

Independent Scrutiny and Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Arrangements

Summary Report

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(2022)¹

¹ This is a small piece of work with limited funding from the Home Office. It was commissioned by the VKPP. Lorraine Parker from the VKPP was Principal Investigator. Professor Jenny Pearce from the University of Bedfordshire Safer Young Lives Research Centre led the research with Iona Sutton (VKPP) as research assistant. Alison Thorpe from the Association of Safeguarding Partners (TASP) supported links with the LSCP sector.

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FOREWORD

“It’s a privilege to have sponsored a project so generously supported by partners across England. I welcome the publication of this report considering the part Independent Scrutiny plays in achieving effective local coordination of services for children and the spotlight it places on influential leadership. Instigated with a modest investment, it has been undertaken in a truly collaborative way at a local and national level.

Working in a permissive legislative framework brings opportunities and challenges. During consultation with local areas, the project team identified a strong desire from local partners to have a means of sharing practice and experiences systematically over a wide geographical footprint. This is not to promote one way of doing things but to provide an opportunity to reflect on the examples of others tackling similar problems, creating an environment where leaders and operational staff can expand their thinking, explore ideas, and reflect on progress to help them develop local approaches to best meet the needs of children in their communities.

Professionals from different agencies meet children and young people in quite distinct circumstances. Combining these insights with what young people tell us about their daily lives has the potential to improve the organisation of local arrangements and service delivery. The project reveals some emerging examples of engaging with young people to provide Independent Scrutiny. Local collaboration on Independent Scrutiny presents a vital opportunity to make the experiences of children and young people count and form the bedrock of future planning.

Leaders are charged with improving the effectiveness of local arrangements. Sir Alan Wood’s 2016 consultation emphasised the importance of independence as a factor that assures objectivity and credibility for multi-agency arrangements. Considering the publication from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel regarding the circumstances leading up to the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, the need for good Independent Scrutiny has never been greater.

It is hoped that the skills and experiences explored in this report can be used and expanded upon as we face the challenges ahead together. This report and the impact of scrutiny itself supports our collective efforts and aspirations to prevent harm and abuse of children. Building trust and confidence between agencies enables professionals to identify how to respond when abuse, neglect and risk of harm is uncovered. Creating an environment where children, families and communities feel they can come forward when abuse has occurred or is threatened so that they can be made safe and that offenders of these appalling crimes can be brought to justice must be at the heart of our work.”

DCC Ian Critchley QPM - NPCC Portfolio Lead Child Protection and Abuse Investigations

“I welcome the opportunity to have been a part of, and to learn from, this project. So many partnerships have shared how they have developed and delivered Independent Scrutiny in their areas. This level of participation and investment by partners should be taken as evidence of how important this topic is to them. I believe this research provides significant learning and reflects the innovation and focus partners have committed to delivering Independent Scrutiny and creating different ways of undertaking this responsibility, including using peer review.

The report raises some important questions about how involved Scrutineers can be in ongoing partnership activity. It is clear from the work that some partnerships benefit from having an Independent Chair providing significant support overseeing coordination of partnership activity. If this is coupled with Scrutineer tasks, it raises a number of important questions about how to both support and scrutinise leadership of LSCP activity.

I am pleased to read about young people taking an active role in scrutiny arrangements. There is a lot to learn from partners who have reached out beyond traditional boundaries for external challenge to, and reflection about, their plans. A wide variety of models of how to undertake scrutiny have developed, with considerable strengths and differences. This piece of research is invaluable in bringing those creative ideas together, offering further opportunity for us to learn from each other about how this important role and function can be achieved.”

Nicky Pace - Independent Scrutineer (Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership and Greenwich Safeguarding Children Partnership)

SUMMARY REPORT

Background context

1. This six-month project summarises responses from 105 Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships (LSCPs)² about what LSCP activity is being scrutinised, how and by whom. Two of the 105 partnerships completed the survey together, accounting for 103 surveys returned. Three of the 105 partnerships were from LSCPs outside the jurisdiction: Islands Safeguarding Partnership, Jersey and Ministry of Defence.
2. We are indebted to all the LSCPs who completed the survey and contributed to the progress of the work. Thanks are also extended to Nicky Pace and Ian Critchley for authoring the foreword, to Dr Debbie Allnock of the VKPP and the University of Bedfordshire for her professional counsel, and the Project Steering Group, for reviewing draft versions of the report. This report is dedicated to the memory of Dr Helen Rawden of the VKPP and Link to Change who was an exemplary doctorate student at the University of Bedfordshire. Helen was completely devoted to protecting the dignity of children and supporting them to build confidence into adulthood.
3. The project scope was to provide descriptions of how Independent Scrutiny is being undertaken. The work does not extend to evaluating or passing judgement on how scrutiny is taking place or what is being scrutinised. There is a demonstrable interest in exploring, sharing and developing ideas about scrutiny across the LSCP sector.
4. This summary report identifies the key messages outlined in more detail in a 'full report' found [here](#). The data is a "snapshot" in time. It covers self-reported data from the 105 LSCPs. Data has not been evaluated or assessed against any criteria or triangulated against any of the LSCP published reports and was not supported by literature reviews of 'grey' or academic research on the topics. Our funding did not cover this, but it is an area of work that would, in the future, benefit from a full review. Partners have continued to develop and refine their methods and approaches since the data was gathered in late 2021.

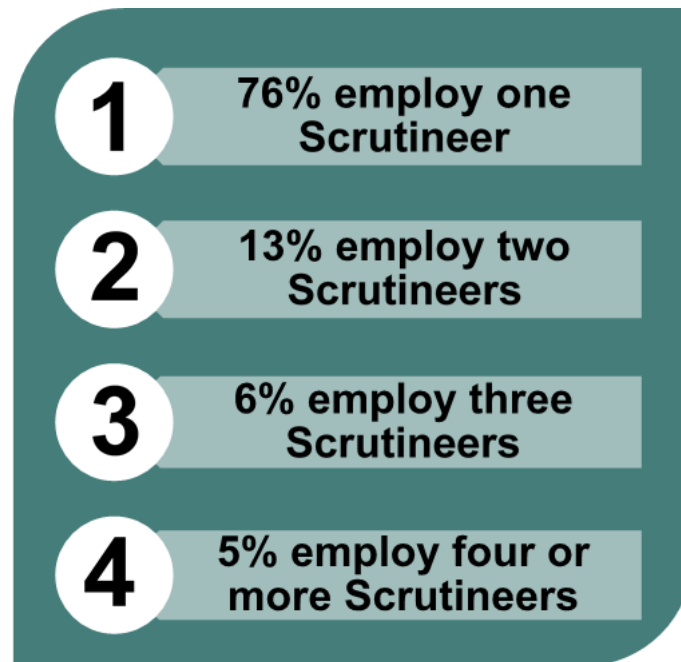
² Partnerships have, in the main, adopted the title Local Safeguarding Children Partnership. Others have adopted different titles, including Local Safeguarding Children Boards. In this report we refer to the term LSCP. In addition, some LSCPs have also created a Local Safeguarding Children Board within the partnership, where meetings take place between the partnership executive and relevant agencies.

5. The survey did not specially ask about the relationship between scrutiny and outcomes for children. This could helpfully be explored further in the future. However, many LSCPs did mention outcomes in response to other questions. They noted the difference between system outcomes (LSCP functioning) and individual outcomes for children. LSCPs refer to 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018' (WT18) to guide their system performance. They also create desired local outcomes and priorities for children within their vicinity, measuring performance through review and audit. Survey responses note the need for a nationally agreed benchmark of desired safeguarding outcomes for children against which local activity can be compared. This must acknowledge that alongside LSCP performance, outcomes for children are impacted by variations in economic, social and environmental issues.
6. WT18 provides a permissive approach to how scrutiny is undertaken. While this offers scope for local autonomy, it also means that there is no agreed common process against which evidence of what constitutes 'good' scrutiny can be collated.
7. Respondents chose to answer all or some questions in the survey, resulting in variations in the number of responses to each question.

Who is undertaking scrutiny?

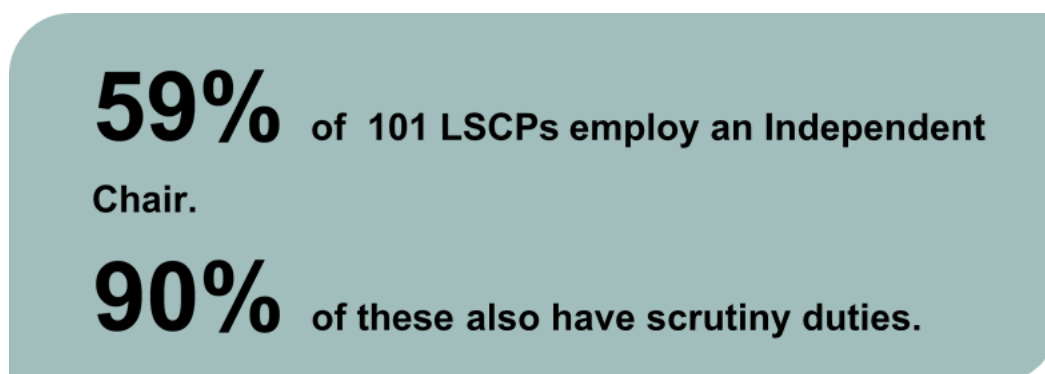
8. 67% (n=67) of 100 LSCPs employ Independent Scrutineers with just over three quarters of these employing one Scrutineer. 33% (n=33) said they do not employ Independent Scrutineers. The majority of this 33% have Independent Chairs undertaking scrutiny and three LSCPs have Scrutiny Committees.
9. 58% (n=37) of 64 LSCPs employ their Scrutineer(s) between one to three years. 16% (n=10) employ Scrutineer(s) for one year or less and 6% (n=4) employ them for undertaking short, one-off time limited deep dives.
10. Of the 67 LSCPs (out of 100 responses) which employ Independent Scrutineers: 76% employ one Independent Scrutineer, 13% employ two Independent Scrutineers, 6% employ three Independent Scrutineers and 5% employ four or more Scrutineers.

Figure 1 –Number of Scrutineers employed by the 67% of LSCPs which employ Independent Scrutineers



- 59% (n=60) of 101 LSCPs employ an LSCP Chair, the majority (90%) of whom also have scrutiny responsibilities. 41% (n=41) of LSCPs do not have an Independent Chair.

Figure 2 – LSCPs’ employment of Independent Chairs



LSCPs who employ an Independent Chair (with or without scrutiny duties) do so to:

- support the three lead safeguarding partners to coordinate LSCP activity
- provide continuity

- hold leadership to account
- embed insight into partnerships' activities
- lead some LSCP improvement initiatives
- engage the wider sector with safeguarding children activity.

These LSCPs report that the structures they had in place for chairing and reviewing LSCP progress prior to 2018 were effective.

12. 95 LSCPs responded to the question: *Do you involve children and young people in a formal scrutiny role?* 29% of these said yes.

Figure 3 - Number of LSCPs which involve children and young people in a formal scrutiny role

29% of 95 LSCPs involve
Children and Young People in a formal
scrutiny role.

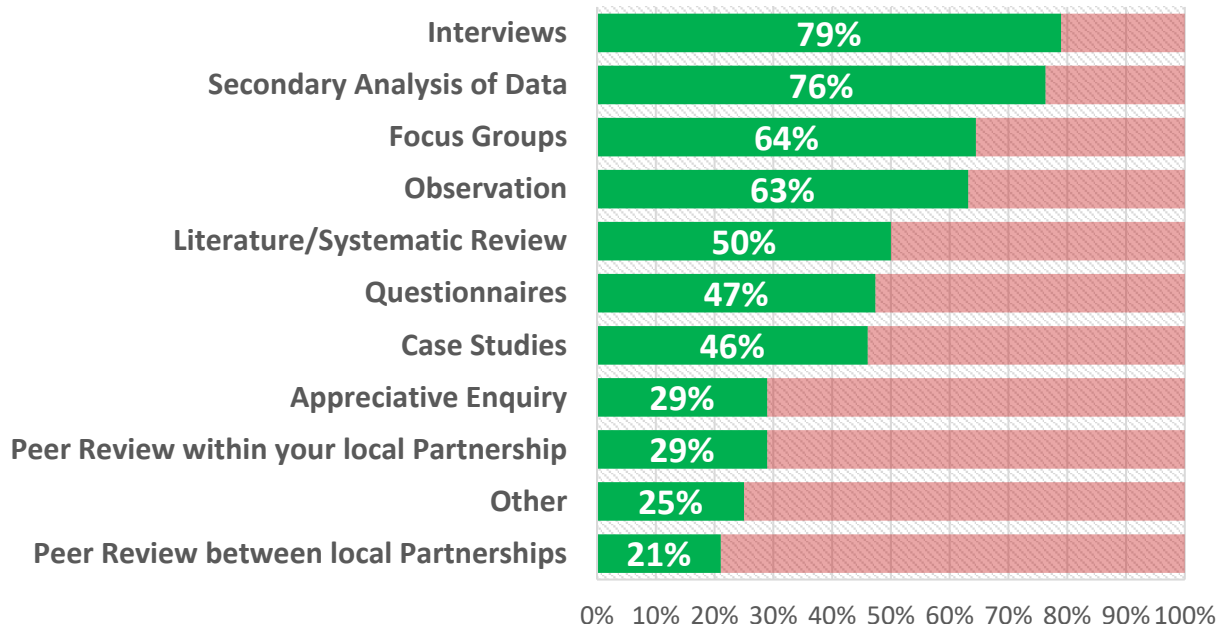
13. There is interest across the sector in exploring how to engage children in strategic development of LSCP activity. Of those engaging young scrutineers, young people were contacted through existing child participation groups and forums. Some had created specific subgroups to either directly involve young people themselves, or to ensure that young people's views were incorporated into LSCP activity. Young scrutineers are providing insight into children's experiences of the LSCP activity and are developing their own outputs, such as films, infographics, and reports on different safeguarding topics. To be effective and ethical, this work needs significant infrastructure and financial commitment to ensure appropriate training and support for the young people involved. It would be helpful for an evaluation of the impact of this work to take place so that learning of good practice can be disseminated.
14. LSCPs report 'independence' can be achieved through appointment of Independent Chairs or through Independent Scrutineer(s) who might also hold some chairing duties. These post holders use their detailed knowledge of the working of the partnership to 'embed' scrutiny across the whole partnership, in particular, facilitating them to be a 'critical friend'.

15. The role of LSCP business units, business managers or their equivalent is described as essential to the running of partnerships and to the relationship between Scrutineers, scrutiny and the safeguarding partners. This, and previous work on Independent Scrutiny (see www.theasp.org.uk), suggests that the changes brought about by WT18 has increased the work undertaken in those business units. This needs to be considered when decisions are made about proportionate investment in LSCP infra-structure required to maintain the strategic functioning of local arrangements.

How is scrutiny undertaken?

16. 76 LSCPs responded to the question: *How is Independent Scrutiny undertaken?* A wide range of methods, or combination of methods are used. The most common are: undertaking interviews; analysing data; running focus groups and undertaking observations. 29% of 76 responses used 'in partnership' peer review and 21% used 'between partnership' peer review. There was a specific request from one LSCP for a national observatory for examples of how scrutiny is undertaken to be deposited.

Figure 4 – Methods used to undertake scrutiny



What is being scrutinised?

17. The extent to which scrutiny focuses on holding LSCP executive leadership to account can vary. It includes feedback to LSCP leadership to drive improvements; taking a leadership role themselves as Scrutineers to drive forward change; and scrutinising LSCP budget allocation and reviewing budget use. 91% of 66 LSCPs noted that scrutineers scrutinise the content of the annual report and add a scrutiny findings section into the annual report.

Figure 5 - Independent Scrutineer(s) scrutinising the annual report



18. LSCPs aim to connect with other strategic partnership work happening locally to support children and families, including arrangements such as Health and Wellbeing Boards, Adult Safeguarding Boards and Community Safety Partnerships. Some LSCPs incorporate this coordination responsibility with the Independent Scrutineer role. This can also provide independent assessment of the connections and gaps in strategic planning for childrens' wellbeing. It is explained that where the SAB and LSCP are merged, or where the Independent Scrutineer chairs both the SAB and the LSCP, a detailed scrutiny of transitional safeguarding for young people moving into adult services can be gained.
19. Scrutiny of relevant agency engagement with LSCP activity happens through a range of methods. These include the Scrutineer or Chair facilitating and scrutinising regular relevant agency partnership meetings, annual or one-off meetings, and learning events; scrutinising multi-agency audits such as section 11 audits; attending or chairing LSCP subgroup activities. This includes providing direct challenge to relevant agencies encouraging full attendance and engagement with safeguarding activity.

20. LSCPs recognise the importance of scrutiny involving education providers. Education is recognised as a key safeguarding children partner. This is acknowledged by a number of partnerships incorporating education representatives on the strategic leadership group or through the establishment of a targeted 'education' subgroup.
21. Scrutiny of data held by the LSCP lead and relevant agencies is used both reactively: where scrutiny identifies gaps or anomalies in existing data; and proactively to inform the development of future initiatives. Some LSCPs employ data analysts to help them use data constructively. Scrutiny of the use of data sharing can help bring relevant agencies together to better safeguard children. Some Independent Scrutineers chair or ensure their own regular attendance at Quality Assurance subgroups or other subgroups where data monitoring and sharing is facilitated. This gives them continual awareness of the use and sharing of data.
22. Scrutiny of learning from local and national reviews can be used to advance partnership engagement, ensuring that learning is disseminated through training and workforce development activities at strategic and operational level. Targeted scrutiny using deep dives and audits, including importantly, multi-agency peer review audits on specific topics of local interest can then be used to identify LSCP training needs. This can be embedded in learning activities across the LSCP, engaging partners in reflective assessment of their work.
23. 75% of 88 LSCPs have used the 'Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny' model as a framework to refer to undertaking scrutiny. Their comments have been used to amend this model and to create a 'Checklist for Independent Scrutiny' (available on the Association of Safeguarding Partners website www.theasp.org.uk).

Figure 6 – Number of LSCPs using used the Six Steps in scrutiny



Independent Scrutiny achieving impact

24. Independent Scrutiny is best evidenced to impact on LSCP performance when leaders drive the creation of an open and reflective learning culture. The impact of scrutiny on outcomes for children is invariably assessed through analysing change resulting from targeted pieces of work. This is done through continual monitoring of the impact of LSCP activity against agreed priority plans.

Opportunities for further reflection

25. Whilst working on this project, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published their report “Child Protection in England” (2022) following the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson. The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care (MacAlister 2022) was also published.

It is obvious that LSCP expertise and findings from this project can be used to consider issues raised in both reviews, supporting local areas to improve the design of their local systems.

This project did not extend to a literature review of LSCP plans and reports and they have not been triangulated, compared, contrasted, tested, or evaluated against the local area survey returns. This is an area of work that would benefit from a full literature review.

This project has:

- delivered and shared the first England-wide picture of how Independent Scrutiny is being approached.
- generated a repository of case study examples for LSCPs to use as reference, to be hosted on VKPP and TASP websites.
- revised the initial “Six Steps” framework to become the “Checklist for Independent Scrutiny”, a resource that can be utilised by LSCP executive leaders, Scrutineers, and relevant partners to self-assess their approach to Independent Scrutiny and develop enhanced arrangements.

Moving Forward

This project has provided a picture of the range and type of practice currently in place and a platform from which further activity can be commissioned. Future work

would develop our evidence base and enable local partners to deliver improved Independent Scrutiny and more effective LSCP arrangements.

These fundamental points and questions have emerged during the project:

- a. High levels of participation from 105 of the 137 LSCPs in this current project should be taken as evidence of the desire to share, build knowledge and confidence as well as co-produce resources. Working Together (2018) identifies that LSCP activity should safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The survey responses give evidence of scrutiny extending from prevention to early help and child protection. How can this range of approaches to scrutiny become more embedded in local systems and be described in every partnership's annual reporting?
- b. Practice development should build on the momentum of this project through engagement with LSCPs. This has the potential to build confidence and ensure that decision making is informed by the best available evidence using high-quality methods to find out what works. This would contribute towards assurance that Independent Scrutiny is being delivered against the intent of Working Together (2018).
- c. Future commissions must be coordinated between senior leaders from key stakeholders, including the Department for Education, the Home Office, Department of Health and Social Care and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel together with Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships.
- d. Future National commissions of Independent Scrutiny would benefit from funding to enable triangulation and evaluation.
- e. How can the executive leaders as local safeguarding partners strengthen their approach to the commissioning of Independent Scrutiny? Reference to the Checklist for Independent Scrutiny could help to ensure proper co-ordination and involvement of all agencies to drive reflective practice and ensure a cycle of embedded and routine learning. This should include monitoring of the impact of LSCP activity against agreed priority plans, national and local learning reviews. This must draw on the expertise of existing LSCP engagement with relevant agencies, and with education as an essential element.
- f. Many LSCPs already involve education as a strategic lead. The report provides examples of the rationale and benefits of this. How can this information be used for future consideration of education as a fourth strategic lead within LSCP arrangements?

- g. Is there system-wide assurance that Local Safeguarding Partners are reporting annually about the impact of their Independent Scrutiny on outcomes for children and how they are providing strong leadership (Working Together (2018) paragraph 33)?
- h. As this project ends how can examples continue to be shared and evaluated, be it through products, case studies, events, and opportunities across a national, regional and sub-regional multi-agency system?
- i. There are interesting examples of local areas engaging with young people as part of their Independent Scrutiny. How can this be expanded across more partnerships and translated into service design? Additional resources would be required to facilitate the safe and ethical engagement of young scrutineers in local scrutiny.
- j. Data shows that some LSCPs see advantage in employing Independent Chairs with scrutiny duties and/or Independent Chairs working alongside Independent Scrutineers. In some cases, the same person holds both roles. Future work could share the rationale for these variations with explanations of how the dual roles are seen to either challenge or support each other. This could demonstrate how safeguarding partners assure themselves that their arrangements for Independent Scrutiny are sufficient.
- k. It could be helpful to have a national outline of desired outcomes for children against which local outcomes can be compared and scrutiny focused. This would need to address how these desired outcomes address other variables such as economic, environmental, and social factors that impact on children alongside their contact with the LSCP. A national set of desired outcomes for safeguarding children would need to be developed through a genuinely multi-agency lens, engaging with all local safeguarding partners, and What Works Centres (or equivalents) representing policing, health partners, education as well as children's social care.
- l. The survey has illustrated that multi-agency information sharing takes place when partnership working is embedded across LSCP subgroups with co-chairs from different agencies, and across multi-agency training and workforce development activities. Achieving good multi-agency information sharing is identified in local and national reviews of serious incidents to be a continuing stubborn problem. How can we learn from scrutiny of these embedded practices to improve information sharing?
- m. The insight gained through this project should be considered by the Department for Education when consulting on the revision of Working Together (2018).