

# Alan Caton Safeguarding and Consultancy Services

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**Alan Caton OBE**  
Independent Safeguarding Consultant

8 December 2023

Executive Leadership Group  
Hillingdon Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements  
London Borough of Hillingdon  
Hillingdon Council  
Civic Centre  
High Street  
Uxbridge  
Middlesex  
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Dear Tony, Jennifer and Sean,

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

This letter summarises the findings from my independent review and scrutiny of safeguarding in the London Borough of Hillingdon between July and December 2023.

The focus of this year's scrutiny was to; 'seek assurance about safeguarding practice and scrutinise the effectiveness of the partnership arrangements with reference to:

- The senior strategic groups; The Executive Leadership Group, Safeguarding Children Partnership Board and Safeguarding Adults Board
- The functioning of safeguarding arrangements within statutory partners and relevant agencies'

The scrutiny process was informed by considering the 'Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny' model developed by the University of Bedfordshire 2019.

I am an experienced safeguarding professional, having worked as an independent chair and scrutineer for both LSCB's, SAB's and Safeguarding Partnerships for the past 10 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.

Working Together 2018 (WT 2018) clearly outlines the role of 'Independent Scrutiny' which I have also considered during this review. The relevant paragraphs from WT 2018 appertaining to Independent Scrutiny are attached at '**Appendix 1**'.

## **Review methodology**

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The review took place over a period of 6 days, during which time I looked specifically at the effectiveness of the partnership with a particular focus on the function and impact of the senior strategic groups along with the functioning of the safeguarding arrangements within statutory partners and relevant agencies.

This review is a snapshot of the current practice arrangements. The review took the form of reading relevant documentation, strategies, policies, plans, self-assessments and reviews, along with discussions and input from strategic leaders across the partnership. In addition, I attended a variety of partnership meetings virtually. I visited Hillingdon to meet with key leaders from statutory and partner agencies, who have active roles within the safeguarding partnership. I also met with and heard from some of Hillingdon's young people who have accessed safeguarding services.

I would like to thank all of those who contributed and gave open and honest feedback to inform the process. I would like to thank the Safeguarding Partnership Team who worked tirelessly to provide me with all 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 ICB 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. On speaking with senior leaders, it is apparent that they feel well supported by a very efficient Safeguarding Partnership Team which is led by a highly competent and effective manager.

It is very reassuring to see that the 'Areas for Consideration' following last years scrutiny have been considered by the partnership along with being actioned and progressed where necessary.

The following headings are lifted from the Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny. I will highlight my key findings under each of these headings. I will identify areas of good practice along with those

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areas that I feel need further consideration by the partnership to improve services for children, families and vulnerable adults.

## **I. The leads from the three core partners are actively involved in strategic planning and implementation.**

The safeguarding arrangements for both children and adults are well established and well understood by partners. Business plans drive the activity of the partnerships, which are well supported with a clear structure of meetings. The Executive Leadership Group, comprising of senior leaders from the three statutory partners have joint and equal responsibility for safeguarding in Hillingdon, their role is delivery oversight, challenge and governance.

I attended and observed the Executive Leadership Group (ELG) meeting and saw there was good oversight and governance from the three statutory partners. The Hillingdon chief executive plays a key role in leading the safeguarding partnership along with senior colleagues in the ICB and police. This senior level of engagement sets the tone for a strong, engaging and collaborative partnership which puts children at the heart of everything they do. This was evident when I observed children and young people deliver a presentation to senior leaders at the ELG around the issues that affect them. The young people expressed concerns about crime, serious youth violence, school exclusions and mental health amongst other things.

The engagement with children and young people in Hillingdon is excellent and should be seen as good practice. In addition to hearing the voices of young people, Hillingdon also produce a young people's version of the annual report which is presented at Board meetings by the young people themselves. Training sessions have also been developed which is called 'Walking in our Shoes', this training is delivered by care experienced young people and should be undertaken by all professionals who work with children and young people.

## **Education**

There is much discussion nationally about how all education settings are integrated within multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and in particular how 'education' should be the fourth statutory safeguarding partner. Schools, colleges, early years and other education and childcare providers are key to ensuring children are effectively safeguarded. Working Together 2023 (Draft) suggests that safeguarding partnerships should create an environment which enables all schools and other education settings to be fully engaged, involved and included in local safeguarding arrangements. They want to make sure that the views and contributions of 'education' are articulated at the highest level of decision making. It is accepted that it would be challenging for a single 'education' leader to speak on behalf of all education settings, however it is expected that senior education leaders will be brought into strategic discussions.

Hillingdon has a sound foundation of engaging with education leaders and professionals. There are excellent links to the Headteachers Forum, the DSL Forum and School Cluster Groups. From these groups there are good links with the Safeguarding Partnership and the Education Subgroup where there is a two-way flow of information.

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Looking ahead to the changes that are to be brought in with the updated Working Together guidance, it is important that partnerships look to improve their engagement with 'education' and provide a way to bring senior education leaders into strategic discussions.

***Area for Consideration 1 – To consider how best to integrate senior leaders in 'education' within the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership, to ensure their voice is heard at a strategic level. It will be important to engage with headteachers directly so that they influence the solution to this challenge.***

Following last year's scrutiny report I advocated the need to build improved strategic relationships and alliances across the safeguarding system to ensure effective coordination between strategic meetings including the Safeguarding Children Partnership, Safeguarding Adult Board, Safer Hillingdon Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Board along with the Family Justice Board. It has been pleasing to see that this is being progressed. A lot of work is ongoing to map the structure of all strategic and tactical meetings to ensure greater oversight on strategic objectives and avoid duplication.

## **II. The wider safeguarding partners (including relevant agencies) are actively involved in safeguarding children and adults.**

Both the Safeguarding Adult Board and the Children's Safeguarding Partnership Board are again well established and understood in Hillingdon and are supported by a number of delivery groups which drive the business activity of both the children's and adult's boards. Boards are in the main, well attended by partners from relevant and statutory agencies.

There is an established induction process which is available to new members of the partnership. The partnership is in the process of developing a video webinar which will further increase the accessibility to the partnership. This is an excellent initiative.

During this review, I attended and observed the Safeguarding Adult Board (SAB) meeting. The Board was well attended by partner agencies. I observed good levels of challenge and collaboration. One area of concern raised at the Board was the lack of multi-agency data. Such data is required to give partners a good understanding of potential risks or concerns and can facilitate coordinated multi-agency responses. This issue was also raised in relation to the lack of multi-agency data available to the children's partnership. I have further addressed this issue under **IV**, below.

It was really pleasing to see adults with lived experience of adult safeguarding present to the SAB. This was a powerful presentation and provided some real challenges to the safeguarding board representatives. As a result of this presentation, the big question was asked, 'what difference will it make'?

***Area for Consideration 2 – To consider developing an Action Plan following the presentation to the Safeguarding Adult Board on 26 July 2023 from adults with lived experience of services, to understand what services will be doing differently following the challenges made.***

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Chairing of the Executive Leadership Group, the Children's Safeguarding Partnership and the Safeguarding Adult Board is undertaken on a shared basis between leaders of the three statutory partners. The chairing rotates on an annual basis. Whilst this seen as being a good idea in principle, it does highlight some challenges in practice. They will chair only four meetings during the year. It is the role of the chair not only to facilitate the meeting, but to get involved in setting the agenda, managing discussions whilst maintaining a focus on the longer-term objectives of the partnership. I would suggest that a one-year tenure is too short to enable meaningful integration within the partnership to be effective in driving forward the business objectives.

**Area for Consideration 3 – *To consider reviewing the chairing roles of the strategic boards and delivery groups to ensure that chairs are representative from across the partnership. Also, to consider increasing the timescale on which the chairing roles are rotated.***

One issue that was brought to my attention during this review is that the police representatives have not always been present or represented at the right level at a number of safeguarding partnership meetings. The police are a key statutory safeguarding partner and as such should be visible within the partnership at all levels and where appropriate take leadership roles in chairing subgroup meetings.

**Areas for Consideration 4 – *To work with the police to ensure appropriate representation on all relevant partnership and subgroup meetings. Where appropriate to request the police take on the role of chairing meetings.***

**III. Children, young people, adults with care and support needs, their carers and families are aware of and involved with plans for safeguarding.**

The engagement with children, young people and adults is a real strength in Hillingdon. During the short time of my review, I observed young people and vulnerable adults talk about their experiences of services at strategic partnership meetings. What I have not been able to assess is the difference that those inputs make to those agencies delivering services. Hence, I have asked the partnership to consider undertaking more work to understand, following presentations from children and adults, what agencies are doing differently to meet their needs, see Area for Consideration 2.

Whilst speaking with Safeguarding Adult Board members, it was highlighted there are some concerns regarding the timeliness of Section 42 enquiries for adults who are at risk of abuse or neglect. Timeliness of Section 42 enquiries in adult safeguarding is crucial to ensure the swift assessment and intervention in cases of suspected abuse and neglect. Adhering to specified timeframes helps protect vulnerable adults and address concerns promptly.

There are some excellent resources provided by the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership covering 'Best Practice in Safeguarding Adults Enquiries', it is important that all agencies involved in undertaking assessments are made aware of these resources.

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**Areas for Consideration 4 – *The Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership to consider undertaking a multi-agency safeguarding audit of Section 42 enquiries, to be assured that they are being conducted efficiently and completed within specified time frames.***

## **IV. Appropriate quality assurance procedures are in place for data collection, audit and information sharing.**

Working Together clearly states that information should be shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families. Having an effective data set is crucial for agencies to hold each other to account and to ensure that safeguarding is effective and is making a difference to children, young people and families across Hillingdon.

It was clear from my interviews with participants of both adults and children's partnership boards, and as highlighted above, that there were ongoing concerns that insufficient data is being provided to the boards to effectively monitor the impact and effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding. This is clearly taking some time to be addressed as it was raised an area for consideration following my independent review and scrutiny of Hillingdon's safeguarding arrangements in 2021.

**Areas for Consideration 5 – *Consider how best to ensure all partners provide clearly analysed data as requested by the partnership. This will ensure the Board has access to the right level of performance and management information data (and commentary) with which to monitor the impact and effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding across Hillingdon.***

Engagement with 'education' in Hillingdon is good. As I mentioned earlier, there is a sound structure of engaging with school headteachers, DSL's and Cluster Groups. The Education subgroup works well and is seen as the effective conduit between education settings and the safeguarding partnership.

The Hillingdon Leap website is seen as a valued resource for providing information and guidance for Hillingdon schools. However, some felt that the website could be modernised and further enhanced to really improve information sharing between schools themselves and between schools and the local authority. For example, making the website secure so that information about children with an allocated social worker can be shared directly with schools. That safeguarding advice can be sought through the website and that important messages can be shared promptly.

**Area for Consideration 6 – *To consider the feasibility of investing in, modernising, further enhancing and developing The Hillingdon LEAP website to meet the information sharing needs of schools.***

Feedback following my interaction with schools as part of this review indicated that they are not always updated with feedback following making a referral. In the short time I have had during this review I have not triangulated this concern; however, it might be useful to undertake an audit to be assured that referrers do get feedback from the local authority on decisions that are taken.

**Area for Consideration 7 – *To consider undertaking an audit of Stronger Families Hub referrals outcomes with a focus on the feedback mechanism to referrers.***

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## **V. There is a process for identifying and investigating learning from local and national case reviews.**

The partnership in Hillingdon has displayed real energy when it comes to learning from serious cases. The purpose of reviews of serious child safeguarding cases, and safeguarding adult reviews, at both local and national level, is to identify improvements to be made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. Such reviews should seek to prevent or reduce the risk of recurrence of similar incidents. It is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Partners to identify serious safeguarding incidents at a local level and then to review them as appropriate so that improvements can be made.

Hillingdon Safeguarding Partners have a well organised group of multi-agency professionals that oversee reviews and ensure there is a culture of learning and continuous improvement. The group are very keen to see that the recommendations from reviews improve outcomes for children and that lessons learned are embedded into practice.

It is important that individual agencies take responsibility for ensuring the learning is cascaded and embedded within their own organisations. The partnership has recently undertaken an evaluation of the impact of SARs to get assurance that the learning has been embedded, that practice has improved and that outcomes for vulnerable adults has improved.

It was disappointing to read the low level of responses from across the partnership to support the evaluation. However, the evaluation does highlight evidence that learning in relation to the application of the Mental Capacity Act and recognition of self-neglect where a person appears to have mental capacity has reached frontline practitioners and managers. It is also clear that learning from SARs has been used to directly inform training, policies and procedures, and service structures. There was however an absence of strategic level assurance responses to the survey that formed part of the evaluation. There was therefore little assurance provided that learning from SARs has been embedded at a strategic level.

### ***Area for Consideration 8 – To hold safeguarding partners to account to ensure they respond to the recommendations outlined in ‘Evaluating the Impact of Local Safeguarding Adult Reviews 2023’.***

There is evidence that learning from national reviews is considered and taken forward within the case review process. Following the publication of Child Q specific learning with a focus on Adultification and Intersectionality was cascaded to frontline practitioners across Hillingdon. The use of briefings, newsletters webinars, safeguarding learning events and inclusion in training are all highly effective ways to cascade important learning.

## **VI. There is an active program of multi-agency safeguarding training.**

There is a real commitment from partners in relation to the learning and development activities of the arrangements in Hillingdon. There is a well-established multi-agency practice development forum which collates the learning from across the adult and child network and identifies training

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needs. There are clear pathways and activities for the dissemination of learning from case reviews and audits.

The production of webinars, 7-minute-briefings, practice briefings and newsletters are used to disseminate learning in a timely way and highlight key areas of practice. This is recognised as a strength within the partnership and should be seen as good practice.

The partnership websites for both children and adults are clear and accessible. The website provides access to a wealth of information for professionals, adults and carers, parents along with children and young people. The site provides clear links to training, awareness raising materials, newsletters, practice briefings, webinars and guidance. This is a strength and an excellent resource for Hillingdon and is well received by the partnership.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, there continues to be 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. As last year, I have not come across any areas of poor practice or weaknesses in service provision. 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.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Hillingdon following their recent Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services. Achieving an 'Outstanding' grade is testament to all the hard work of leaders, frontline staff and partners in delivering high quality services to improve outcomes for Hillingdon's children, young people and families. It was very pleasing to see that Ofsted recognised Hillingdon's effective partnership. They stated in their report 'Partnership work is a strength within Hillingdon, with a relentless focus on cooperation with partners, families and communities. Through relationship-based work and the creation of the Stronger Families Hub, families and communities are well supported to address issues before they require more intense interventions'.

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

Yours sincerely,



Alan C Caton OBE  
Independent Safeguarding Consultant



## Appendix 1

### Independent scrutiny

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.

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.

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.

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.

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