



Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership

Annual Report 2019 -2020

Report of the Independent Chair/Scrutineer

1. BACKGROUND

The arrangements to create a (local) Safeguarding Children Partnership are set out in Statutory Guidance, Working Together 2018, and Chapter 3 alongside the requirement for Statutory Partners to establish independent arrangements for scrutiny and to report annually on the effectiveness of the Partnership

One requirement of the Statutory Partners is to produce an Annual Report. The purpose of this report is to provide the comment of the Independent Chair /Scrutineer on the SSCP Annual Report, which is also a requirement of the Statutory Guidance.

The Annual Report explains the reasons why, on this occasion, it covers an extended period up to 31 December 2020. Given the reporting timetable to the Health and Wellbeing Board I have taken the opportunity to make a small number of further comments based on the continued progress of the Partnership's work.

2. SSCP ARRANGEMENTS & GOVERNANCE

The Statutory Partners responded positively to the change in guidance and consulted widely in their preparation of Governance arrangements for the new Surrey Safeguarding Partnership which subsequently came into operation from September 2019. At that point the need to significantly develop and improve the arrangements of the former LSCB was recognised and addressed.

The Partners also recognised the opportunity to support the County Council in its Improvement Programme for Childrens Service's and, following consultation with the Department for Education, agreed to undertake the function of the Ofsted Priority Action Board (OPAB).

Responsibility for the Partnership rests clearly with the 3 Statutory Partners. However, their clear ambition was to recognise the importance of the potential contributions to

safeguarding of Schools and Education providers, District and Borough Councils and the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner; all of whom have been included in the SSCP's extended leadership arrangements

Careful thought has gone into broader representation of 'relevant partners' covering a very wide range of safeguarding interests. This is supported by governance arrangements which enable a full contribution through the representative 'Forum' structure, clearly set out in the Partnership Governance arrangements. In this regard a very welcome and encouraging feature is the Forum which enables the very large, energetic and diverse Third Sector of voluntary and community agencies to have increasing influence over the direction of strategy and quality of practice in regard to safeguarding.

The function, role and purpose of the Partnership is clear and strategic priorities for the first year have driven the work of the Partnership and are clearly set out in the 'Arrangements document' and Annual Report. Each of the strategic priorities is aligned as a particular work stream and assigned to a formal Sub-Group, chaired at senior level and accountable to the Executive.

The SSCP's Priorities are regularly monitored through a Business Group and are broadly on track with any delay being accountable and well managed. The senior leadership arrangements help ensure that drift does not occur. (Given the timing of this report it is also possible to confirm that in light of experience these arrangements and strategic priorities have been appropriately reviewed, updated and published.)

It is important to ensure that where Partners carry statutory responsibilities for safeguarding, they are comfortable with the arrangements for representation. This has been an area of careful scrutiny and confirmed to be satisfactory and proportionate, including through the findings of a Peer Review.

However, equally importantly it is clear that the extended leadership arrangements have created a far greater opportunity to realise the contribution and support of Schools and Education providers, District and Borough Councils and the sustained support of the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner

The SSCP Arrangements and Governance are therefore seen to be inclusive and fit for purpose.

3. SCRUTINY PROCESS

Whilst the guidance is clear that the scrutiny process should be subject to local determination, it is expected to be '*objective, act as a constructive critical friend and promote reflection to drive continuous improvement.*' It is expected that the Independent Scrutiny element be part of wider arrangements that include regulation and inspection and have a focus on impact for young people and their families.

In the event the Partnership has set in place thorough arrangements to ensure that ongoing scrutiny is challenging and constructive, including:

- Appointment of an Independent Chair and Scrutineer with a role to continually challenge and reflect
- Peer Review undertaken by Isles of Scilly and Cornwall Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Co-operation with the Surrey County Council Select Committee for Overview and Scrutiny
- Reference to regulation and Inspection
- Undertaking the function of the Ofsted Priority Action Board
- Case review process and relationship with (national) Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel
- Learning from Practice and performance scrutiny
- Escalation process

The Partnership has rightly taken the view that ongoing scrutiny is a continuous activity that needs to be focused over any period of time. There is acknowledgement that the scrutiny process needs further development, and this will be supported as a priority of the Partnership Development Team in consultation with the Independent Chair and Statutory Partners.

Sensibly, the Partners have agreed that the approach needs to be focussed and have resisted the temptation to 'try and do everything'. The focus of scrutiny and challenge throughout this first reporting period (and beyond) has been on activity related to assurance on governance arrangements and addressing strategic priorities. Some illustrations include:

Case Review - A complete review of commissioning and management arrangements for case reviews, which are now considered effective and fit for purpose (see also more detailed comments below)

Governance - Arrangements are now in place that have been validated through internal consultation and review within the Partnership and also through an Independent Peer Review undertaken by Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Safeguarding Partnership

Inspection - Aside from the ongoing commitment to support the Children's Service improvement programme through OPAB, the Executive has also held to account the improvement programme following the report of HMI Probation in 2019, culminating in the de-escalation of Surrey by the Youth Justice Board from Priority Status.

Work is also underway to gather information relating to the inspection of schools and children's residential homes which will form part of the focus for the coming year, albeit it remains necessary to determine a clearer programme of inspection activity related to other Partner services .

Performance - whilst the Partnership does not assume direct management responsibility for any services, it is expected to have an overview and capacity to challenge performance that may indicate risk. To that end the Partnership, with particular support from Surrey County Council, has made good progress in agreeing a multi-agency data set that gives an indication of performance with a bias toward safeguarding. This has enabled the partnership to receive regular exception reports, where there may be pressures building in services and the capacity to comment, challenge and where necessary encourage change and improvement.

Through OPAB activity, the Partnership has also been able to access and comment upon casework audit activity and through the Learning from Practice Group, a programme of multi-agency audits is in place.

Through the Children Act 2004 (section 11) and Education Act 2002 (sections 157/175) there are statutory responsibilities to provide safeguarding assurance and in Surrey this is achieved through a bi-annual audit process which is commissioned and accountable to the SSCP. This is a self-assessment process which is well managed, subject to moderation, and was reported to the SSCP in July 2021.

Escalation Arrangements - The challenges facing many families are becoming increasingly complex, and safeguarding is substantially reliant on effective partnership working. When assessing levels of need and vulnerability, it is vitally important to utilise the skills, knowledge and perspectives of all agencies who may be involved in some way. However, from time to time, there will be occasions when agencies (and indeed families) are unable to agree on the best and most appropriate way forward. It is important, therefore, that clear and swift arrangements are in place to resolve such disagreements and ensure that families' needs are recognised and appropriately met.

Challenge - As Independent Chair and Scrutineer, I have been encouraged to challenge and promote reflection. Whilst this has become an integral style and culture of the Partnership, it is also evidenced through particular challenges on 'legacy cases', contact levels and mental health services, all of which are well documented.

The SSCP has therefore put in place arrangements which are intended to ensure that disagreements can be resolved in the minimum time necessary albeit they have not yet been sufficiently tested to determine a level of effectiveness. This remains a challenge to all Partners to utilise the arrangements in the interests of those families with whom they work.

4. CASE REVIEW

Unfortunately, the SSCP inherited a significant backlog of case reviews at various stages of completion, and where it was clear the arrangements for both commissioning and management was in urgent need of review

As can be seen in the Annual Report, this challenge was taken extremely seriously within SSCP and in respect to the families concerned, all partners quickly agreed to a completely renewed culture for the management and the conduct of case reviews.

This required a significant commitment from all of those Partners with leadership responsibilities concerned with the work of the Case Review Group. At the time of reporting, the backlog has been addressed and all outstanding case reviews completed, including consultation with the families concerned.

Arrangements are now in place to ensure that any future cases that require this level of review will be addressed swiftly and without unnecessary delay.

However, the SSCP did recognise that the backlog also represented a unique opportunity to derive a substantial degree of learning, and to improve practice across the Partnership. This work has largely been taken forward through the Learning from Practice Group and has resulted in improved management information, changes to procedures and practice, and additional focussed training. This work has also influenced the strategic priorities of the SSCP but, most importantly, also resulted in the commissioning of two important Thematic Reports concerned with a case review findings and separately adolescent suicide. These reports were published by the Partnership in September 2020, and particularly in the case of the latter have been instrumental in driving change to the culture and accessibility of mental health services in Surrey.

A significant lever in the delivery of this important responsibility, has been the revised approach to case review set out in statutory guidance alongside the introduction of a 'Rapid Review' process which requires initial reviews to be completed within 15 days. In Surrey, this deadline has been consistently met in all cases considered. The arrangements are supported through national oversight of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (CSPRP) where a helpful and open dialogue has emerged, giving SSCP credibility in managing this activity. CSPRP has recognised the quality of work undertaken to address the initial difficulty and has been complimentary about the thematic reports and the approach taken by the Partnership.

However, the SSCP still face a major challenge which is to ensure that the learning from past and current reviews can be consistently embedded into practice and make a real difference in helping keep children and young people in Surrey safe. This will remain an ongoing and accountable priority for the Partnership with a commitment to reporting evidence of change.

Looking forward, an important development is the commitment to work alongside the Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board and all Community Safety Partnerships to ensure that learning can be aggregated alongside the findings from Serious Adult Reviews and Domestic Homicide Reviews, respectively.

It is also important to include the messages emerging from the Child Death Overview Panel –which remains consistently well led and supported. This panel is required to publish an annual report in its own right which can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.surreyscp.org.uk/documents/surrey-cdop-report/>

5. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT

The Annual Report gives a detailed account of Childrens Service Improvement, which has been closely monitored by SSCP through its discharge of the OPAB responsibility. There is good support for the Effective Family Resilience Model and all Partners regard Early Help as a cornerstone in supporting families with particular needs.

The report makes clear that a great deal of work has been undertaken to enable a shared view of levels of need and to harmonise understanding and recognition in areas such as neglect. However, these approaches are not yet consistent and remain a feature of the improvement programme.

Similarly, whilst progress has been reported in the amalgamation of the Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) and the Learners' Single Point of Access (L-SPA) –the C-SPA continues to operate alongside the Police led P-SPA. This is a potential weakness in current arrangements and represents a consideration in regard to a safe pace of change to local arrangements. However, I am pleased to be able to report that aligned to consideration of contact levels into C-SPA, this is under the close consideration of senior leadership teams.

Through its performance and quality arrangements, alongside OPAB responsibility, the report outlines the continuing improvement of Childrens Services in Surrey. This is further evidenced through the positive messages received through the periodic Ofsted Monitoring visits to which the SSCP has access. However, as evidenced through the variations in tracking the numbers of children on child protection plans, it is not entirely clear what the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic has been. However, the arrangements to ensure correct decision making are far more robust and managers are clear that where child protection plans are in place, they are indeed appropriate and necessary.

It is perhaps unrealistic to consider that all partners will be entirely agreed on all aspects of practice and delivery. However, there now exists a strong and co-operative culture within the Partnership that enables contentious issues to be identified and considered in a constructive way. This is no better illustrated than through the positivity in the Mental Health Partnership Board in tackling the immense challenges presented through escalating levels of mental health –a national as well as local challenge.

6. COVID-19

The SSCP responded swiftly to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and through its Executive initiated regular weekly then fortnightly meetings with a focus on safeguarding assurance. These meetings proactively sought to identify emerging risk to safeguarding across all sectors and to ensure local resilience arrangements were able to take into account safeguarding concerns as they emerged. Particular concerns included the building pressures in all services and ability to maintain frontline capacity. This challenge was exacerbated by the need to find different ways of working in circumstances where face to face contact was not possible and the impact of challenges to mental health within families.

These dedicated meetings were sustained for a considerable period to ensure that local resilience arrangements were sufficient to mitigate risk and were not stood down until Partners were satisfied that revised management arrangements were in place and working satisfactorily. COVID-19 remains a standing item on Executive meetings.

The Executive was able to receive evidence of much highly skilled and innovative work aimed at supporting families through an unprecedented period. Given the significant pressure on time, it is reassuring to report that attendance for these additional meetings remained very strong throughout.

7. RESOURCES

The Annual Report clearly sets out the financial resource base for the Partnership, which despite financial pressures within funding agencies has been maintained in indeed increased. The Partnership also has ambition to significantly further develop its activity especially in regard to engagement with children, young people and their families together with a closer connection with front line practitioners. To that end some discussion is underway to consider further funding opportunities.

However, alongside this financial commitment it has to be acknowledged that the launch of the 'new partnership' has been accompanied by a significant commitment from Partners to ensure that the Governance arrangements are given the time and support they need to work well. To that end, agencies such as Health, Surrey Police and Surrey County Council have additionally funded particular pieces of work, but all Partners have also ensured strong and consistent support and attendance for all of the formal meetings and work streams. This has undoubtedly enabled a far stronger 'ownership' of safeguarding responsibility at a partnership level.

8. CONCLUSION

The Annual Report gives a detailed and balanced account of the Partnerships first 18 months of operation, giving a clear rationale for the new operating arrangements and the reasons why significant change in style and culture was necessary. The arrangements are now well led by the Strategic Partners and supported by other Partners who feel more influential in sharing responsibility for safeguarding and driving change.

Strategic priorities and performance monitoring arrangements are clear and realistic in their appraisal of progress made and understandably there has been a reliance on OPAB activity to determine the degree to which children and young people in Surrey are safe.

Particular strengths in this first period are undoubtedly;

- The unequivocal commitment to support and engage with children young people and their families
- Realisation and delivery of the need to enable the huge sectors of District and Borough Councils, Schools and Education providers and the extensive Surrey Third Sector to have a voice and influence
- The absolute transformation of work associated to the backlog of case reviews and impact on culture and practice

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Strategic priorities have been assessed, reviewed and updated and commitments are in place to enable the continued development and access to multi-agency data as part of the local assurance arrangements. This is clearly strengthened by the Partners approach to moving beyond having good governance and arrangement's in place to a clear understanding of the impact and benefit for families, delivered through a continuous approach of;

- **What did we do?**
- **How well did we do it?**
- **Is anyone better off?**

Overall, therefore, it is evident the Safeguarding Partnership has grown in confidence and is well positioned to accelerate progress through the commitment of partners and the strong agreement to deliverable strategic priorities. It is helpful that sections of the Annual Report also set out some of the challenges which lie ahead.

The SSCP is committed to collaborative working and has developed good relationships within the Surrey Partnership Governance structures, including close working with the Health and Wellbeing Board, Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board, Community Safety Strategy and the networks involved in contextual safeguarding.

Perhaps a relatively small cost in setting an ambitious agenda for its first 18 months results in the Annual Report falling a little short in meeting all of the requirements for content set out in statutory guidance. This is something that the Partnership Development Team intends to address.

Nevertheless, the report gives an honest and open account of the Partnership's response to a range of very significant challenges and illustrates a growing confidence in consolidating a safer approach for children young people and their families in Surrey.