

# Alan Caton Safeguarding and Consultancy Services

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Executive Leadership Group  
Hillingdon Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements  
London Borough of Hillingdon  
Hillingdon Council  
Civic Centre  
High Street  
Uxbridge  
Middlesex  
UB8 1UW

Dear Fran, Diane and Sharon,

**Re: Independent Scrutiny of the London Borough of Hillingdon Safeguarding Arrangements**

This letter summarises the findings from my independent review and scrutiny of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for both children and adults in the London Borough of Hillingdon between February and April 2021.

I am an experienced safeguarding professional, having worked as an independent chair and scrutineer for both LSCB's and safeguarding partnerships for the past 8 years. Prior to this I served as a police officer in Suffolk Constabulary for over 30 years and retired as the senior officer in charge of the Public Protection Directorate.

I was appointed as the independent person to conduct this review and considered the safeguarding arrangements as outlined in the terms of reference which are attached at '**Appendix 1**'.

Working Together 2018 (WT 2018) clearly outlines the role of 'Independent Scrutiny' which I have considered during this review. The relevant paragraphs from WT 2018 appertaining to Independent Scrutiny are attached at '**Appendix 2**'.

The review took place over a period of 7 days, during that time I looked specifically at the safeguarding partnership arrangements, focusing on how the whole system works together. The review was a snapshot of the current arrangements and did not consider the effectiveness of practice or review individual cases. The review took the form of reading relevant documentation, strategies, policies and plans along with discussions and input from strategic leaders across the partnership. It would have been beneficial if I had been able to attend and observe multi-agency partnership meetings, but it was not possible during the timespan for this review.

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I would like to thank all of those who contributed and gave open and honest feedback to inform the process. In particular I would like to thank Suzi Gladish, who has worked tirelessly to provide me with all of the requested documentation and arranged interviews with senior managers and safeguarding partners.

All advice given, albeit experienced based, is in no way meant to be prescriptive and is given on the basis that Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnerships may or may not choose to act upon it.

## **Key Findings**

The Hillingdon Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements for both children and adults comply with their statutory responsibilities. The arrangements for both children and adults are clear and have been published in accordance with statutory guidance.

I found that good relationships have been built between partners, both statutory and non-statutory, and that there is a real willingness for the safeguarding partners to work together to seek out vulnerable children and adults and to provide them with the best possible services. It is apparent that there is a strong sense of partnership across Hillingdon and a desire to continually improve services. There is a clear meeting structure and delivery model which is supported by multi-agency subgroups.

Strategic governance is provided by the Executive Leadership Group (ELG) who oversee the safeguarding arrangements for both children and adults. The ELG comprises of the Council Chief Executive and senior representatives from the CCG and police who form the three statutory safeguarding partners. There is joint and equal responsibility for the safeguarding of children and adults in Hillingdon which is recognised by the wider partnership. It is my view that the funding for the safeguarding arrangements in Hillingdon falls disproportionately on the local authority.

***Area for Consideration: Working Together 2018 highlights that working in partnership means organisations and agencies should collaborate on how they will fund their arrangements. This funding for the arrangements should be equitable and proportionate across the partnership. The funding for the arrangements in Hillingdon falls disproportionately on the local authority and should be reviewed.***

Sitting underneath the ELG is the Safeguarding Children Partnership Board and the Safeguarding Adult Board. The Safeguarding Adult Board does not have an independent chair and is chaired on an annual rotation basis by senior members of the three statutory partners. It has been a challenging year for the Adult Board who have gone through a 'reset' and restructure of the arrangements. The Safeguarding Adult Board has had to deal with a legacy of overdue serious safeguarding adult cases that were in the system and waiting for a decision on whether or not to commission a Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR). The national pandemic exacerbated these delays and also delayed a planned multi-agency audit in relation to 'Making Safeguarding Personal'. I am pleased to say that through the hard work and tenacity of the Safeguarding Partnerships Quality and Implementation Manager these legacy cases have recently been concluded, and audit work has recommenced.

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The Safeguarding Adult Board is currently chaired by the Principal Social Worker and Head of Safeguarding for Adult Social Care and has clearly been one of the key drivers in implementing the necessary change and progressing the agenda within the adult safeguarding partnership. During some of my interviews with partners, the Adult Board was seen to be driven by the local authority and could possibly benefit from having an independent chair.

**Area for Consideration: *The Care Act and supporting guidance states that although it is not a requirement, the local authority should consider appointing an independent chair to the SAB who is not an employee or member of an agency that is a member of the SAB. It goes on to say that the chair has a critical role to lead collaboratively, give advice, support and encouragement but also to offer constructive challenge and hold partner agencies to account to ensure effectiveness. An independent chair can provide additional reassurance that the Board has some independence from the local authority and partners.***

The Safeguarding Children Partnership Board is well attended by partner representatives at the appropriate level and each partner recognises that they have the authority to speak for, and take decisions, on behalf of their organisation as well as holding their own agency to account on how effectively they participate and implement the local arrangements. Board partners did consider that the three statutory partners forming the ELG were actively involved in driving the safeguarding agenda. The Board is chaired on an annual rotation basis between the three statutory partner organisations and is currently being chaired by the local authority Assistant Director of Children's Services.

Independent scrutiny is required to provide assurance in judging the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children and should include arrangements to identify and review serious child safeguarding cases. The decision on how best to implement independent scrutiny has been made locally and is articulated in the published safeguarding arrangements. In Hillingdon that decision is to invite an annual independent peer to provide critical challenge and appraise the safeguarding arrangements. It has been a privilege for me to be able to undertake this role. However, I now feel I am just starting to understand the partnership and feel that anyone appointed to the role of independent scrutineer would be keen to delve deeper into key areas of progress against priorities, to better understand practice, and to act as a constructive critical friend to drive continuous improvement.

**Area for Consideration: *To consider enhancing and providing ongoing access to an independent person to provide regular scrutiny to the safeguarding children's partnership for Hillingdon. This would enable ongoing scrutiny to the arrangements, offering constructive challenge and the ability to hold partners to account to ensure effectiveness. In addition, independent scrutiny of practice, the published annual report and child safeguarding practice reviews can provide reassurance that the partnership has some independence from the local authority and partners. Finally, it may be helpful to consider the addition of Lay Members to both the children and adult partnership boards. Lay members can be valuable in bringing additional challenge and a perspective from within the local community.***

Working Together 2018 outlines that the safeguarding partners should publish a threshold document which sets out the local criteria for action in a way that is transparent, accessible and easily understood. Hillingdon relies on the London Child Protection Procedures as its threshold

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document. Whilst the London Procedures provide an overarching threshold document, they still advocate that every local safeguarding partnership should publish and disseminate a threshold document that includes amongst other things the process for early help and the services provided.

**Area for Consideration: *Hillingdon Safeguarding Children's Partnership considers publishing and disseminating a local threshold document incorporating the requirements contained within Working Together 2018.***

Members from both the adults and children's partnerships felt that a better understanding of the voices, views and lived experience of both children and vulnerable adults would enhance effectiveness both strategically and operationally and should be used to inform the work of the board and to further develop and improve services.

**Area for Consideration: *To consider developing a process that ensures the voices, views and needs of children, families and vulnerable adults are captured and appropriately engaged in the work of the safeguarding partnership as it develops and progresses its work plans and priorities.***

In order to fulfil their functions, both the children's and adult's partnership boards should use data in order to assess the effectiveness of the services being offered to children, families and vulnerable adults. Data needs to be multi agency and it is incumbent on the local authority, statutory partners, and relevant agencies to provide the partnerships with the necessary data to enable them to fulfil their functions. Board members did express concerns that the data provided to the Boards is not sufficient and that there needs to be a greater emphasis on obtaining multi-agency data, particularly from police and health, along with sufficient commentary and analysis to monitor the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding and practice. I am aware that this issue is being progressed.

**Area for Consideration: *Consider how best to ensure all relevant partners provide clearly analysed data as requested by both the Children's and Adult's Partnerships. This will ensure that each of the Boards has access to the right level of performance management information, data (and commentary) with which to monitor the impact and effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding, child protection and vulnerable adult practice across Hillingdon.***

In more general terms the Board has a sound structure and relevant sub-groups to take forward the Board priorities. The partnership has created a number of sub-groups that are aligned to each of the board's priority areas. Some of these are joint subgroups which are designed to address those priorities that cut across children's and adult's services and ensure a consistent, coordinated and coherent approach that supports both children and adults in Hillingdon.

During the review I found a number of areas of good practice. Communication links between the partnership is good with the regular distribution of the PSW Practice Briefing Newsletter which highlights key safeguarding issues and operational updates. In addition, I also found the 7-minute briefing tools which are available to provide practical and accessible information to practitioners to be an excellent resource. A number of these briefings are available on the Hillingdon SCP website and cover key issues around particular themes that are important and relevant to safeguarding children and adults, including briefings to highlight the learning from serious case reviews.

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The Board is well supported by the Safeguarding Partnership Implementation Unit which is led by a highly competent and effective Quality and Implementation Manager. The Quality and Implementation Manager has the full confidence of the wider partnership and ensures the whole of the Board's planning and improvement work for both adults and children is maintained and kept up to date.

To be really effective a safeguarding partnership has to work within and relate to all the partnership arrangements across the system. The Board's job is to be able to 'hold up the safeguarding lens' to all of the other partnership board activity strategically, hold them to account, identify risk and opportunity in relation to how well the system operates to safeguard children and adults. It also has to provide intelligence on the effectiveness of practice to each other Board.

**Area for Consideration: *To consider how best to build strategic relationships and alliances across the safeguarding system including, Safeguarding Children Partnership, Safeguarding Adult Board, Safer Hillingdon Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Board, the Local Family Justice Board etc.***

The annual report provides a comprehensive overview of local performance and the work of both the adult and children's partnerships, there are really good innovative examples in the report which highlight the extent of operational activity across Hillingdon to keep children and vulnerable adults safe. However, whilst the report provides a really good update on partnership activity, I did not get a sense that the published report provided sufficient evaluation of the impact of the board's work.

**Area for Consideration: *To consider enhancing the published annual report to provide a rigorous assessment of local services along with evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners on outcomes for children, families and vulnerable adults, including an analysis of any areas where little or no progress has been made against agreed priorities.***

## Conclusion

In conclusion there are, in my view, many strengths to the safeguarding arrangements for both children and adults across Hillingdon. I have found a strong partnership that is open to scrutiny and challenge and one that strives to continually learn and improve practice. I have not come across any areas of poor practice or weaknesses in the safeguarding arrangements. The areas I have outlined for the partnership to further consider, are there to help the partnership on its journey to improve collaboration and coordination and therefore consequently, to improve outcomes for children, families and adults in Hillingdon.

There is strong leadership from the ELG and a clear sense of joint and equal responsibility from the three safeguarding partners. The partnership is one that is built on high support, high challenge and where difficult conversations are encouraged.

Attendance at both the children's and adult's partnership Boards and associated subgroups is good and has good representation from the wider partnership. There is excellent engagement from leaders across the partnership who set a culture which drives improvement activity. There is a clear

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structure and good links between the children's and adult's partnership arrangements, however improved links with other strategic boards as mentioned above would enhance effectiveness.

Whilst I have found a culture across the Hillingdon Partnership that encourages high levels of challenge and scrutiny, I do feel this could be improved with more consistent engagement with independent scrutiny as outlined above.

The effectiveness of the partnership in Hillingdon was recognised in February 2020 following the Ofsted Focused visit to children's services, Ofsted commenting that '**Effective multi agency communication, cooperation and collaboration ensure that vulnerable young people and their wider associations are identified early and preventive services are offered quickly**'.

Next years independent scrutineer should consider the findings from this scrutiny report to assess progress against the 'Areas for Consideration'.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alan Caton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alan" and the last name "Caton" clearly distinguishable.

Alan C Caton OBE  
Independent Safeguarding Consultant

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## Appendix 1

### Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership Independent Scrutiny 2020-21 Terms of Reference

#### Local Context

Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership is a joint arrangement across the adult and child safeguarding networks. In September 2019 the Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Partnership was launched in line with the statutory requirements set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. Under these arrangements The Local Authority shares responsibility with our statutory partners, the NHS Hillingdon Clinical Commissioning Group and Metropolitan Police, to safeguard children and young people.

The vision of the Safeguarding Children Partnership is for every child and young person to be and feel safe, enjoy good physical, emotional and mental health, have pride in their unique identities, feel that they belong and have opportunities to thrive. The three statutory partners work alongside other relevant agencies in achieving this goal.

The Safeguarding Adult arrangements set out how the Safeguarding Adult Board will discharge our statutory duties related to Safeguarding Adults, in order to optimise the safety, wellbeing and quality of life of adults with care and support needs, their carers and families. In order to achieve this the Board must raise awareness, minimise the risk of abuse, neglect or self-neglect occurring, and ensure our response is timely, proportionate, effective and underpinned by the key principles of safeguarding adults when it does occur. The Safeguarding Adult Board's vision is for Hillingdon citizens, irrespective of age, race, gender, culture, religion, disability or sexual orientation to be able to live with their rights protected, in safety, free from abuse and the fear of abuse.

Following the successful implementation of the new statutory arrangements for children, the same approach has been expanded to incorporate the Safeguarding Adult Board. This has enabled Hillingdon to provide a safeguarding service that is consistent, irrespective of age, and provides opportunities for innovative and responsive services in the Borough.

To ensure the success of the shared arrangements we have created a joint Executive Leadership Group (ELG) that provides governance, leadership, oversight and challenge to both Boards. The ELG consists of the Local Authority's Chief Executive, the Chief Nurse of Hillingdon NHS Clinical Commissioning Group and the Metropolitan Police Service Borough Commander. This group has joint and equal responsibility for safeguarding in Hillingdon. Each partner is subject to internal scrutiny in accordance with their internal governance structures. In addition to this, the ELG will commission independent reviews of the Hillingdon

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Safeguarding Partnership arrangements to provide critical challenge and appraisal and support future developments.

## **Agreed Areas of Scrutiny/objectives:**

The objectives of the review are to scrutinise the way in which:

1. The leads from the three core partners are actively involved in strategic planning and implementation
2. The wider safeguarding partners (including relevant agencies) are actively involved in safeguarding children and adults
3. Children, young people, adults with care and support needs, their carers and families are aware of and involved with plans for safeguarding
4. Appropriate quality assurance procedures are in place for data collection, audit and information sharing
5. There is a process for identifying and investigating learning from local and national case reviews
6. There is an active program of multi-agency safeguarding training

## **Methodology**

This is the first year of Independent Scrutiny and will focus upon the overarching effectiveness of the model that Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership has adopted. It has been agreed by the Board Chairs and Executive Leadership Group that the Review will be based on the Six Steps to Independent Scrutiny Model, this will be adapted to reflect the statutory duties of Safeguarding Adult Boards.

An independent person was appointed and agreed by the ELG to conduct the review looking at both Children and adults' arrangements

A self-assessment focused on the objectives of the scrutiny activity will be developed and made available to the independent scrutineer

As part of the scrutiny, the independent person will be conducting both paper reviews and interview with the relevant professionals that will be able to inform the review

The review will produce a proportionate report that will highlight areas of good practice and areas of future focus for the partnership. (these recommendations will be presented at ELG and included in the activity plans for the two Boards ).

During the scrutiny activity the scrutineer will comply with all data protection and GDPR requirements.

## **Schedule/Timescales**

The independent scrutiny activity will start in February 2021 and the report will be produced no later than the end of March 2021

## Appendix 2

### Independent scrutiny

31. The role of independent scrutiny is to provide assurance in judging the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in a local area, including arrangements to identify and review serious child safeguarding cases. This independent scrutiny will be part of a wider system which includes the independent inspectorates' single assessment of the individual safeguarding partners and the Joint Targeted Area Inspections.

32. Whilst the decision on how best to implement a robust system of independent scrutiny is to be made locally, safeguarding partners should ensure that the scrutiny is objective, acts as a constructive critical friend and promotes reflection to drive continuous improvement.

33. The independent scrutineer should consider how effectively the arrangements are working for children and families as well as for practitioners, and how well the safeguarding partners are providing strong leadership and agree with the safeguarding partners how this will be reported.

34. The published arrangements should set out the plans for independent scrutiny; how the arrangements will be reviewed; and how any recommendations will be taken forward. This might include, for example, the process and timescales for ongoing review of the arrangements.

35. Safeguarding partners should also agree arrangements for independent scrutiny of the report they must publish at least once a year.