



Multi-agency communication; New safeguarding children arrangements in Somerset

The partnership responsible for safeguarding children in Somerset has been redesigned and is now up and running as of 29 September 2019, as part of new arrangements introduced nationally.

The statutory changes mean that Somerset County Council is no longer the single lead for co-ordinating safeguarding arrangements for children, and there is a tripartite responsibility for safeguarding children in the local area.

Three organisations – the Somerset County Council, Avon and Somerset Constabulary and Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group – now have joint and equal responsibility to safeguard children and young people, under the name of the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The new partnership builds on the strong multi-agency working of the Somerset Safeguarding Children Board and secures future arrangements for safeguarding and improving outcomes for children and young people. The Somerset Children's Trust has merged with the new safeguarding arrangements for children to create efficiencies, and the new multi-agency partnership will take oversight of the delivery of the Somerset Plan for Children and Young People (2019-2022).

The Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership will work with 'relevant agencies', who have safeguarding responsibilities under Section 11 of 'The Children Act' (2004), as described in 'Working Together To Safeguard Children' (2018).

The strategic aims of partnership are to ensure that effective systems are in place to promote the well-being of children and young people and safeguard them from harm. These include:

- Focusing on the impact of all forms of child abuse and neglect
- Learning, and the dissemination of learning, from local and national research, including case reviews
- Continued identification of indicators of the prevalence of all forms of child abuse and neglect in Somerset and assessing the effectiveness of progress in tackling these

- Understanding the perspectives of children and young people by asking for their views, listening to them and responding to them so that they know what has happened as a result
- Supporting and scrutinising the effectiveness of arrangements to reduce risk of abuse and neglect e.g. early help
- Improving and integrating performance monitoring for safeguarding arrangements and delivering the Somerset Plan for Children, Young People and Families
- Supporting communication and information sharing across partners.

Significant changes are:

- Shared and equal responsibility for safeguarding children within the Local Authority boundaries lies with the County Council, Avon & Somerset Constabulary and the Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group.
- Replacement of the Safeguarding Board with a Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership comprising:
 - an Executive (the three key partners meeting monthly initially)
 - a wider Somerset Safeguarding Partnership Forum for engagement of wider partners with Section 11 responsibilities (three times per year)
 - delivery subgroups.
 - strengthened professional leadership groups for Education & Health
- Maintaining links with other partnership groups
 - Safer Somerset Partnership
 - Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board
 - Health and Well-being Board
 - Corporate Parenting Board
 - Early Help Strategic Commissioning Board
- Requirement for independent scrutiny arrangements to assure the quality of safeguarding practice across the County.

Under the new partnership, there is no change to key operational processes and procedures, such as the Effective Support for Families guidance (thresholds), the Resolving Professional Differences Protocol (escalation policy), or any of the shared South West Child Protection Procedures (SWCPP). Similarly, there are no changes to the responsibilities that 'relevant agencies' have under Sections 10 and 11 of 'The Children Act' (2004), such as commitment to systems that are effective in supporting practitioners to identify and act on safeguarding matters; the identification of risks outside the family, and safer recruitment of staff.

The functions, terms of reference, chairing, and membership of the subgroups are under revision. In the transitional year from 29 September 2019 onwards, the four key priorities will remain: **early help, multi-agency safeguarding, neglect and child exploitation**. Leadership of the groups which will deliver on these priorities are being strengthened, as are links with education, health and district councils. There will be a renewed focus on hearing the voice of children and families.

Many of the functions of the former Board remain, including publishing safeguarding policies and procedures, organising multi-agency safeguarding training, and reviewing serious and significant incidents involving children.

Arrangements for independent scrutiny of the effectiveness of local safeguarding remain a priority and these are being enhanced further. Regional scrutiny is also being developed within the Avon and Somerset Constabulary area. These opportunities will become clearer over the next few months e.g. peer reviews, external challenge around Section 11 audits. Terms of reference and contractual arrangements for any regional activity are under development to ensure that collective resources are maximised, and efficiencies made.