



## **Avon & Somerset Strategic Safeguarding Partnership**

### **Independent Scrutiny**

**June 2020**

All partners, across the Avon & Somerset Police geographical footprint, share a commitment and take responsibility for safeguarding children. Statutory responsibility rests with the three safeguarding partners – the Local Authority, Police and Clinical Commissioning Groups. Within the Avon & Somerset area, this is delivered by:

- Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (BNSSG CCG);
- B&NeS, Swindon & Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BSW CCG);
- Avon & Somerset Constabulary;
- Bristol Local Authority;
- South Gloucestershire Local Authority;
- North Somerset Local Authority;
- Somerset Local Authority;
- B&NeS Local Authority.

The core partners must ensure that there is independent scrutiny of the effectiveness of the local arrangements. It is a local decision how best to implement a robust system of independent scrutiny, however, the Avon & Somerset Strategic Safeguarding Partnership (ASSSP) are tasked with the development of a regional approach.

The role of Independent Scrutiny is as follows:

- Provide a rigorous and transparent assessment of the extent to which appropriate and effective systems and processes are in place in all partner agencies so as to fulfil their statutory duties, and ensure that children are protected and that appropriate safeguarding strategies are developed and embedded;
- Evaluate arrangements for the operation of the requisite partnership, including the purpose, function and effectiveness of board meetings, and recommend and implement appropriate changes;
- Support the implementation of findings and outcomes of any safeguarding/Domestic Homicide Reviews;
- Confirm, or not, that effective performance management, audit and quality assurance mechanisms are in place within partner organisations which will support the partners to fulfil their statutory objectives, and which will enable the partnership to identify and measure its success and impact;
- Ensure that the core safeguarding partners provide independent, robust and effective challenge to partners;
- Ensure that the voices of the community, as relevant, are appropriately represented and heard in the work of the partnership.

The purpose of this report is to outline all Independent Scrutiny activity that has occurred, across the Avon & Somerset Constabulary area, from September 2019. Some of this activity has been detrimentally affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has significantly affected partnership ability to prioritise scrutiny work against increasing operational demand and has of course, presented various logistical challenges.

## Peer Reviewer Network Workshop

In October 2019, a workshop was held at Police HQ, bringing together subject matter experts with a network of peer reviewers across the Avon & Somerset Policing area. Discussions took place in order to equip the network in relation to scrutiny, assurance activity, training needs and requirements, as well as the key priorities and themes which attendees believed needed further scrutiny activity.

The key priorities for assurance activity were the following:

- Contextualised Safeguarding
- Early Help & Relationship Building
- Transition into Young Adulthood
- Response to Domestic Abuse
- Effective Partnership Arrangements
- Placing Children out of Hours
- Missing Children
- Children Missing from Education

Within each theme, a bespoke piece of activity will be developed, in order to provide a detailed understanding of the issues facing each partnership. This will be consistent activity across all five LA areas, allowing for benchmarking exercises to be completed, but still allowing for local nuances in order to be reflective of local practice.

Training Needs Analysis forms were completed during the event, which have been forwarded onto the Training & Workforce Development Regional Workstream. It is anticipated that a bespoke training course can be delivered to the network in order to support their ongoing development.

From this workshop, a plan has been drawn up to coordinate delivery of activity (see Appendix One) and also incorporates the following:

### S.11 Audit Activity

Key partners across the region met in January 2020 to design the S.11 Audit for 2019/2020. This was drawn from Working Together 2018 which stipulates that organisations and agencies should have in place arrangements that reflect the importance of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, including:

- *A clear line of accountability for the commissioning and/or provision of services designed to safeguard and promote the welfare of children;*
- *A senior board level lead with the required knowledge, skills and expertise or sufficiently qualified and experienced to take leadership responsibility for the organisation's/agency's safeguarding arrangements;*
- *A culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings, both in individual decisions and the development of services;*
- *Clear whistleblowing procedures, which reflect the principles in Sir Robert Francis' Freedom to Speak Up Review and are suitably referenced in staff training and codes of conduct, and a culture that enables issues about safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children to be addressed;*
- *Clear escalation policies for staff to follow when their child safeguarding concerns are not being addressed within their organisation or by other agencies;*

- *Arrangements which set out clearly the processes for sharing information, with other practitioners and with safeguarding partners;*
- *A designated practitioner (or, for health commissioning and health provider organisations/agencies, designated and named practitioners) for child safeguarding. Their role is to support other practitioners in their organisations and agencies to recognise the needs of children, including protection from possible abuse or neglect.*
- *Safe recruitment practices and ongoing safe working practices for individuals whom the organisation or agency permit to work regularly with children, including policies on when to obtain a criminal record check*
- *Appropriate supervision and support for staff, including undertaking safeguarding training*
- *Creating a culture of safety, equality and protection within the services they provide*

Audit cycles of the five LA areas were slightly out of synchronisation, so it was agreed that as Somerset were coming to the end of their three-year cycle, we would produce a slightly less comprehensive audit for the other four areas, with the intention that we would bring all areas together for the 2020/2021 Audit.

The 2019/2020 report has now been finalised, and will be discussed at the next available ASSSP meeting. There are a number of recommendations accompanying the findings, and there will be a number of methods used in order to develop these findings further, such as peer reviews and walkabouts throughout the partnership.

### **JTAI Plans**

From a Health and Police perspective, there is a duplication of effort involved in planning for JTAI inspections. It was agreed amongst the partnership that there are some clear benefits to combining the process across the partnership, in order to ensure that effective planning can take place. Planning meetings were scheduled to take place in March 2020, but unfortunately, due to Covid-19, these have had to be postponed – alongside which, all inspectorates have postponed all inspections during this time period.

The intention is that, when partnership priorities allow, this activity will be ran virtually. There will be a focus on an agreed assurance framework, and will test this audit tool out across the partnership, using our network of peer reviewers, using live-time scheduling, as if it were a `real` JTAI inspection.

### **6 Steps of Independent Scrutiny**

There has been a self-assessment exercise, testing the efficacy of the safeguarding partnership, which has taken place across all areas other than South Gloucestershire LA area. This is a pilot, led by Professor Jenny Pearce from the University of Bedfordshire, and is expected to attract national attention, due to the methodology and findings. We are awaiting the final report from Professor Pearce, and learning from this process will be shared across all five areas.

## **Future Plans**

Plans for 2020/2021 are to develop a matured model of scrutiny across the partnership, using the thematics developed during the October workshop – see Appendix A for details. This timetable will be presented to the next appropriate Avon & Somerset Strategic Safeguarding Partnership meeting and following approval, will be developed with key partners across the region.

Future activity is based on the assumption that there remains a level of commitment at the Avon & Somerset Strategic Safeguarding Partnership to develop and progress a scrutiny framework, notwithstanding that there is a statutory responsibility to deliver independent scrutiny within a robust partnership structure, as per Working Together 2018.

Victoria CAPLE

Independent Scrutiny Coordinator

Avon & Somerset Strategic Safeguarding Partnership

June 2020

