

City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership

# Independent Scrutineer's Annual Report 2023-2024



City of York  
Safeguarding Children Partnership



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# Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the key findings from the Independent Chair and Scrutineer for the City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The role of the Independent Scrutineer is to carry out the independent scrutiny function as set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)*.

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.

Safeguarding partners should ensure that the scrutiny is objective, acts as a constructive critical friend and promotes reflection to drive continuous improvement.



# Methodology

The Independent Scrutiny Annual Report 2023 – 2024 is based on an evidenced based methodology, as set out under the [‘Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny: Safeguarding Children Arrangements’ by Pearce, J \(2019\); Institute of Applied Social Research; University of Bedfordshire.](#)

The Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny: Safeguarding Children Partnership Arrangements are:

**Step 1:** The three core partner leads are actively involved in strategic planning and implementation.

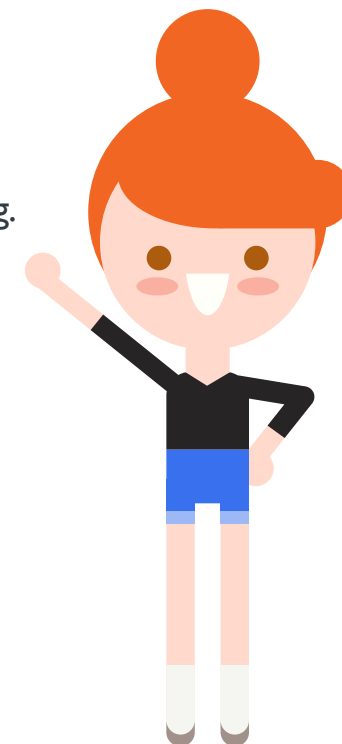
**Step 2:** The wider safeguarding partners (including relevant agencies) are actively involved in safeguarding children.

**Step 3:** Children, young people and families are aware of and involved with plans for safeguarding children.

**Step 4:** Appropriate quality assurance procedures are in place for data collection, audit and information sharing.

**Step 5:** There is a process for identifying and investigating learning from local and national case reviews.

**Step 6:** There is an active program of multi-agency safeguarding children training.




In writing this annual report, the Independent Scrutineer has also referenced the core elements and cross cutting themes from Working Together (2023).

## **The five core elements are:**



**A shared  
responsibility**



**Multi-agency  
safeguarding  
arrangements**



**Help, support and  
protection**



**Decisive multi-agency  
child protection**



**Learning culture**



**The six cross cutting themes are:**

**Voice and influence**

**Information sharing  
and communication**

**Working in  
partnership**

**Leadership**

**Governance**

**Impact/Scrutiny**



# Context

This is the first Independent Scrutiny Annual Report 2023-24 completed by the Independent Chair and Scrutineer, recruited in February 2023.

The period of this report is therefore 1st March 2023 to 31st March 2024.

## **The annual report is informed by scrutiny of:**

- Strategic documents, including the York Children and Young People's Plan 2024-2027; the CYSCP Annual Report 2022/2023 which sets out the strategic priorities for the partnership.
- Scrutiny of Partnership governance arrangements
- Scrutiny of Partnership strategies, procedures, guidance, training and workforce development.
- Scrutiny of all reports to the Partnership Executive Meetings, including Subgroup assurance reports.
- Chairing the Partnership Executive Meetings.
- One to One Meetings with the Director of Children's Service and Lead Member for Children and Young People (City of York Council); the City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Manager and Performance & Governance Officer.
- Facilitation of the Partnership Development Day on the 6th March 2023..
- Facilitation of the Partnership Section II Challenge Event, 31st October 2024.
- Scrutiny of the Partnership Performance Management Information.
- Scrutiny of Serious Incident Notifications and Child Safeguarding Rapid Review Meetings and Outcomes.
- Scrutiny of Rapid Reviews and Multi-Agency Reviews Reports.
- An independent review of in-house residential respite care for children and young people in York.
- Comparison and scrutiny of best practice across Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership arrangements and Joint Target Area Inspection outcomes.

# Key headline findings

## Step 1: The three core statutory partner leads are actively involved in strategic planning and implementation – Leadership & Governance.

There is significant evidence of robust and effective governance arrangements for the Partnership, with a shared responsibility led by the three statutory partners, who are represented on the Partnership Executive.

Despite competing priorities, the three statutory partners have committed to bi-monthly Executive meetings, recognising the pace and progress of work being driven across the partnership, to strengthen further the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA).

The Independent Scrutineer has directly observed a culture that is open, aspirational and one that welcomes respectful challenge, an indicator of a strong and mature partnership.

**Example:** The completion of timely Health Needs Assessments for Children in Care. This was raised by the Director of Children's Services and immediately resolved by the lead statutory partner for the Independent Care Board. The outcome is that health and developmental needs of children in care are assessed, identified and responded to.

**Example:** The Executive did not agree to sign off a multi-agency review where the family had not been engaged, despite significant efforts. The outcome was that the family were approached and did provide their feedback into the review, shaping the recommendations. The outcome strengthened the learning from the local case review.

**Example:** Since coming into post, the Independent Scrutineer has respectfully suggested to the Partnership that they consider and agree:

- The strategic priorities for 2023 – 2024
- Develop a Business Plan to track pace and progress.
- Support a Section 11 Challenge Event.
- Develop Outcome Based Assurance Reporting from the Subgroups to the Executive.

All suggestions have been fully supported and progressed.





The Annual Report 2022-2023 sets out the strategic priorities moving forward for the partnership. This aligns with the York Children and Young People's Plan 2024-2027.

A Business Plan is in progress, to provide assurance to the Executive, that priorities and agreed activities are being driven forward.

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements are accessible and published, including:

- The Governance Structure.
- The Safeguarding Arrangements.
- The City of York and the North Yorkshire Information Sharing Protocol.

Equally the Partnership Strategies, Practice Guidance, Resources and Procedures are all available and accessible to the Partnership member agencies.

The governance arrangements includes appropriate subgroups, who drive the work of the partnership:

- Voice of Children and Young People
- Learning from Cases
- Child Exploitation
- Safeguarding Practice
- Quality Assurance and Training.

The business management of the Partnership is outstanding. There are robust governance arrangements in place, ensuring strong oversight and management of the work of the CYSCP Executive and partnership.

The quality of work produced by the CYSCP Business Unit is excellent, i.e. the Annual Report.

The Partnership relies upon one Business Unit Manager and two Performance and Governance Officer's, who heavily support the co-ordination and minuting of the CYSCP Executive meetings. There are no dedicated admin posts for the partnership, although the City of York Council Children's Social Care Business Support Hub Team help minute some of the subgroups. Whilst the geographical area is small, the expectations and requirements of the City of York Safeguarding Children Partnershi are no less than for larger partnerships.

On the 15th December 2023 the government published the revised statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023: A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children (December 2023).

The Partnership have agreed an implementation plan to drive forward and implement the new arrangements.

However, on the 31st January 2024 the Partnership Executive agreed that the York Schools and Academies Board (YSAB) nominate a Multi Academy Trust Chief Executive to be part of the CYSCP Executive, ensuring that there is a strategic voice representing schools at the highest level.

**Example:** This evidences a strong strategic commitment to strengthening the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and the influence of education leaders.

The Council's Plan 'One City For All' 2023 to 2027 prioritises Health and Wellbeing and Education and Skills for children and young people.

### **Areas for Development**

- Implement the revised changes and requirements, as set out under Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023, which includes a review of the arrangements.
- *'Funding contributions from the statutory safeguarding partners should be equitable and funding for the arrangements should be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that they can meet the financial needs of the arrangements'; Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023. As part of this review, it is recommended that the capacity and resources within the CYSCP Business Unit is considered, to ensure that funding and resources are sufficient for the delivery of effective multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.*



## Step 2: The wider safeguarding partners (including relevant agencies) are actively involved in safeguarding children – Working in Partnership.

The wider safeguarding partners (including relevant agencies) are appropriately informed of and engaged with the safeguarding children partnership arrangements.

The Partnership Development Day, held on the 6th March 2023, reviewed the safeguarding priorities for the Partnership as well as the broader priorities for all children and young people living in York, as set out under the York Children and Young People's Plan 2024-2027.

The Development Day was well attended by wider safeguarding partners (including relevant agencies), who were well represented at the event, actively contributing to both the Partnership priorities for 2023/24 and the Young People's Plan 2024-2027.

The wider safeguarding partners were involved in the Section 11 Self-Assessment Programme for 2023. Of the 17 agencies asked to submit a response, there was 100% compliance in submitting a self-assessment audit return and action plan, evidencing a strong commitment to effective safeguarding arrangements in York.

Six agencies were invited to attend the Section 11 Challenge Day held on the 31st October 2023. The event was chaired by the Independent Chair and Scrutineer and comprised of representatives from the three statutory partners. The event was extremely positive, providing respectful challenge, whilst identifying areas of good practice, learning and developmental opportunities.

**Example:** The City of York Council Housing Services attended the Challenge Panel and provided an update report to the Executive on the 20th March 2024. Outcome: reassurance was provided that the Housing Service feel part of safeguarding, across both Adult and Children's Services and feel well supported. Equally, that information sharing between agencies is good. The Children's Social Care 'Building Brighter Futures Practice Model' training had been well attended by Housing colleagues, who found it beneficial. Housing have done some fantastic work with Children's Social Care, following the recent changes, regarding the accommodation pathway for young people who become homeless. Housing colleagues who go into homes to carry out repairs, are on a safeguarding journey, with a clear commitment from the Head of Building Services to ensure that staff are aware of safeguarding and, that safeguarding is including in policies and commissioning arrangements.

The Independent Scrutineer has found a high degree of commitment and engagement across the partnership. This is evidenced by a culture of reflective learning, where there is shared ownership and leadership at all levels.



### **Step 3: Children, young people and families are aware of and involved with plans for safeguarding children - Voice and Influence.**

There are strong arrangements, with a clear strategic ambition, to engage with children and young people, so that their lived experiences shape and influence the work of the partnership. Consequently, there is a strong culture of listening to what children and young people across the city say about what matters to them.

The Partnership has a dedicated Voice and Involvement Subgroup.

The City of York Council has a dedicated Head of Innovation and Children's Champion, where there is also an active Youth Council and Children in Care Council.

There is a Humber and North Yorkshire Young People's Mental Health Advisory Group and Children and Young People's Engagement and Co-production Manager from the Independent Care Board.

The Partnership website provides practice guidance and accompanying tools for practitioners, to support communication and engagement with children and young people, as well as information regarding advocacy.

**Example:** Practitioner Tools have been developed for capturing the lived experience of pre-verbal children.

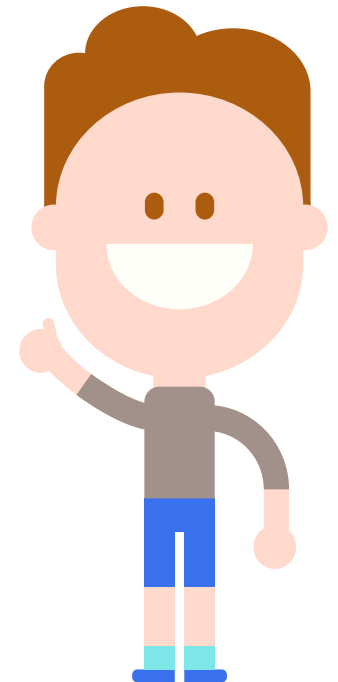
**Example:** York's Children's Rights and Advocacy Service Speak Up, have produced a leaflet about Child Protection Conferences for Children and Young People.

**Example:** In producing the York Children and Young People's Plan 2024-2027 over 3,000 young people were consulted.

**Example:** Young people attended the Partnership Development Day on the 6th March 2023. Outcome: The CYSCP Voice and Involvement Subgroup have agreed that Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing should be adopted as the priority area for the Subgroup.

#### **Areas for Development**

- The Safeguarding Children Partnership Children's Rights and Involvement Strategy (October 2021) remains relevant but is due for a review.



#### **Step 4: Appropriate quality assurance procedures are in place for data collection, audit and information sharing – Communication & Information Sharing.**

There are clear safeguarding procedures and arrangements in place, to share information across the partnership.

Whilst safeguarding information and data are available to the partnership, and well embedded within single agencies, the Partnership is sighted on the need to agree a streamlined integrated partnership dashboard, aligned to cross cutting indicators and partnership priorities.

During the reporting period for this review, the Independent Scrutineer has not been invited to lead or observe any thematic, multi-agency qualitative case file audits.

#### **Areas for Development**

- An area that is currently being developed, is an agreed Safeguarding Children Partnership Integrated Data Set and Scorecard.
- An area that could be strengthened further, are outcome focused multi-agency audits/deep dives, that focus on demonstratable outcomes for children, improved practice and the difference that the partnership are collectively making for children and young people in the city.

- Equally, triangulating learning reviews and audits, to evidence that learning has been implemented, the demonstrable impact and the difference being made.
- Maximise the role of the Independent Scrutineer to support qualitative, multi-agency deep dives and audits, strengthening assurance.

#### **Step 5: There is a process for identifying and investigating learning from local and national case reviews – Impact and Scrutiny.**

There are clear processes and procedures in place, for identifying and learning from local and national case reviews.

An area of real strength is the reflective, child centred learning that is evidenced in Rapid Review meetings.

Rapid Review reports and minutes are produced to an exceptionally high standard.

#### **Area for Development**

- Whilst the Partnership website sets this out clearly the processes and procedures for identifying and learning from local and national case reviews, there is an opportunity to build on this, particularly in respect of national, transferable and up to date learning.

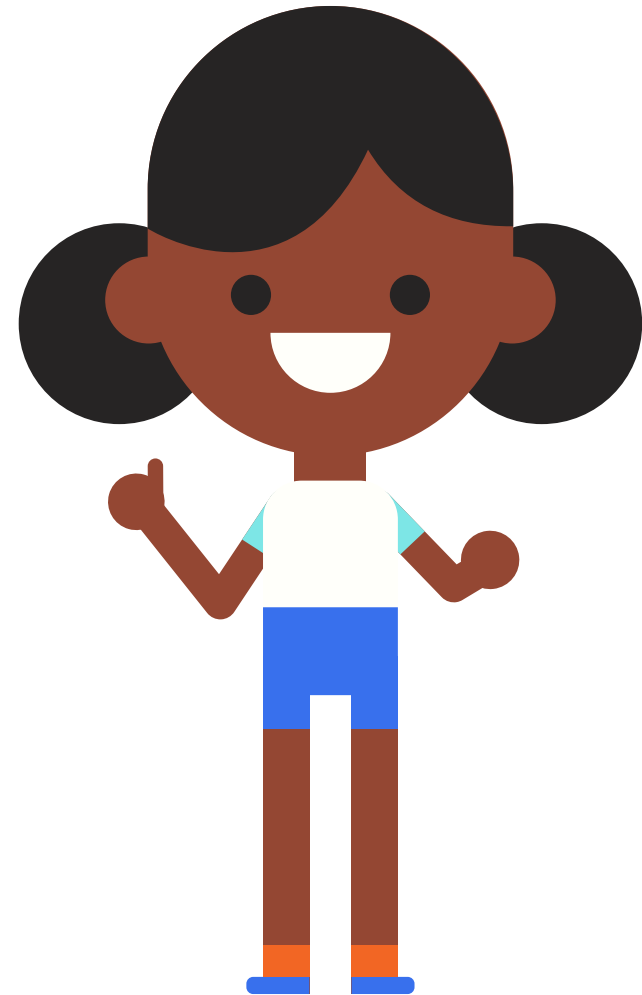
## Step 6: There is an active program of multiagency safeguarding children training.

An area of real strength is the Safeguarding Children Partnership Training Programme, which provides extensive learning and development opportunities on a variety of subject matters related to safeguarding children.

Training can be accessed through training courses, E-learning courses, learning from national and local reviews and briefings, which respond to issues and learning in live time, providing easy and accessible learning.

### Area for Development

- Consider how the evaluation of multi-agency safeguarding children can more strongly evidence examples of how it is consistently improving practice across the Partnership.



# Outcomes

## Outcome of The Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny: Safeguarding Children Partnership Arrangements are:

### Step 1:

The three core partner leads are actively involved in strategic planning and implementation.  
***This is an area of strength.***

### Step 2:

The wider safeguarding partners (including relevant agencies) are actively involved in safeguarding children.  
***This is an area of strength.***

### Step 3:

Children, young people and families are aware of and involved with plans for safeguarding children.  
***This is an area of strength.***

### Step 4:

Appropriate quality assurance procedures are in place for data collection, audit and information sharing.  
***There are opportunities to develop and strengthen this area further.***

### Step 5:

There is a process for identifying and investigating learning from local and national case reviews.  
***This is an area of strength.***

### Step 6:

There is an active program of multi-agency safeguarding children training.  
***This is an area of strength.***



# Recommendations

- 7.1** Implement the revised changes and requirements, as set out under *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)*.
- 7.2** As part of the requirement to review the multi-agency arrangements, include a review of financial contributions and resources, to ensure that these are sufficient to support local arrangements (*Working Together 2023*).
- 7.3** The Safeguarding Children Partnership Children's Rights and Involvement Strategy (October 2021) remains relevant but is due for a review.
- 7.4** An area that is currently being developed, is an agreed Safeguarding Children Partnership Integrated Data Set and Scorecard. This needs to progress.
- 7.5** Strengthen assurance, by the co-ordination of a systematic programme of outcome focused multi-agency audits. Multi-agency audits could be developed further, by focusing more on the demonstrable outcomes for children, the effectiveness and difference made by the partnership, cascading and celebrating 'what works'.
- 7.6** Equally, qualitative audits that triangulate the impact of case reviews, providing assurance that learning has been implemented, evidencing the demonstrable impact on how practice has been strengthened and the demonstrable outcomes for children and young people.
- 7.7** Consider how the evaluation of multi-agency safeguarding children can more strongly evidence examples of how it is consistently improving practice across the Partnership.
- 7.8** Whilst the City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership website sets this out clearly the processes and procedures for identifying and learning from local and national case reviews, there is an opportunity to build on this, particularly in respect of national, transferable learning.





# Conclusion

My evaluation and reflection are that there are strong and effective children's safeguarding arrangements in York, with a high level of commitment from strategic leaders, the wider children's safeguarding workforce and the diverse Subgroups, that drive the work of the Partnership.

There is a well embedded culture of openness and reflection, with an aspiration to learn and continuously improve. Equally, there is evidence of innovative practice, not least a system and culture which captures and listens to the views and voices of children and families.

Since coming into post in February 2023, I have observed a real commitment and collaborative drive, to lead significant developments across the partnership. This includes the Partnership Development Day, where together the partnership agreed the priorities for the partnership; the Business Managers Annual Report; the new Section 11 Challenge Event and the collaborative commitment to the Children and Young People's Plan 2024-2027.

The pace and progress of work has been tremendous, and thanks must go to the Business Unit Manager and the Performance and Governance Officers, who so professionally 'hold the ring' on the work of the Partnership.

It is a privilege to be the Independent Chair and Scrutineer for the City of York Safeguarding Children's Partnership and I express my thanks to all the dedicated partners and practitioners across the partnership, who have much to be proud of in striving to keep children and young people safe in York.

As we move forward, there is the opportunity to strengthen assurance through qualitative activities, identifying how learning leads to demonstratable impact and outcomes; crucially, what does it look like for children and young people in York.


Equally, to consider how the role of the Independent Scrutineer can assist and support qualitative assurance measures and activities, which provide deeper assurance.

**Mel John-Ross**

**CYSCP Independent Chair and Scrutineer**



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এই তথ্য আপনার নিজের ভাষায় দেয়া যেতে পারে। (Bengali)

Ta informacja może być dostarczona w twoim własnym języku. (Polish)

Bu bilgiyi kendi dilinizde almanız mümkündür. (Turkish)

یہ معلومات آپ کی اپنی زبان (بولی) میں بھی مہیا کی جاسکتی ہیں۔ (Urdu)

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