



**NCASP**

NORTHUMBERLAND CHILDREN AND ADULTS  
SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP



# Independent Scrutineer Report

June 2023 to September 2023

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## INTRODUCTION



**Sue Kirkley**  
Independent Scrutineer

This is the first report of the Independent Scrutineer for Northumberland Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnership (NCASP). It is for the period June 2023 - September 2023 and provides an appraisal of the effectiveness of partnership joint arrangements.

The report follows the [Checklist for Independent Scrutiny](#) and the [Bedford University six steps for independent scrutiny framework for safeguarding partnership arrangements](#).

## OVERVIEW

### 1. SAFEGUARDING PARTNERS ARE INVOLVED IN STRATEGIC PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The NCASP business year runs from September to August. The new joint children and adults arrangements for the NCASP were implemented in April 2023 and an Independent Scrutineer (IS) appointed in June 2023.

The content of the report is based on the views of partners, Business Managers, chairs of the sub and task and finish groups, information obtained from the NCASP development sessions, chairing of the Business Groups initial meetings in June and September 2023, observations of the work of the sub and task and finish groups, review of meeting minutes and action logs, and NCASP processes and systems.

There is a legal requirement that children's safeguarding partnerships publish their local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA), which does not apply to safeguarding adults boards. These arrangements provide the foundation on which the partnership functions and what it is expected to do to fulfil its responsibilities. Given the NCASP is a joint children's and adults partnership, the NCASP multi-agency safeguarding arrangements reflect this position and were published in October 2023<sup>1</sup>.

The NCASP executive group approved its overarching strategic priorities in July 2023<sup>2</sup>. An annual delivery plan underpins the strategic priorities and provides the finer detail of actions for the year(s) ahead, which are progressed by the subgroups and report on progress to the NCASP Business Groups.

Governance and structural arrangements of the partnership are embedding, and the work of the subgroups are strengthening their individual infrastructures and functions based on the terms of references; these were approved by the NCASP executive team in July 2023<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements \(MASA\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Strategic Plan 2023-2026](#)

<sup>3</sup> [NCASP Groups - Terms of Reference](#)

The Department for Education has praised the way NCASP have developed its new joint safeguarding arrangements and have commented on its approach to scrutiny as a model of excellent practice.

## TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

Task and finish groups are identified through learning from case reviews, practice learning audits and performance management data. There are currently four tasks and finish groups: children; self-harm and safeguarding under ones and adults; domestic abuse and older people and mental capacity.

The task and finish groups the IS has observed have clear terms of reference, defined outcomes, and timescales for completion of the work. Draft reports from the task and finish groups will be considered at the March 2024 Business Group meetings, after which learning will be shared with the Practice Learning Group (PLG) for dissemination and with the executive team through the IS report.

Going forward action plans will be designed to include 'success' measures, which will inform impact assessments followed up six months following completion and sign off.

## NCASP BUSINESS SUPPORT UNIT (BSU)

Business support for NCASP is hosted by Northumberland Council (two Business Managers, a business support officer and a percentage of 2x data analysts as an 'in kind' contribution).

The Safeguarding Partnership's budgets for children and adults are currently held in separate places. How the NCASP BSU is funded going forward will be considered as part of budget discussions for 2024/2025 to ensure that partner contributions are equitable and proportionate.

The BSU functions well. The two Business Managers are enthusiastic and work closely together; the business support officer is very competent in co-ordinating the business.

## **2. THE WIDER SAFEGUARDING PARTNERS, INCLUDING RELEVANT AGENCIES, ARE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND ADULTS**

Working Together guidance states that safeguarding partners must set out in their Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements which organisations and agencies they will be working with to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The [NCASP MASA document 2023-2026](#) lists who these relevant agencies are.

A launch of the new arrangements in January 2024 will seek the views of relevant agencies on how their involvement and contributions can be meaningfully represented.

## **3. CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS ARE AWARE OF AND INVOLVED WITH PLANS FOR SAFEGUARDING THEM FOR ABUSE, NEGLECT AND EXPLOITATION**

Several processes, groups and forums currently exist where the views of children, young people, parents and adults are sought. These will be mapped, and consideration given to how they can be maximised to raise awareness and be involved with plans for safeguarding from abuse, neglect and exploitation.

This is a priority area of business for NCASP, which will be supported by the IS in considering models of excellent practice across the country.

## **4. QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES ARE IN PLACE FOR DATA COLLECTION, AUDIT AND INFORMATION SHARING**

Quality assurance processes are developing and strengthening. The Practice Learning (PLG) and Performance Management subgroups have delegated responsibility for this area of the business.

Core data sets for children and adult performance are being reviewed and strengthened and a multi-agency audit schedule being formulated so NCASP has an effective 'window' on the safeguarding system and are linked to the strategic priorities. Areas of safeguarding raising significant concern will be subject to partner challenge, accountability and independent scrutiny.

The PLG is exploring the development of a multi-agency learning hub to ensure learning from case reviews, multi-agency audits and performance data is effectively disseminated to partners and practitioners.

A priority for the PLG is to develop a process for understanding the impact of its quality assurance framework on practice, systems and outcomes for children, young people, and adults. The IS will support this area of development.

## **5. THERE IS A PROCESS FOR IDENTIFYING AND INVESTIGATING LEARNING FROM LOCAL AND NATIONAL SAFEGUARDING CASE REVIEWS**

The NCASP Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Safeguarding Adults Review subgroups have delegated responsibility for this area of the business. There are robust processes in place for identifying when a serious safeguarding incident requires a rapid response and consideration of whether a local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) or a Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) are required.

There has been two children's Rapid Reviews since April 2023. The National CSPR Panel agreed with the NCASP decision that one review did not meet the criteria for a CSPR, whilst the other Rapid Review did. A review author has been appointed and is undertaking the local CSPR using Appreciative Inquiry methodology. The review is due for completion by January 2024, which will be subject to IS scrutiny.

There have been four referrals for consideration of a SAR since April 2023. Two are still waiting a decision to be made for consideration at the November SARG meeting, and two did not meet the criteria.

Learning and completed action plans from all reviews are re-mitted to the PLG for quality assurance and dissemination.

The SARG is exploring adopting the rapid review process that is undertaken in child safeguarding serious incidents.

## **6. THERE IS AN ACTIVE PROGRAM OF MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING TRAINING**

There is an active multi-agency training programme for both children and adults. These are delivered by Northumberland Council. Training costs will be part of NCASP budget discussions in January 2024.

Evaluations of the impact of the training on practice is gaining momentum with two excellent examples presented to the August PLG meeting.

## **INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

The IS report highlights that the new joint NCASP arrangements have developed at a pace since April 2023.

There is strong partner engagement and a culture of positive relationships and partnership working, with a strong appetite for the success of joint children and adult arrangements.

The independent scrutineer role is evolving, as the Independent Scrutineer I will continue to strengthen how I fulfil the role responsibilities for acting as a critical friend and providing objective support, scrutiny, and challenge to NCASP.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Kirkley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

**Sue Kirkley**

**Independent Scrutineer**

Northumberland Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnership