

Introduction

The role of Independent Scrutiny was initially introduced in statutory guidance¹, following a change in legislation², and the revised version of Working Together³ provides more detail.

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. It should encourage and enable rather than undermine the ability of safeguarding partners to provide strong and clear strategic leadership.

Independent scrutiny is part of a wider system of accountability which includes the independent inspectorates' single agency inspections⁴, such as the Inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) as well as Joint Targeted Area Inspections, and annual reporting arrangements. Whilst the decision on how best to implement a robust system of independent scrutiny is to be made locally, LSPs should be assured that the system in place leads to objective and rigorous analysis of the functioning of local arrangements.

Independent scrutiny can be delivered through a range of methods and structures. Local areas may choose to have an individual or an externally commissioned group delivering their scrutiny. Furthermore, scrutiny may be embedded within the structure of the arrangement or set apart from it. Scrutiny work can be undertaken through interviews, focus groups, data analysis, observations and peer review. Some local areas may choose to involve children in their scrutiny activity to provide their challenge and perspective to the safeguarding partners.

However local areas choose to deliver scrutiny, it should be robust, carry authority and be independent. It should act as a constructive critical friend, promote reflection to drive continuous improvement, and provide assurance that the arrangements are working effectively for children, families and practitioners.

The independent scrutineer or scrutiny group should be able to demonstrate expertise in the area being scrutinised and as a consequence add value to the work of local agencies. They should consider whether the Partners are providing strong leadership, how learning is being embedded within the arrangements, and agree with the LSPs how this will be reported and reviewed.

Where local arrangements source their scrutiny through the role of an independent scrutineer, the LSPs should be confident that the role allows for scrutiny of frontline practice and that it comments directly on the experiences of children, families and practitioners.

¹ [Working Together 2018 – Chapter 3](#)

² [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#)

³ [DRAFT Working Together 2023 – Chapter 2 \(paragraph 74-80\)](#)

⁴ [Ofsted, Care Quality Commission, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, joint targeted area inspections](#)

The approach to independent scrutiny should be clearly set out and accessible. The published arrangements should state how independent scrutiny is delivered locally and by whom; how the arrangements are reviewed and how regularly, which areas will be scrutinised, and why and how any recommendations will be taken forward.

This might include, for example, the process and timescales for ongoing review of the arrangements, and the effectiveness of learning following serious incidents. The LSPs should report on how they are responding to the findings of scrutiny.

Independent scrutiny should change over time. LSPs should review how well their independent scrutiny is functioning on an ongoing basis to ensure it is having the desired and necessary impact. The learning from this should then be reflected in the report they must publish once a year.

NORTHUMBERLAND'S APPROACH TO INDEPENDENT SCRUTINY

(Key objectives and Descriptors) based on the 6 steps model/checklist for Independent Scrutiny⁵.

The Northumberland Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnerships integrated in April 2022. The new arrangements acknowledge that children and adult arrangements are underpinned by different legislation and statutory guidance, however, also recognise the similarities and shared benefits of a joint safeguarding approach across the life course.

The new NCASP structure (April 2023) represents a streamlined approach to enable us to evidence value, offer maximum effectiveness, and meet agreed priorities. Fundamentally, this will also support the Partnership to meet the statutory requirements and needs of both children and adult safeguarding arrangements – including the statutory duty to undertake case reviews.

The Northumberland Scrutiny Framework therefore applies to both children and adult safeguarding arrangements ([appendix 2](#)).

Scrutiny of arrangements

When developing local scrutiny arrangements, the NCASP considered a number of options (based on national learning⁶) and agreed a blended approach to scrutiny, these are:

- An **Independent Scrutineer** appointed April 2023 (see [appendix 1](#))
- NCASCP **self-assessment**, evaluating how the leadership of the Safeguarding Partners, the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, how well safeguarding leads and relevant agencies are engaged with safeguarding planning and implementation, and how effectively children, families and adults contribute to the business of the Partnership ([appendix 3](#)) – *The learning from this would then be reflected in our annual report.*
- Partners' **safeguarding audits** (s11/s175)
- Regional **peer review**/challenge arrangements
- Independent scrutiny through the local authority and Integrated Care Board **scrutiny committees**
- External inspections** and reviews

⁵ [Independent-Scrutiny-Checklist-August-2022.pdf \(vkpp.org.uk\)](#)

⁶ [WOOD REPORT – SECTOR EXPERT REVIEW OF NEW MASAs](#)

Appendix 1 - Independent Scrutineer role

The role of Independent Scrutineer is to provide independent scrutiny and constructive challenge to support the Statutory Safeguarding Partners and Relevant Agencies to fulfil their responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults with needs for care and support.

The role includes providing assurance regarding the effectiveness of local multi-agency arrangements in Northumberland with a particular focus on practice and supporting inclusion of the voice of children and adults in decision making and assurance.

The Independent Scrutineer will provide scrutiny and challenge across the Partnership, hold partners to account, and provide an independent view of effectiveness of **both children and adults safeguarding arrangements**.

This is an evolving role, which will involve a variety of methods of assurance such as focus groups, audits, consultations and visits.

Broadly, the requirement is for between 30-40 days of work per annum and will involve:

- Acting as a critical friend, and providing objective scrutiny, constructive challenge, appreciative inquiry, and assuring the effectiveness and quality of local multi-agency arrangements with a particular focus on practice.
- Supporting the inclusion of the voice of children and adults in decision making and quality assurance, to directly improve outcomes.
- Scrutinise the outcome, decision making and rationale of Rapid Reviews.
- Scrutinise the progress and impact of any Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Safeguarding Adult Review action plans.
- Scrutinise the effectiveness of quality and assurance processes
- Driving continuous improvement and learning across the Partnership and strengthening accountability for impact and outcomes.
- Supporting partners to explore the opportunity to further integrate the children and adults Safeguarding Partnership, paying particular attention to the benefits, risks, governance issues and engagement of practitioners in that development.
- Providing regular reports to the Safeguarding Partnership Executive detailing progress and highlighting and escalating areas which require focus for improvement.
- Undertaking an annual review of the new safeguarding partnership arrangements which will contribute to the Annual Report and Strategic plan.
- Collaborating and contributing to regional independent scrutiny developments and frameworks.

	Key objective	Descriptor (summary statement of key activity)
1	NCASP Leadership	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide independent critical challenge, enquiry, and investigation to the Children’s Safeguarding Partnership, ensuring that it fulfils its statutory responsibilities (as established in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 the Care Act 2014 and other related guidance). 2. Appraisal of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, with a specific focus on:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The quality of leadership provided by the three statutory partners, including appropriate representation and attendance at all partnership meetings. <input type="checkbox"/> The development of a strategic plan to safeguard children and adults, adequate allocation of resources to implement the plan and to deliver against the agreed outcomes. <input type="checkbox"/> Reviewing local governance arrangements to ensure that there is an effective interface between Strategic partnerships
2	Engagement of Relevant Agencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate how the partnership engages with wider partners (including non-statutory partners) to identify, review, and communicate the priorities and work of the safeguarding partnership. 2. Evaluate the effectiveness of information sharing and communication between all safeguarding partners, including the escalation of safeguarding concerns. 3. Consider the mechanisms to engage with all safeguarding partners and its impact in promoting children and adult wellbeing, keeping them safe from harm and deliver a coordinated and person centred approach to safeguarding. (Including the sharing of findings from local and national reviews, and guidance)
3	Outcomes for Children and adults	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider how effectively the arrangements are working for children, adults and families as well as for practitioners. 2. Evaluate the opportunities and methods to involve children and adults in the work of the partnership, including opportunities to lead or co-produce initiatives. 3. Evaluate the role that children and adults play in assessing and influencing desired outcomes.

4	Quality assurance and information sharing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider how multi agency performance information, relevant to safeguarding children and adults, is used to develop and improve knowledge and practice. 2. Evaluate the learning from single and multi-agency audits and its direct impact on systems and practice. 3. Evaluate how partnership performance information and analysis is being used to inform the priorities and the partnership business plan.
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5	Learning from local & national reviews and research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide assurance in judging the effectiveness of arrangements to identify and review serious child and adult safeguarding incidents. 2. Ensure local and national learning from CSPRs and SARs are widely disseminated and their impact evaluated. This includes the immediacy of learning identified at Rapid Reviews irrespective of the decision to undertake a case review. 3. Evaluate how effectively learning from case reviews improves practice and is integrated into training, policy, and practice.
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6	Multi agency safeguarding training & workforce development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review how the three safeguarding partners assesses training needs locally. 2. Consider how the partnership will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of training they deliver or commission, including the take up and use of training and the impact on the quality of practice. 3. Evaluate the use of training by children, young people and communities (what does this mean?)
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Appendix 3 – NCASP self-assessment tool

The [tool](#) can be used by safeguarding partnership and/or by independent scrutineers as a model for:

- the safeguarding partnership and/or independent scrutineer to structure their scrutiny
- the three statutory partners to engage with a self-assessment exercise in preparation for independent scrutiny
- the wider range of safeguarding partners to assess their engagement and activity with safeguarding children initiatives (this would provide a variety of perspectives)

Each question in each of the six steps can be answered with:

Green:

- a positive affirmation that the statement can be confirmed with evidence to illustrate the positive response

Amber:

- acknowledgement that some parts of the statement can be confirmed positively (with evidence to illustrate the positive response) but that there is still work to be done for full positive affirmation.

Red:

- it is not possible to confirm that any part of the statement can be confirmed with a positive response.

Any response (green, amber or red) will require an action to ensure reaching and maintaining desired outcomes. Actions will automatically be pulled through into action tracker (tabs along the bottom) specific tasks and other details will need to be added.

This tool will help us to review how well our arrangements/independent scrutiny is functioning and to ensure it is having the desired and necessary impact. This tool could also be used for regional peer review, to structure and focus scrutiny and ensure consistency.

[Link to tool](#)