arrangements	Answers to questions
Who employs the independent scrutineer(s), who do they report to (including in public to scrutiny committees?) and how often?	
Is it clear what the scrutineer(s) are scrutinizing?	
If there is more than one independent scrutineer, how is the relationship between them managed (do scrutineers share their observations with each other; how are the scrutineer findings amalgamated; do scrutineers have a contribution to make to this amalgamation)?	
What is the process for the three partners to use if they have concerns about the work of the independent scrutineer(s)?	
If the scrutineer(s) is given responsibility for resolving conflict as final arbiter within the safeguarding children partnership, how is this to be managed, who is this reported to and over what time line?	
Is scrutiny focused on outcomes for children as well as processes to achieve these outcomes?	

What does 'critical friend' mean? Is the scrutineer somewhere between being an inspector and a friend?	
Does the scrutineer chair any partnerships meetings? How is independence maintained if a scrutineer also chairs meetings?	
How is information created through independent scrutiny to be used in inspections of any of the core and wider safeguarding partners?	
Is each question posted in the Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny to be answered by all or some of the safeguarding partners?	
How often do partners answer these questions within a process of self-scrutiny?	
How often do the independent scrutineer(s) ask the questions and assess responses?	
Where is the information from the consideration of the questions gathered and stored?	
Who has access to this information and for what purpose?	
How is the information gathered to be incorporated into annual reporting?	
At what stage does the independent scrutineer(s) or scrutiny processes have access to drafts of the Local Partnership for Safeguarding Children annual report?	
What contribution does the independent scrutineer(s) make to the production of the Local Partnership for safeguarding children annual report?	
Do independent scrutineers have a national reference point and how is local scrutiny informed by / influencing the national agendas for safeguarding children?	

Section Seven: References

Association of Independent LSCB Chairs (2016) *Review of OFSTED LSCB Inspection Reports*. <https://www.norfolkscb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/201610-OCT16-AILC-Ofsted-Analysis-5th-Report.pdf>

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