

Assured Safeguarding

“How do I know that I am doing all that I can to keep as many children and young people as safe as possible?”

2010 Edition

for Directors of Children's Services
and Elected Lead Members for Children's Services

A support resource developed
in the East Midlands



“Embedding good practice
and developing next practice
into everyday approaches”

Introduction

A few words about the purpose of this document. It is designed to help Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members reassure themselves they are doing everything possible to ensure that children within their jurisdiction are as safe as possible. It is not an attempt to describe what best practice looks like, nor is it a checklist for DCSs to pass out to their management teams to help assess current performance. It is not the Holy Grail in relation to protecting DCSs and Lead Members from all the pitfalls involved in leading the safeguarding agenda.

What this document seeks to do is to help DCSs and Lead Members be clear about what they personally can and should be doing to assure themselves that their organisation - its staff, systems, processes, frameworks etc - are working as well as possible. The document asks questions such as "How do you, Director, know that your performance management systems are actually helping you personally be 100% confident that your systems really are having an impact upon practice?"

The document is populated with suggestions of existing behaviours exhibited by DCSs and Lead Members which they think demonstrate how they personally assure safeguarding in their authorities. This is intended to be a document which does not reside on the bookshelf or is passed on to second and third tier officers, but is a genuinely valuable resource for Directors and Lead Members."

Peter Duxbury

(Director of Children's Services, Lincolnshire and project sponsor)

The production of this resource has been overseen by a steering group, chaired by Peter Duxbury, the membership of which included representatives from the regions' second tier 'safeguarding officers' network, Government Office and the Strategic Health Authority. Field work was carried out by Kate McKenna.

A range of publications and resources were analysed to determine key thematic areas that DCSs and Lead Members should personally consider, namely:

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Once the themes and 'questions to be considered' within them had been identified a series of face to face interviews were undertaken with DCSs and their Lead members to capture examples of practice across the East Midlands found to make a difference.

“Ensuring that good practice is identified, celebrated and shared for others to learn from”

Initial feedback on this approach suggests that it has been helpful with the framework of questions alone being a useful self evaluation tool.



Leadership/Accountability

? Questions to consider

Directors of Children's Services

1. What do I do to ensure that the relationship between the Children's Trust and Local Safeguarding Children's Board make a collective difference to the safeguarding agenda?
2. What can I do to ensure that good practice is identified, celebrated and shared for others to learn from?
3. How do I ensure that we have the opportunity to learn from research?
4. How can I ensure that vulnerable and minority groups access the services that they need?

Elected Lead Members

1. How do I know if I have an effective DCS and am I allowing them to do their job?
2. How do I support strategic partners to develop a shared safeguarding ambition for improving outcomes for children and young people?
3. Can I demonstrate that the prioritisation of resources to narrow the outcomes gap will provide value for money?
4. Where can I most effectively use my strategic influence to ensure a corporate approach to the safeguarding agenda?



Leadership/Accountability - Examples of practice

Leading the establishment of a culture of challenge and scrutiny, ensuring that reflection and evaluation informs the development of improved approaches.

"The safeguarding panel provides an external challenge to our practice and a forum from which we can ensure that we learn from research and experience. The panel interrogates information including inspection outcomes, unallocated cases, complaints, case reviews and service performance data. This has proved to be a very useful way of ensuring that a broad range of members 'own' the safeguarding agenda. It also helps us to know that we are being told the truth." (LM)



"We conducted a 'root and branch' service review resulting in major turbulence in the structure, but now we are confident we can safeguard children more effectively. We constantly challenge the system to be corporately effective in our safeguarding duties. The next meeting of the Overview Scrutiny Commission is dedicated to safeguarding. The chair of our LSCB will attend this session." (DCS)

“Every paper that goes to either the LSCB or the Executive is read by me. When officers go into a meeting they have already had a debate with me. This enables us to provide a united front in public despite sometimes difficult ‘behind closed doors’ debates” (LM)

“We have an annual ‘state of the nation’ on social care. This is a high-level meeting between DCS and Lead Member, independent chair of LSCB and Director of Safeguarding. We review issues, developments and the future for social care in the City. The results of this meeting are fed back to the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council” (DCS)

“Our Lead Member has a professional background outside of the Children’s Services agenda. He approaches the agenda critically and asks searching questions. We value his enquiring mind and critical questioning skills to balance against officer professional backgrounds.” (DCS)

Effectively using strategic influence to ensure a corporate approach to the safeguarding agenda

“We have set up a corporate safeguarding group. Both the DCS and DASS are members alongside representatives from each of the LA directorates. We have transferred the safeguarding training function from the LSCB and the corporate group oversee that function. The outcome of this action has been a much greater awareness of safeguarding responsibilities and a broader approach to risk management.” (DCS)

“We have had a protocol in place between the LSCB and the Children’s Trust for 3 years. We have reviewed this in light of the working together guidance and jointly developed a performance framework across both the Board and the Trust” (DCS)

Embedding good practice and developing next practice into everyday approaches.

"We haven't had our unannounced safeguarding inspection yet but we are ready and confident that our approach is robust." (LM)



Ensuring that good practice is identified, celebrated and shared for others to learn from

"We have introduced a programme of safeguarding assurance days. We spend a day together with our front line specialist social work teams to listen to what people on the ground say. During our day we spend some time with the team manager and then participate in whatever is happening that day. This has included attending (DCS) a child protection conference. We emphasise that this is about 'keeping us current' and does not in any way replace supervision. Feedback from the field is positive." (DCS and LM)

Casework Reviews

Questions to consider

Directors of Children's Services

1. What can I do to ensure that strengths and weaknesses of existing case work activities are routinely identified and that they inform future practice?
2. How do I model good practice in managing risk?
3. How do I ensure resources for safeguarding are targeted effectively?
4. Do I know if the safeguarding thresholds are appropriate?

Elected Lead Members

1. What action can I take to ensure that learning from casework and reviews is fed into decision making and risk management processes?
2. How do I ensure that the right children are efficiently taken into care and that they are then supported and safeguarded by skilled service providers and their corporate parents?
3. What have I done differently as a result of effective casework and reviews?

Casework Reviews - Examples of Practice

Ensuring that learning from casework and reviews is fed into decision making and risk management processes

"If the same mistake is made twice action will be taken" (LM)

"I like to know the strategic issues coming out of case work reviews not the detail." (DCS)

"I have on occasion asked for immediate access to a set of individual files which I have reviewed overnight. That changed practice!" (DCS)

Ensuring resources are targeted effectively

"We model senior level awareness of individual children. The DCS and I can talk about individual children on a weekly basis and we ensure our teams and partners are held to account." (LM)

Modelling good practice

"I go to visit frontline safeguarding offices and spend time with staff but also look through supervision files etc to ensure that CRB and GSCC registration is up to date" (DCS)



Workforce

Questions to consider

Directors of Children's Services

1. How can I ensure that the whole workforce is effective at identifying, assessing and managing risk to children young people and their families?
2. What behaviours do I model for coping with emotional stress and how can I improve and maintain staff morale?
3. How do I know that safeguarding training makes a difference to outcomes?
4. How do I find out about, and respond to, the current pressure points and how staff are feeling about safeguarding issues?

Elected Lead Members

1. How do I ensure that teams are effectively resourced, managed, developed and deployed in a climate of economic pressure and recruitment and retention issues?
2. How do I ensure that Elected Member colleagues and senior leaders understand the importance of all components of the safeguarding framework?
3. What training do I and other Elected Members need to ensure that I/we am able to effectively scrutinise and challenge safeguarding service delivery?

Workforce - Examples of practice

Improving and maintaining morale.

"We did a press briefing for the local media in advance of our unannounced safeguarding inspection report being published. We invited a local reporter to spend half a day in one of our assessment services. This proved very positive resulting in a 2 page spread- 'How difficult the job of a social worker is'. Staff felt very supported and valued and this was a very worthwhile exercise." (DCS and LM)

"Every 6 weeks I attend the Strategic management group (1st - 4th tier officers). This helps to establish effective working relationships and support and value the work that officers do." (LM)

"I have established a social work forum whose purpose is to raise awareness and develop pride in the profession. The group members are front line practitioners. I am encouraging social workers to act as champions for their profession. It is still early days but activity so far includes group members being interviewed by the local media, establishing peer and newly qualified mentoring schemes. The group is currently focussing on developing a better understanding of 'what does high quality social work look and feel like and how do we best promote and release it throughout a self improving system.'" (DCS)

"Social work practitioners are part of our monthly star awards scheme. Winners of the awards are nominated by their managers and meet with me personally. This has also been successful in raising self esteem and recognition of the difficult job these colleagues do." (DCS)

Facilitating challenge and scrutiny

"I meet with the Chair and Vice Chair of Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny to enable them to develop a deeper understanding of the safeguarding agenda." (LM)

Finding out about, and responding to, the current pressure points and how staff are feeling about safeguarding issues

"I go on visits with frontline safeguarders and shadow them in their statutory visits and meetings. This gives me a chance to talk to workers about their experiences and see how they work on a day to day basis." (DCS)

"I have meetings with front line staff (social workers and family support workers) twice a year. These run as several sessions at various times to ensure everyone gets a chance to be involved. These have an open agenda where staff are able to feedback issues. A letter is sent back to staff to feedback what has been picked up" (DCS)

Prevention

Questions to consider

Directors of Children's Services

1. What routine actions do I take to ensure children and young people are and feel safe?
2. How can I demonstrate effective working with agencies and professionals to identify safeguarding as a priority and promote the welfare of the potentially vulnerable?
3. How do I champion the preventative approach in all that I do as a senior leader?
4. Can I talk about the impact of CAF in my authority?

Elected Lead Members

1. How much do Children's Trust partners spend individually and collectively on prevention? What has been the impact?
2. Has the reconfiguration of services strengthened our preventative approach?
3. What new policies have I championed that have helped to embed the preventative approach into next practice?
4. What relationships beyond the Local Authority do I need to develop to ensure that children and young people are and feel safe?

Prevention Examples of practice

Local action to help children feel safe.

"We've set up a 'Children's Champion's network' with each Borough Council having a nominated local Councillor in that role. I then bring that group together." (LM)

Reconfiguration to include virtual networks

"We have developed virtual wrap around teams. The teams are multi agency and include health visitors, local police, school nurses and other school staff, LA officers including social workers, extended services and integrated youth. Each team has a CAF co-ordinator whose reporting line is into the Extended Services and Family Support Team. We are piloting the Children's Trust approach to commissioning through the wrap around teams working closely with the Commissioning Support Programme" (DCS)

"The most important trigger for us is having integrated working guidance rather than co-location or re-structuring" (DCS).

"The Family Intervention Programme (FIP) has had an impact. We targeted the 20 most problematic families and responded with joint intervention programmes. We are beginning to get some interesting evidence." (DCS)

Is the CAF making a difference?

"CAF is starting to make a difference but some people still see it as a fast track into other assessment processes rather than an early intervention tool" (DCS)

"We have some clear evidence that tells us that parents and carers feel that CAF is making a difference." (DCS)

"We have some evidence to show that where CAF is working well we are making a difference to outcomes." (DCS)



Integration

Questions to consider

Directors of Children's Services

1. Do I speak the same language as partners from other sectors?
2. Do I know the extent to which integrated service delivery has improved outcomes and narrowed the outcomes gap?
3. How effectively do I engage with front line services, including head teachers, to model resilient, well informed, creative and innovative leadership?
4. How can I be sure that we are taking a well-co-ordinated approach to listen and respond to the voices of young people suitably?

Elected Lead Members

1. How effective have I been in challenging the work of partners and what difference have I made?
2. How have I worked strategically to aid transition for care leavers from children's to adult services?
3. What have we done differently as a result of children and young people's involvement in decision making?
4. Has the learning from case reviews changed the Local Authority's decision making and that of its partners?

Integration - Examples of practice

Engaging front line services

"I have a formal programme of visits including a minimum of 1 day every 6 weeks visiting schools and 1 day every 6 weeks visiting non school providers. This provides me with an opportunity to gain a front line perspective on issues faced and also to collect valuable feedback on service performance." (DCS)

"I have informal termly meetings with head teachers and governors. These meetings provide an opportunity for 'informal feelers' about safeguarding practice, protocols and approaches. Information from these visits is triangulated with data and service user feedback to gain an overview of how we are doing and where we need to improve. The programme is an important strand in our quest to ensure that safeguarding is everybody's business" (DCS)

Listening and responding to the voices of young people

"We involved young people in the review of home to school transport with a commitment that they could decide how any savings were reinvested. The money saved was used to fund an anti bullying bus." (LM)

"Children and young people's voice is central to the school building design process. We aim to design out bullying" (LM)

Challenging the work of partners

"The LSCB has recently undergone a major root and branch review. We now have representation from the adult safeguarding board on our children's board and vice versa. We have appointed a new independent chair who has regular meetings with the chair of the adult board." (DCS)



Performance Management

Questions to consider

Directors of Children's Services

1. Have I done enough to embed a needs based commissioning process?
2. Have I modelled the use of qualitative and quantitative data in making effective safeguarding decisions?
3. How do I know what works well and what we could do more effectively?
4. What do I need to do to ensure that all my staff and strategic partners know what they are accountable for?

Elected Lead Members

1. Does the LSCB hold the Children's Trust to account?
2. What will the outcome of an inspection be?
3. Have I embedded the contribution that the priorities in the LAA collectively contribute to the safeguarding agenda?
4. What is my evidence base for the safeguarding debate within the corporate decision making processes?
5. Have we done enough to protect children and how do I know?

Performance Management - Examples of practice

Empowering a corporate safeguarding debate

"Approximately twelve months ago the council conducted a cross party review of children's safeguarding. The review group consisted of leaders of the political groups and was chaired by the leader of the opposition. The group reported to full council. As a result of this I set up a multi agency safeguarding scrutiny group. The group includes the chair of the LSCB, GP representation, District Council representation, 6 elected members and the chair of the PCT. The role of this group is to scrutinise performance data and the LSCB. It also reports into the Children's Trust." (LM)

"I write a monthly social care performance report on key 'health' indicators to the Chief Exec which is then fed into a statutory monitoring meeting between the Chief Exec, Deputy Chief Exec and our Director of Legal and Democratic Services." (DCS)

Integrating safeguarding into broader performance elements

"We have conducted a robust review of performance data, rationalising Children's Trust and Local Authority performance information. This has resulted in a much more coherent set of information that we 'traffic light' and use for a range of purposes. A key factor in our improved approach has been the creation of a team that provides infrastructure support to the Children's Trust. This team includes the lead for performance." (DCS)

Modelling the use of qualitative and quantitative data in decision making

"Integrity is critical, don't cover it up. It's very important that we identify the lessons that we have learned to prevent us from repeating the same mistake?" (DCS)

"We triangulate views about service performance and feed that into performance management processes. We invite service users to reflect on what worked well for them and what could have been done better. We always listen but check out issues against other quantitative and qualitative information. We encourage the system to reflect on what we can learn and how we can share it." (DCS)

"We share performance data across the children's board and LSCB. We have allocated lead responsibility for all or NIs. Performance reports are produced against NIs at national, local and statistical neighbour comparative levels. This is displayed in both tabular and graphical forms for ease of access by a broad range of decision makers." (DCS)

"We still have a way to go with qualitative data but our locality teams are the key to unlocking that challenge." (DCS)

Reflecting on effectiveness

"As DCS and Lead Member we meet weekly to consider policy and performance. If we believe we have done enough we probably haven't." (DCS and LM)



Additional copies of this booklet can be obtained from:

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