



Independent scrutiny Report

Dr Henri Giller, Independent Chair

Date: November 2020

Introduction

The new safeguarding arrangements, introduced by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018, require that they include provision for the scrutiny by an independent person of the effectiveness of the arrangements. This section of the report provides the scrutiny of the Independent Chair of the Oldham Partnership of the first working year of the new partnership arrangements. Because this is the first operational period of the partnership, it was decided that the criteria for scrutiny should be that proposed by Sir Alan Wood in his report proposing new safeguarding arrangements (para. 69 Wood report: review of the role and functions of local safeguarding children boards (2016)). These criteria are said to reflect the key strategic issues that need to authorise and underpin effective multi-agency practice.

Oldham's progress

Criteria 1: Determining the physical area of operation covered by the multi-agency arrangements

This measure was rapidly agreed at the outset of the Partnership planning process and reflects the previous position adopted on the safeguarding governance footprint. The Partners did face challenge as to this determination in the run-up to the national deadline for implementation of the new arrangements from GMP and GMCA. However, this challenge was robustly resisted by all the statutory partners.

Judgement: Green

Criteria 2: The authorising vision for multi-agency arrangements, the partnership commitment

The importance of having an agreed multi-agency vision statement and a public commitment to the revised partnership arrangements was recognised at the outset by both the statutory partners and the relevant agencies. This vision statement and associated statement of strategic aims for the Partnership was endorsed at a preparatory workshop on the implementation of the revised Partnership (July 2019). The workshop also examined the expectations of revised partnership working and how this should differ from the working relationships under the previous safeguarding board arrangements.

In framing the revised arrangements, the partners specifically considered the extent to which the work programme and structures of the children arrangements could and should be elided with those of the adult safeguarding board. The specific issues of workforce development, mental capacity assessment, transitions and PR and communications were prioritised for joint development. These matters reflected a common change agenda that was being simultaneously addressed by the two safeguarding bodies. In addition, the Partners recognised the need to bring together on a formal basis twice a year a joint children and adult safeguarding forum which would consider the progress being made on tackling common issues and to prioritise emerging demands that require concerted action.

The Partners recognise that there will be a need to review and revisit both the vision statements of partnership working and the strategic aims by March 2021. Nevertheless, for now, the matters have been addressed on start up.

Judgement: Green

Criteria 3: The resource framework, e.g. the cost of the multi-agency strategic decision-making body, the cost of agreed initiatives, e.g. joint training, agreed local research, innovation in service design

Resourcing of the partnership in the first six months reflected the historic contributions of the statutory partners and the GM context of partner contributions. The new partnership arrangements benefitted from a programme of service improvements that were steered by the Local Authority. These improvements included improvements to the local special educational need offer, enhanced team around the school resources, improved early help services and a strengthening of the children's social care workforce. Further innovations were progressed in the first period of the new partnership's life cycle including the scoping of a multi-agency complex safeguarding team and a re-structuring of the partnerships approach to neglect.

These positives, and their continuing impact on framing closer partnership working, cannot mask the fact that we cannot yet claim that there is a strategic and robust resourcing framework in place across the Partnership

Judgement: Amber

Criteria 4: The method to assess outcomes of multi-agency practice, including how intervention happens if performance falters, and how "independent" external assurance/scrutiny will be utilised.

The process for assessing the outcomes from multi-agency practice is at the heart of the revised structure of Oldham's safeguarding partnership arrangements. The Learning and Improvement Group has a remit which focuses on the effectiveness of practice. The remit of the learning and improvement group states that the "group will lead on the learning and improvement activity of the Partnership. This will include undertaking multi-agency case evaluations, monitoring of partner agency compliance with Section 11 responsibilities, collating and providing analysis of partnership performance data."

The main focus of the data analysis activity has been primarily on single agency rather than multi-agency safeguarding performance. Similarly, there have been some challenges in ensuring that stakeholders respond to and engage with those seeking to assure performance, via the use of an escalation policy of the Partnership. Understanding the role and remit of the Partnership to assure safeguarding standards is an on-going process which requires continuous attention. Currently priority points of focus relate to domestic abuse, complex safeguarding, mental health and neglect.

The presumed role of the GM Standards Board in participating as external facilitator and evaluator to Oldham's safeguarding performance, originally scoped in the new arrangements' specification document, did not materialise in the first six months of the life of the Partnership. How that role will develop now that the entity is transforming into the GM Safeguarding Alliance remains to be seen.

In the meantime, a peer review of complex safeguarding has been undertaken by the GM complex safeguarding hub and cross-partnership scrutiny of children exposed to exploitation using the JTAI methodology.

External review of the Partnership arrangements has been led by the independent Chair. This exercise in the evaluation of the Wood strategic criteria is the first iteration of that function.

Judgement: Amber

Criteria 5: The strategy for information and data sharing, including to allow for identification of vulnerable children in need of early help.

A protocol for information sharing between the statutory partners and between the partnership and key stakeholder organisations was developed in line with the new partnership arrangements. Guidance on retention and destruction of personal information held by safeguarding stakeholders is under development.

Judgement: Amber

Criteria 6: High level oversight of workforce planning, e.g. gaps in skilled areas.

Attention to work force planning in this period was primarily undertaken on an agency- specific basis. Active strategies to enhance the quality and quantity of the workforce were pursued by children's social care (e.g. improving the level of engagement of permanent qualified social work staff), the police (e.g. reorganising specialist safeguarding staff into local divisional structures) and NHS commissioners (e.g. reconfiguring community health staff into locality teams).

The Partnership maintains a strong multi-agency training offer however further work is needed to evaluate the impact of this offer on workforce planning.

Further enhancements to the reach of safeguarding services on a multi-agency basis (e.g. complex safeguarding) have heightened awareness of the need for a cross-partnership workforce planning strategy. Further awareness -raising is emanating from the development agenda for complex safeguarding particularly with respect to the role of vulnerable children who become vulnerable adults.

Judgement: Amber

Criteria 7: A multi-agency communication strategy on protecting children

Oldham has had a long-term ambition to improve the public relations and communications capacity with respect to safeguarding across both the child and adult arrangements. The formulation of the revised Partnerships has enabled this ambition to commence in earnest. Work on a revised website which will be a shared platform for both safeguarding partnerships has commenced, with the children's cut being made available to both public and professional stakeholders in March 2020. Significant input into the development from children and young people themselves has meant that the resultant product is a far better reflection of local priority safeguarding needs. The website development will also mean that there can be a better co-ordinated approach to the dissemination

of new and revised safeguarding policies and procedures, seven minute briefings on key findings from child safeguarding practice reviews and information relating to high profile campaigns and initiatives, both across the borough and GM-wide, which seek to impact on public and professionals' awareness of safeguarding issues. This work during the initial phase of the revised Partnership has established a strong foundation on which to build.

Judgement: Amber

Criteria 8: Risk strategy, identifying and adapting to challenges including new events, and establishing a core intelligence capacity.

The identification of patterns of safeguarding risk, both on an individual and areal basis, is well recognised by the local statutory partners. Indeed, in the foundation document to the Partnership both types of risk are identified and sought to be prioritised. Strategic risk identification, management and amelioration was primarily focussed on familiar risk groups; looked after children missing from home, those at risk of sexual exploitation, gang violence etc. The Partners, moreover, were keen to extend this strategic approach with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. It remains to be seen whether more traditional areas of safeguarding need will benefit from a strategic refresh (e.g. transitions, domestic abuse, neglect).

Judgement: Amber

Criteria 9: The model of local inquiry into incidents

The establishment of a rapid review group within the new partnership arrangements provided Oldham with the architecture with which to address the new requirements for responding to serious child safeguarding incidents. Translation of the statement of requirements into practice has been facilitated by Oldham partnership staff participating in the GM initiative on safeguarding reviews being led by Salford. A variety of methods for undertaking review and reflection have been trialled and further are scheduled for testing and trialling (e.g. GM model). Active communication with the National Panel has produced positive outcomes from local decisions and support for local initiatives.

A key conclusion from the first Partnership development workshop was that the new Partnership arrangements should secure more effective practice change where required from practice reviews. This remains a priority for the partners, and one that requires audit and evaluation. The Learning and Improvement Group is currently overseeing implementation of changes to practice proposed by the first tranche of practice reviews to have emerged from the new arrangements.

Judgement: Amber

Snapshot of ratings

Criteria	RAG rating
Determining the physical area of operation covered by the multi-agency arrangements	Green
The authorising vision for multi-agency arrangements, the partnership commitment	Green
The resource framework, e.g. the cost of the multi-agency strategic decision- making body, the cost of agreed initiatives, e.g. joint training, agreed local research, innovation in service design	Amber
The method to assess outcomes of multi-agency practice, including how intervention happens if performance falters, and how “independent” external assurance/scrutiny will be utilised.	Amber
The strategy for information and data sharing, including to allow for identification of vulnerable children in need of early help.	Amber
High level oversight of workforce planning, e.g. gaps in skilled areas.	Amber
A multi-agency communication strategy on protecting children	Amber
Risk strategy, identifying and adapting to challenges including new events, and establishing a core intelligence capacity.	Amber
The model of local inquiry into incidents	Amber