

Stuart Ashley Transcript

Hello colleagues, I'm Stuart Ashley, Director of Hampshire Children's Services. Welcome to the Hampshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership (HSCP) Yearly Report for 2023-24.

This section of the yearly report will consider the role of the partnership chair and annual arrangements, the role of our education partners, how the partnership is funded and brings value for money, our Hampshire partnership arrangements as well as our HIPS arrangements, which is Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton and then finally, I'll end by looking forward.

I will start by looking forward and I'm pleased to say I'll be the new partnership Chair of the HSCP from autumn of 2024. Big shoes to fill in terms of replacing our independent chair and scrutineer who will continue to be our independent scrutineer, I'm pleased to say. I see the partnership as vital in continuing to strengthen our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and you will see the detail of that within this yearly report.

Alongside my other safeguarding partners, I look forward to working closely with multi-agency colleagues across Hampshire, the partnership team and of course our Independent Scrutineer, Scott MacKechnie. Scott will continue to provide that independent assurance and oversight of our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and is pivotal to the work of the partnership, providing both high support and high challenge.

We begin this new chapter in our arrangements from an already mature partnership focused on learning with an established culture of support and challenge. We know and understand we can always do more, and as partnership chair and with our partners, we will continue to work together tirelessly to effectively safeguard Hampshire's children.

As this yearly report demonstrates, there is sustained demand on the range of our services and education settings right across Hampshire and this reflects the increased levels of need of Hampshire's children and families since the pandemic with the overlay of the cost-of-living crisis, which continues for so many of our families. I would add to that, that the threat of war in Europe with the ongoing war in Ukraine further adds to the stresses and strains, particularly for our children. As safeguarding partners, we are sighted on evidence of continued pressure across the whole system working with children and families. This is from our universal services through to our specialist and statutory services. Now, more than ever, it's critical that each of us continue to play our fullest part in safeguarding children, from very early help and support through to statutory intervention.

Our schools and our education settings are an important part of our safeguarding arrangements and, in my view, are the fourth safeguarding partner. Colleagues in schools and settings are often the trusted adults children first turn to, the people who notice all is not well with the child. Our teachers and school staff are the ones who take the first steps to provide early help to a child and their family, trying to resolve issues as soon as they emerge, preventing problems from becoming worse. For some children who need coordinated early help, school staff can take the role of lead professional, putting a plan in place to reduce risk and need, with the support of colleagues in our Early Help Hub and other agencies. School staff are involved in the support for our most vulnerable children, including those who may be on a child protection plan.

Education is a huge protective factor and at its best, it offers children a safe space, oversight and support from caring professionals, helping children develop and grow in a number of ways. If children are not in school, they miss the protection and opportunity school offers and can become more at risk of harm. That is why education colleagues have such an important role in these partnership arrangements through our Education Group and as members of our partnership board, they are integral to what we do. They will be formally represented in the partnership to decision making at the highest level moving forward with our new arrangements.

The HSCP is funded through safeguarding partners and agencies across Hampshire. Funding mainly comes from the three statutory safeguarding partners – Hampshire County Council, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary. Other agencies, such as our district, boroughs and town councils also contribute. Hampshire County Council provides a home for the partnership team along with legal and communication services. While it's important to be transparent about the funding amounts, this does not account for the other contributions partners make and I want to touch on those. They deliver training, they undertake multi-agency auditing, they work hard and ensure that learning from reviews of serious safeguarding cases is embedded and develop new resources to support the safeguarding of our children. I want to acknowledge all those contributions too, which can be seen throughout this report. Without those contributions this work could not take place.

The majority of this funding supports our small partnership team who coordinate and develop the work of the partnership. Much of their work goes unsighted and happens behind the scenes. They prepare the meetings, they write the reports, they do the research and in no small order they help us keep ourselves accounted for.

There is a comprehensive training programme which is free to the large multi-agency workforce in Hampshire, and this is all funded by the partnership contributions.

It is a shared ambition that contributions from the safeguarding partners will become much more equitable overtime. That better reflects the equal shared responsibility and accountability of each of the safeguarding partners.

As the yearly report demonstrates, the work undertaken by the partnership as a whole meets the statutory requirements of Working Together to Safeguard Children and the funding allocated ensures this work continues.

The partnership has an established architecture. The executive is like the engine room of the partnership where decisions are made, our priorities are set. Our main partnership board then informs our work and priorities, and work flows out through our groups and back to the executive for agreement. So, it's circular in terms of there's no bottom up or top down, it's just circular workflow.

This year, the yearly report evidence is the output and the impact of the work of the partnership. It remains a frustration to partners that the impact could be greater and in 2023-24 we have responded to this challenge with more innovation around our communication.

On the groups:

The role of the Learning and Inquiry Group (LIG) is to ensure that learning from serious safeguarding cases, including child safeguarding practice reviews, takes place and then offers assurance that learning from this work is actioned and embedded across agencies holding partners to account to make sure that that learning really is embedded within practice.

There is a Scrutiny Group and they undertake multi-agency auditing and assurance work. That multi-agency auditing is really important, it shows where our safeguarding practice is working well and, of course, it shows what can be strengthened and improved as we learn together. You will hear later in this yearly report of the outcomes, learning and recommendations coming from our scrutiny work. It's really important. This group also reviews and assures the self-assessment work of agencies in relation to the Section 11 safeguarding standards for organisations – important standards that all agencies achieve and achieve well across Hampshire.

We have an Education Group and this group provides the education voice to the partnership and the chair is a member of the Executive Group. The work streams of this group focus on areas aligned to schools and settings and manage the schools safeguarding self-assessment process, making sure there is executive oversight and engagement in the themes and issues that arise.

There's a Workforce Development Group and they review the training offer, ensure it meets the priorities of the partnership, undertake the learning needs analysis annually, review attendance and ensure agencies promote relevant training and address any issues around attendance that emerge from time to time. They also undertake quality assurance of training and webinar sessions.

We also have a Communication and Development Group. This is a new group formed in 2023-24 and provides a communication plan for the work of the partnership, ensuring resources remain up to date and in the line of sight of busy practitioners.

We have a Child Exploitation Delivery Group, and this group is responsible for Hampshire's delivery of the Child Exploitation and Extra Familial Harm Strategy. This is an essential group as exploitation, extra familial harm, threats and risks to our children can change swiftly and grow equally as quickly through social media and technological platforms.

Task and finish work streams are established as required and during this year focused on areas such as refreshing our Neglect Strategy and Toolkit for launch in 2024 and a review of the threshold guidance completed in Autumn 2023. We also worked in partnership with other statutory boards to produce a Prevent Toolkit, just one example of the work that this group has undertaken.

I mentioned at the beginning that I'd just touch on the partnership arrangements across Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton and they all have statutory safeguarding boards, partnerships and arrangements and we meet together as a collaborative in what's called HIPS. The group is known as the HIPS Executive and we identify areas where the four partnerships should and can work together to best effect, sharing best practice and ensuring effective cross-border working. This is important as our children and families move around the broader Hampshire geography.

We have a HIPS Health Group allowing for effective practice learning and health safeguarding procedures to be shared across the health economy. We have a HIPS Procedures and Strategy Group supporting a single set of safeguarding procedures and protocols across the HIPS region. The HIPS Child Exploitation Extra Familial Strategy was refreshed and updated as

child exploitation does not solely exist within one local authority, so rightly, we joined up with our processes and worked across the four local authority areas.

And then finally I will finish where I started. Looking forward to 2024-25 and being partnership chair with the support of our safeguarding partners. It will be a year of high support and high challenge as we continue to navigate the unprecedented demand on our services at a time when the financial reserves of all agencies are significantly challenged.

Our partnership arrangements are established and effective at driving work forward. We can continue to focus on strengthening our reach and effectiveness evidencing the impact of the work of the safeguarding partnership. The arrangements provide value for money, and we will continue to seek ways to manage costs while ensuring that we meet our statutory requirements.

Finally, can I also take the opportunity to thank you all. I am, by trade, a qualified social worker and registered to practice, so I know, understand and value the unique contributions every agency and every practitioner makes to safeguarding and protecting Hampshire's children. A very genuine thank you from me for all that you continue to do.

Thank you, colleagues.