

Independent Scrutiny – Scott MacKechnie

The role of independent scrutiny is an important one to the partnership and one that I take very seriously. I have maintained quarterly meetings with safeguarding partners and have attended a number of subgroups as a participant and observer during the year.

I am focused on ensuring that equitable voice of the safeguarding partners and a continued focus on the voice of children and young people.

Due to the nature of my role, I also bring a broader perspective across the Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton footprint known as HIPS. I am an independent chair and scrutineer across the four local authority areas and for the HIPS Executive. This executive brings together the safeguarding partners across the HIPS region supporting cross-border working and reducing duplication for agencies that cross more than one local authority area.

During this reporting year, I've attended all Hampshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) executive meetings and main partnership meetings, and this will continue. This allows me to scrutinise all the work coming through the partnership, including the work of each subgroup, the multi-agency auditing and learning from reviews of serious safeguarding cases, which includes rapid reviews.

I've also supported assurance regarding national reports, including the reports from the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel. An example of that was the two reports on safeguarding children with disabilities in residential settings. Children's Services and the Integrated Care Board reported the learning identified in the national report and how that translated to a local level, including the implementation of recommendations. As part of the phase one report recommendations, Children's Services considered a broader cohort of children for assurance purposes.

In my role as scrutineer, I've helped maintain connectivity across the partnership, and I've supported regular communication and partner oversight regarding proposed organisational changes that impact on the safeguarding system. In 2023 and 2024 this included consideration of reorganisation of health providers and the development of Children's Services Family Help teams.

I've also encouraged agencies to bring the outcomes of any relevant inspections to the attention of safeguarding partners. This promotes high support and high challenge for any improvements that are needed, including multi-agency ones and the sharing of effective practice.

I ensure communication across boards where appropriate. An example of this is learning from the multi-agency audit regarding school attendance of our most vulnerable children being shared with their colleagues in the Safeguarding Adults Board and our Children's Trust. This was important due to the learning around the impact of parental needs on children's engagement with education and the need to identify and respond to young carers.

I've provided scrutiny to discussions in response to the updated Working Together to Safeguard Children statutory guidance, which was published in December 2023, ensuring strategic briefings for the new lead safeguarding partners.

I have supported partners to maintain oversight of issues raised within the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. This includes collectively identifying, considering and mitigating risks for the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Risks in relation to the 0-19 Public Health Nursing Service were being considered during 2023-24 with the Director of Public Health presenting plans under way to support recruitment and retention of both health visitors and school nurses where local and national challenges are known. This will be revisited in 2024-25.

During this reporting year, I have chaired the review of physical intervention practices in secure establishments, which is a statutory requirement of the partnership. Hampshire has three such establishments within the safeguarding children's partnership area. The approach taken was robust and included a review panel of safeguarding partners. In addition to these panel members, the review was supported by senior advisors from relevant agencies with expertise in this area. The area of focus of the review framed a benchmark of expectation of what a secure establishment should be able to demonstrate in terms of effective practice in relation to physical intervention.

Each secure establishment operational manager, and Commissioner where relevant, presented to the panel with an opportunity for questions from the panel followed by discussion. Each secure establishment also showed a case study, which demonstrated the

learning they are taking from such examples. Establishments also shared relevant policies and procedures relating to the use of physical intervention with the review team.

Each secure establishment demonstrated review and monitoring of physical intervention practices and how children and staff are supported, and their wellbeing prioritised. They demonstrated a trauma-informed approach that wraps around any use of physical intervention, supporting a holistic understanding of the child.

Effective approaches were noted in terms of the training and development of staff and the review of physical intervention to identify and promote effective practice and share learning. We noted the links the secure establishments had with similar settings regionally and nationally. The panel noted the access to independent advocacy for the children placed in the establishments as a strength.

I was personally struck by the attention to detail the staff within the establishments have in ensuring they know each child well. Case studies were provided by each establishment which were hugely valued by the panel and added considerable depth of understanding of the voice of the child.

This has been a busy year and none more so for the services and agencies that are part of Hampshire's multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. I would like to highlight the focus on learning, the support for an openness for professional challenge in areas as an area of strength and one which clearly demonstrates a collective drive towards continuous improvement.

Areas for the partnership to focus on moving forward are:

- Maintaining our focus on assurance of safeguarding practice, acknowledging the challenging context for children and families and for organisations, we must ensure practitioners are supported to do their very best for children and their families.
- Expanding the voice and influence of children and young people within our arrangements and the voice of critical partners such as schools and settings.
- Maintaining the effective partnership culture through the changes in response to Working Together to Safeguard Children and continuing to focus on the shared responsibilities and accountability of the safeguarding partners.

Thank you.