

Safeguarding Early Adopters programme

Learning example – Independent scrutiny

Early Adopter: Bexley, Greenwich, Lewisham.

Learning theme: Independent Scrutiny

Introduction

The learning example describes the emerging role and function of independent scrutiny in Bexley, Greenwich and Lewisham. The former two areas have launched their new safeguarding partnership arrangements (Bexley in October 2018 and Greenwich in March 2019), Lewisham is due to publish its new arrangements at the end of June 2019. Included with this report are the respective briefs for independent scrutiny developed by each of the three areas.

Background, aims and objectives

In terms of the focus for this priority, the tri-borough agreed to explore the role of independent scrutiny across all three boroughs where a range of scrutiny arrangements would be tested, the focus being on the impact of the partnership arrangements rather than processes. In all three areas, in responding to what *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018* says about independent scrutiny, briefs for describing the scrutiny function were produced in order to procure scrutiny services. These descriptions of scrutiny are included in the published arrangements of Bexley and Greenwich.

Approach

Bexley

Bexley's Working Group (made up of the partnership's strategic leads from the Local Authority, CCG and Police) developed and agreed a brief for independent scrutiny (attached to this report) in August 2018 and followed local procurement processes to secure independent scrutiny services ahead of the launch of their new partnership arrangements in October 2018.

In line with the partnership's Learning Hub model and timetable for addressing the agreed practice priorities for Year 1, an initial programme of activity for the independent scrutineer was produced. This included the following activities (for each priority):

- Preparatory conversation with partnership programme manager
- Attendance at Partnership Board
- Attendance at Learning Hub
- Attendance at System Learning Event (used to share updates on the partnership's priorities with a wider group of practitioners from across agencies).

Greenwich

The new Safeguarding Partners were conscious that the Greenwich Safeguarding Children Board, under the direction of its experienced and knowledgeable chair, had successfully delivered against a substantial work programme to ensure that high quality multi agency safeguarding services were provided to children and their families. This had been validated by external inspection where the Board was rated 'Good' by Ofsted in 2016.

The partners were reluctant to lose that expertise. They were also aware that the role was a new one, and whatever model of scrutiny was first adopted would be likely to change and evolve over the next year as knowledge developed and the market matured.

They therefore asked the existing chair to stay on in the role of scrutineer and she agreed to do this for one year.

The scrutineer is meant to provide assurance, monitoring and challenge, as well as act as a constructive critical friend and be a key driver to promote reflection for continuous improvement. It was agreed early on that an enabler for this activity would be 'freedom to roam'. This means that the scrutineer has the right attend any meetings of the partnership or its workgroups, speak to and involve practitioners in all agencies informally as well as in formal meetings and deep dives, and to hear the voice of the child and family.

Her work plan, jointly agreed with the safeguarding leads, is focused on scrutinising both the baseline and progress against both practice and partnership priorities. For example, the partnership is seeking to shift the conversation about the provision of services from one of the 'thresholds' to a focus on ensuring families are receiving the right service through conversations involving deliberation and professional judgement. As part of this, she has reviewed the current application of thresholds at the front door for Social Care and Early Help.

The scrutineer also has a role in resolving conflict as the final arbiter of the escalation processes and for dispute resolution (should it be necessary) between the safeguarding leads.

Lewisham

Lewisham have set out their vision for independent scrutiny in their procurement brief (document attached to this report). In Lewisham, the role is designed to provide critical challenge to:

- Provide assurance in judging the effectiveness of services to protect children
- Assist where there is a disagreement between agencies
- Support the Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership to be a learning organisation.

Independent scrutiny will be provided by a single individual (or designated substitutes) with a view to generating learning for system improvements.

Note: Lewisham are due to publish their new partnership arrangements at the end of June 2019 and implement these arrangements by the end of September 2019 (Lewisham LSCB remains operational with an independent chair in situ). Therefore, the rest of this report draws on learning from Bexley and Greenwich where the independent scrutineer role/function is in place.

Challenges

Bexley

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 has a relatively brief description of independent scrutiny and with no blueprint for the role, one key challenge for Bexley in July 2018 was formulating an initial brief for independent scrutiny as a new function distinct from the role of the independent chair of a Local Safeguarding Children's Board. The position was helped by some local conversations that recognized the role of independent scrutineer would in part need to evolve or 'emerge' once the new arrangements were launched. It was also acknowledged that there would be other models of independent scrutiny 'emerging' elsewhere in the country and that ongoing reflection was critical in developing the role/function. In order to reinforce the changes in safeguarding partnership arrangements (including emphasising the leadership responsibilities of the three safeguarding partners), our independent scrutineer explained his role at all meetings and events (critical friend and system coach rather than leader). The importance of repetition and revisiting key messages (in this case, in relation to new roles and responsibilities) was critical in helping the wider system understand the new arrangements.

The independent scrutineer suggested an additional meeting of the three safeguarding partners in January 2019 to reflect on the performance of the partnership to date. The partnership's programme manager agreed an agenda with the independent scrutineer as follows to aid some early reflections from the three safeguarding partners:

- Why are we doing things this way?
- The Partnership Board
 - The purpose of the Partnership Board
 - Chairing the Partnership Board
 - Participation challenges and engagement exercises for future Board meetings
- Reflecting on the first Learning Hub
- The purpose of the Working Group (made up of the leads from the three safeguarding partners)
- Work of the partnership subgroups
- Operational business team
 - Have we got the staffing and roles right?
 - How is the team performing so far under the new arrangements?
- Performance data and how we use it strategically to measure the impact of each priority?
- Relationship-based approaches.

Greenwich

The scrutineer and the three safeguarding leads were aware that the roles of chair and scrutineer were very different, and that by keeping the same person on in different roles some work would be required to shift the culture and perception so that people did not think that this was just 'business as usual'.

The Greenwich Safeguarding Children Board held its last meeting on the same day that new Partnership began and the handover meeting was explicitly designed to signal the end of the old arrangements with the chair physically stepping away from the front of the room and being replaced by the leads for the safeguarding partners.

Successes

Bexley

Bexley's new safeguarding partnership agreed three priorities for its first year. The independent scrutineer has attended all of the meetings described above to engage with Learning Hub and Partnership Board members as well as the wider system in thinking critically about these priorities. The following key questions have been established to support this critical thinking:

- Why and how have the priorities been chosen to commit a disproportionate amount of time and resource above and beyond all the other priorities within a children's safeguarding environment?
- What is the hoped for benefits and improvements for children and families of working on these priorities?

On completion of the initial work on a priority area, our independent scrutineer has posed the following questions:

- How much activity has taken place?
- What is the quality of activity undertaken?
- What difference to children and families has this activity made?

The independent scrutineer has also challenged the partnership to think about its relationship with the wider community and how to engage 'all of Bexley' in how to ensure all of its children and young people were safe.

Greenwich

Because the role of the scrutineer had not been rigorously defined in *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018*, there were initially some questions about governance and accountability and how and to whom the scrutineer would submit an annual report or express her concerns outside of the annual review. This has been resolved in so much as the local authority and CCGs have structures in place; the governance for the Metropolitan Police above the Basic Command Unit is yet to be formalised.

Conclusion

Bexley

During the first eight months of Bexley's new safeguarding partnership, the independent scrutineer has helped the three safeguarding partners consider the overarching success measures for the partnership, the rationale for focusing on the first three practice priorities (Year 1 activity), as well as provoking discussion around both restorative practice and community engagement.

The following key questions have been posed consistently by our independent scrutineer within the context of providing both support and challenge to the three safeguarding partners and the wider system:

- How much are we doing?
- How well are we doing it?
- What difference are we making?

Some questions have emerged to help shape the planning around independent scrutiny in Bexley going forward:

- What will Year 2 independent scrutiny activity look like?
- Are there different/additional mechanisms for carrying out independent scrutiny that the three safeguarding partners may want to consider?

Greenwich

Greenwich has found it extremely helpful to have a scrutineer who has been involved with another Early Adopter site and who has connections with other London Boroughs as well as a range of professional colleagues across the country. The scrutineer has also been an active attendee at the TriBorough Steering Group meetings and so has an overview of the Bexley and Lewisham arrangements.

The safeguarding leads are very interested in exploring how the peer scrutiny might work across London Boroughs, and this option is being developed by the scrutineer.