

Scrutiny Activity Transcript

Hello, my name is Sophie Butt. I'm an area director within Hampshire Children's Services and I chair the Hampshire Safeguarding Children Partnership's (HSCP) Scrutiny Group. I'm here today to provide you with an outline of all the scrutiny activity we've undertaken.

What is scrutiny and why is it important? Working Together to Safeguard Children, which is the statutory guidance that outlines all the work that we do in the partnership, is really clear about the HSCP'S role around scrutiny of the multi-agency partnerships work to provide services that keep children and their families safe.

The purpose of our scrutiny activity is to drive continuous improvement. It's to help us collectively understand the work that we do to keep children safe and to work with their families, to keep children at home and to provide assurance to the safeguarding partners and all members of the partnership, that what we're doing is right, we're engaging at the appropriate levels and our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are working effectively for the children and families in Hampshire.

Our scrutiny needs to be evidence based. That means that it needs to use information directly from the agencies that we work with in the partnership and the agencies that work with children and their families here in Hampshire. As part of that, and as part of our arrangements locally, we have both an independent scrutineer who is our chair, and we have a multi-agency Scrutiny Group, which is the group that I chair. And the Scrutiny Group needs to be able to have knowledge and understanding and expertise in their areas of children safeguarding and how that's arranged in Hampshire.

Our scrutiny needs to be based on looking at local and national data, local intelligence, and information that we can get from a variety of different ways. In Hampshire, we do exactly that. We have information coming from a range of sources and we have a range of activity that forms our annual plan in the Scrutiny Group that helps us look at the things we need to do and also align that work to the boards or the partnerships and strategic plan and annual priorities. I'm going to give you a feel for those today.

One of the things that's really important that we have to do on an annual basis is our review of restraint. In chapter two of Working Together it clearly states that local safeguarding

children partnerships should undertake a review of restraint if we have a secure establishment in our local area.

Our review of restraint looks at three establishments that we have in our local authority area and as part of that we put together a multi-agency panel of senior managers representing the three safeguarding partners – Children's Services, Police and health agencies via the Integrated Care Board. The panel is chaired by our independent scrutineer. To make sure that we have sufficient subject matter experts, as part of our work, we include senior managers and senior advisors from the relevant provider agencies that provide the three secure settings that we're looking at.

This year's area of focus involved outlining a benchmark of expectations about what we think a secure establishment should be able to demonstrate in terms of effective practice in relation to physical intervention. That looks at a whole range of things, not just the use of the physical intervention itself. We look at a whole range of other system-wide factors as part of each setting to help us understand how physical intervention is used and understood and deployed only if, and when, necessary. As part of that, we also look at things like recruitment, retention and training of staff, and policies and processes, as well as other factors.

We invite the operational manager and the commissioner, where appropriate, for each of those secure establishments to come and present to the panel, which includes a range of information on areas of focus that we've identified. We then have questions and answers from the panel to each of the providers.

Each provider was also asked to provide a case study from a theme that they've identified from their own learning, and they also provide us with access to policies and procedures so that we can understand how the inner workings of the setting operates. As part of that, the outcome of our review identified that each of the secure establishments in Hampshire demonstrated that they review and monitor every incident of physical intervention, and also how the children in their care are supported and how their staff are supported to understand what an appropriate use of physical intervention would be.

The staff team for all of the settings that we looked at were able to demonstrate good knowledge and application of a trauma informed approach, that wraps around the use of any physical intervention that might be used to support the care for a child. The panel were given good assurance around the use of training and the development of staff, and in particular

noted innovation and significant progress on recruitment and retraining of permanent staff in one particular setting. In addition, the panel were provided with information about how each of the settings conduct their own review of any physical intervention that takes place for any of their children, after it happens. This is done to identify and promote their own effective practice and to share learning.

We were also really pleased to see that each of the secure settings have proactively developed their own links with peers and counterpart settings in other areas of the region or sometimes even nationally, and they do this to share best practice and to aid their own learning and development. That was positive to see. We did note that some of those relationships were more developed than others, but these things take time. What came out really clearly from all of the discussions was the time that is spent by staff and managers in all settings to develop open, transparent and trusting relationships with the children in their care and through doing that, how each staff member really gets to know their children, gets to know what they like, what they dislike and what their needs are so they can best support them and give them the best possible care.

In terms of the broader Scrutiny Group, you might think, well, what information comes to the Scrutiny Group? What is it that we do in these meetings? We have a plan and for each meeting we have an agreed agenda. We do always review a select number of annual reports every year from particular organisations. Good examples of that would be the annual report of the MAPPAs, the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements, who present their annual reports to the group every year and as a group, we scrutinise that information and ask questions, particularly where those arrangements interface with children or with adults who have caring or parental responsibility for children in Hampshire.

Another good example of an annual report is the LADO, the Local Authority Designated Officer, and that's a specific role within the local authority, Children's Services. Again, their annual report comes to the group every year, and again we scrutinise that and we ask questions, so we understand how the services operate with the impact that those services are having on the safety and safeguarding of children in Hampshire. We look a lot at data, which I'll talk a bit more about later. It's important that we keep up to date with changes in national guidance so that we understand the implications it has for us either as a multi-agency partner, a partnership or for single agencies within our partnership.

Sometimes we ask for thematic or ad hoc reports on particular themes or from actual

individual agencies. A good example would be when any one of our member agencies may well have been subject to an inspection themselves. We ask for a summary and any action plan following on from any learning identified. We also look at learning from single agency audit activity, so you'll hear me talk a lot about what we do as a partnership. But of course, each of the individual agencies across the partnership should, and will, have their own programme of scrutiny and assurance work. Sometimes we seek insight into this because the learning that they identify will often have implications for us across the partnership.

So, data, what data do we use and what do we do with it? We have a large partnership in Hampshire. There are many agencies that work with children and their families that provide regular data to us. We agree in advance the data lines and the areas of data that we think would be useful for us to look at as a partnership. They most often align to the strategic priorities that the partnership has set as part of the annual or forward plan over a number of years, because one of the most important areas is scrutinising data – what the data tells us about our work and about the impact for the children that we work with. You need to make sure that you've got data collected on similar themes over a reasonably long time period so that you can understand what the difference in trends are and you can think about what that means for the services that you're providing.

We look at data and have extended data discussions on a six-monthly basis within the Scrutiny Group. The things that we discuss change each time and they will always depend on what the key themes or key issues might be arising from the what's changed in the last six months versus the data that we're being presented quite often.

Most recently we've looked at data around children who might be missing education, children who are experiencing neglect, and children who perhaps have emotional wellbeing or mental health needs. They're all common themes for us in Hampshire, but also nationally, and it's important that we understand the data that's presented to us. It's also important that as a multi-agency group, we look to understand that across our collective, because we all work with children and families and sometimes there might be many agencies that are working with the same child and their family and sometimes there might be fewer of us. It's important that we take the time to understand this properly.

Thank you.