

DRAFT - FINAL VERSION WITH NYCC DESIGN TEAM



NORTH YORKSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (NYSCP)

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

DR MAGGIE ATKINSON, CHAIR OF NYSCP EXECUTIVE AND INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises, reflects on, and presents formal scrutineer's assurance regarding the work of the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP) between 01 April 2020 and 31 March 2021. This covers the first full financial year of operation by the NYSCP, which succeeded the Local Safeguarding Children board (NYSCB) from September 2019, half way through the previous financial year. All details about the work of the Partnership and the materials it presents to professionals, children and young people, their parents carers and communities, and the comprehensive and complex network of services that work with them, are available on the NYSCP website at www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk

The Partnership is a statutory body, led by an Executive, which I chair in addition to being NYSCP's Independent Scrutineer. The Executive is led by the County Council, North Yorkshire's Clinical Commissioning Groups and North Yorkshire Police, each represented by staff sufficiently senior as to be able speak with authority for and approve decisions on behalf of their organisations. It is also contributed to by a small number of representatives: lead Officers from key services in all three Statutory Partners, the County's current Tier 2 Local Authorities, and the Voluntary Sector.

The NYSCP carries coordination and accountability responsibilities which were previously covered by both the NYSCB and the now-closed Children's Trust. This report however focuses largely on the work previously covered by NYSCB, with plans to expand the agenda in coming years to cover more of the ground covered by the former Children's Trust. NYSCP is becoming the accountable and report-receiving and approving body for work under all 4 Priorities in Being Young in North Yorkshire

The report summarises my activity, in chairing and attending the Executive and in covering, as a participant observer, the Partnership's subgroups. These cover the following:

- Multi-Agency Criminal Exploitation Groups, at both strategic (countywide) and operational (one in each of the seven Districts) levels
- Local Safeguarding Practice Review Group, which reviews are undertaken where there are concerns about safeguarding, and that the Partnership and each agency in it respond
- Learning and Development Group, which draws on what the two strands above find and steers the learning and professional development offered to ensure that professionals continue to learn, across boundaries between them as well as within each one
- Practice Development Group, which works to ensure deeper whole-system learning takes place and is sustained.
- Shared with City of York LSCP: Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) which contributes to what is to be learned when a child dies whether expectedly or unexpectedly, and Child Death Review Panel which ensures professionals, especially in medical disciplines, reflect on and can give assurance regarding what was or could have been done in the circumstances around a child's death

The report presents my observations of, and any recommendations regarding, how well the work entailed in safeguarding children and young people has been undertaken and assured in 2020-2021, an unprecedentedly challenging year in terms of challenges to all services caused by the Pandemic that has taken up the entire year under review.

It looks ahead to the 2021-2022 year which is part-way through as this report is published; recommends that the agenda of NYSCP expands to cover universal as well as targeted and specialist services and issues; looks forward to a county with one unitary Council from 2023 onwards; casts forward to post-pandemic practice and partnership working.

The report concludes with my confirmation, as Working Together 2018 statutory guidance requires, that NYSCP is ensuring that as far as possible, all of North Yorkshire's children and young people are kept safe: the majority in their families, schools and communities, and experiencing success in all four areas of Being Young in North Yorkshire. I give formal assurance that where children or young people require additional support, or where more formal interventions and statutory provision are required, North Yorkshire's services at both tiers of local government and in partner bodies largely do well for the county's young citizens. I am also clear that when things go wrong for a child or young person, agencies are quick to respond and consistently open to rigorously challenging both themselves and each other, so that matters improve and services develop, having learned the required lessons.

INTRODUCTION

This report covers what I have observed as both Chair of the Executive and Independent Scrutineer of the NYSCP in the financial year 2020-2021. Inevitably the report is influenced by work done by all partners to ensure children's and young people's safety and wellbeing during the continuing Covid 19 pandemic. It reflects on work by partners who, since March 2020, have largely worked remotely rather than face to face. It also reflects on a range of non-Covid-19 issues, given much work with children and young people has continued uninterrupted, albeit adapted to circumstances.

As Executive Chair and Independent Scrutineer I present assurance that the County Council, District Councils, CCGs, Police, OFPCC, other partners and relevant agencies, have done far more than simply stand by children and young people in challenging times since Spring 2020. They have sustained the development of the Partnership at subgroup and Executive levels, to keep children and young people as safe as possible. In many services this has been seen in staff working longer hours than normal. There was no travel between appointments for much of 2020-2021, the corollary being that whilst this is an efficient way of working, staff moved between meetings in unbroken strings, in long working days. This presents challenges to stamina and work-life balance that will go on being addressed post-pandemic.

Staff and leaders are aware that as well as challenges, gains have arisen during the pandemic. They are determined to maintain a good deal of remote working and the efficiencies it brings, and to work on a longer-term programme that accepts ways of working will need to go on using “hybrid” meeting models that mix remote working with meetings face to face. Covid 19 may be with us for a long time in endemic form. What services do with each other, children and young people, goes on regardless across North Yorkshire.

The NYSCP’s model, terms of reference for and meeting schedules of the Executive and subgroups, along with a great deal of material that guides and supports professionals, parents or carers, and children and young people themselves, are all available on the Partnership’s website at www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk

In 2020, government asked Sir Alan Wood to review Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships, notwithstanding that the review was launched less than a year after most MASAs were launched and was published in the midst of a pandemic that had inevitably influenced practice and partnerships. It sets out some lessons that have emerged, which should be considered alongside this Annual Scrutineer’s Report. In the same way, so should the Annual Report from the National Children Safeguarding Review Panel at the Department for Education.

North Yorkshire’s developments and partnership practice are well within the range of what both Sir Alan Wood and the National Panel consider good practice.

MY COMBINED INDEPENDENT EXECUTIVE CHAIR AND SCRUTINY ROLE

I open this section with a note exercising Scrutineer powers, rather than as Chair of the Executive.

As NYSCB closed and NYSCP launched, the county stood down its Children’s Trust which had been created, as in every top tier Local Authority area, after the 2004 Children Act and 2003’s *Every Child Matters* Green Paper. The Children’s Trust covered all elements of childhood and services from Universal (maternity, early years, schools, GP and 0-19 health, youth services, faith, community and voluntary bodies and more) through targeted services providing early interventions, to statutory services in SEN/D, social care and health.

LSCBs replaced, and expanded the remits of, Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs.) LSCBs ran from 2005 to September 2019 and focused on safeguarding issues, largely driven by social care and child protection concerns and trends, but with a requirement to oversee universal and targeted services’ and settings’ work on safeguarding.

The NYSCP took up the Children’s Trust’s remit as well the NYSCB’s. NYSCP Executive agendas are gradually expanding to ensure a focus on what the Children’s Trust steered, across all five

national Outcomes set out in the Children Act 2004 (Stay Safe, Be Healthy, Enjoy and Achieve, Make a Positive Contribution, Achieve Economic Wellbeing.) The first NYSCP Annual Report (2019-2020) was entirely focused on the safeguarding agenda that NYSCP inherited from NYSCB, given there was a closing annual report from the Children’s Trust. As a result NYSCP’s 2019-2020 report contained text from me alone, as Scrutineer.

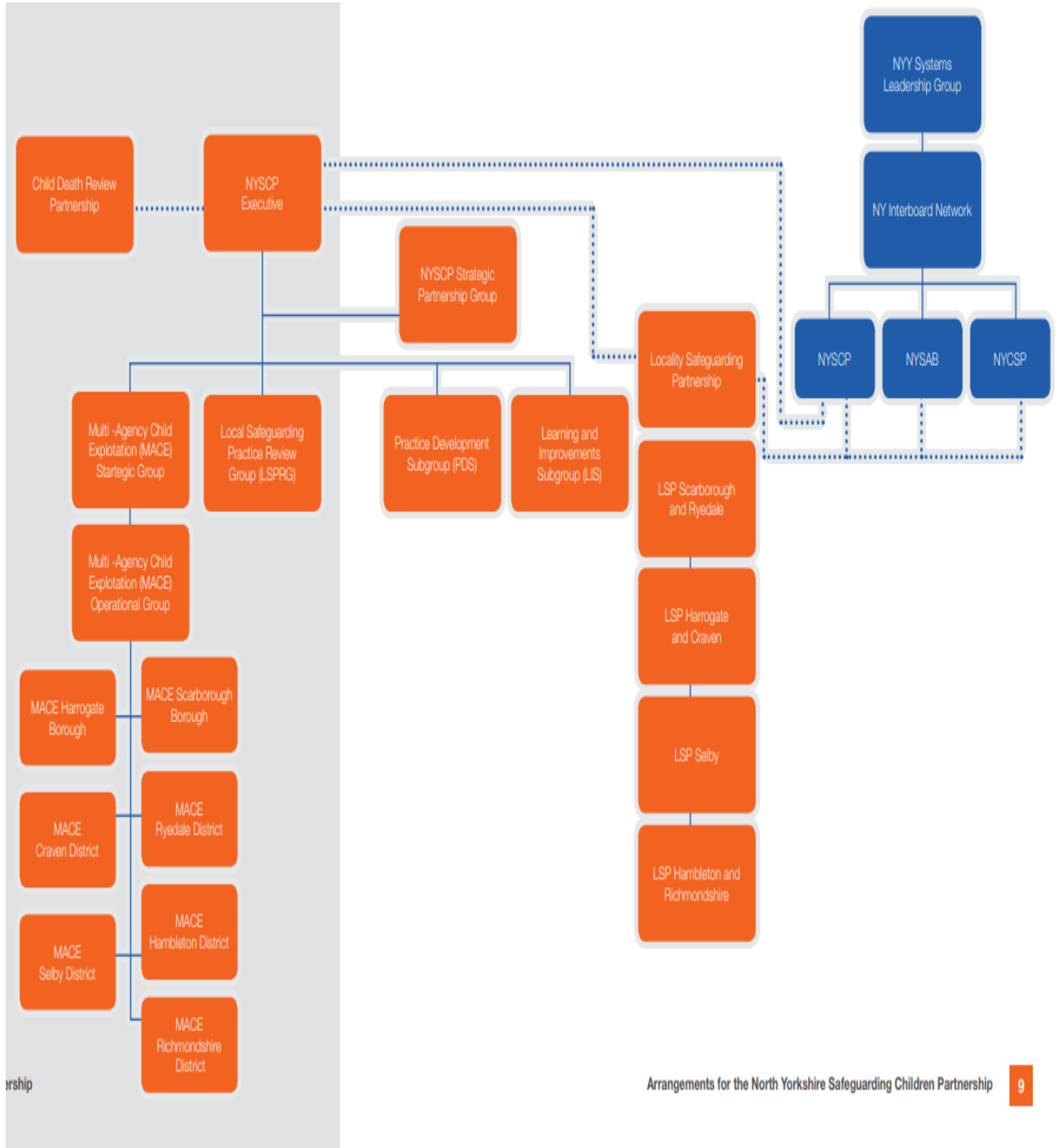
This Report is the first that covers a financial year in which both the Children’s Trust and the NYSCB’s previous agendas are covered by NYSCP. However, my scrutiny in 2020-2021 has covered only the Executive and the subgroups of the NYSCP as per its structure diagram on page 4 (CHECK PAGE ONCE DESIGNED). These do not include steering and reference bodies which cover education for all North Yorkshire children and young people; 0-19 health provision; youth and community, or other universal services.

As this report is presented, partners are in discussion on ensuring all themes in “Being Young in North Yorkshire” are part of a published annual report for 2021-2022 and subsequent years.

DRAFT

MY WORK FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (NYSCP)

NYSCP’s published structure is in the diagram below. The Executive meets for half a day per meeting six times a year. Throughout 2020-2021, all meetings of both the Executive and subgroups were held online.



Arrangements for the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership 9

Executive meetings follow a standard pattern. On an annual rota, leaders from both commissioning and delivery bodies are required to attend the Executive to present and be questioned on their activity reports. They consider what they need to draw to the Executive’s attention as both successes and challenges, and look both back on what has happened since their

last report, and forward to what they expect in the period to come. The Executive is expected to have read all reports and considered questions or comments members may have. Discussions cover these, and reach agreed conclusions, which are duly recorded. If further information is required or matters need to come back to the next Executive, this occurs. On a similarly rota, we receive detailed reports from the Chairs of each NYSCP subgroup (see structure below), and the shared North Yorkshire and City of York Child Death Review Partnership (CDRP.) The Executive discusses reports, notes the contents, and decides on any actions requested or required.

In the diagram above there are missing themes, regarding elements of childhood or youth not directly connected to safeguarding, but featuring in "Being Young in North Yorkshire." These would have been covered by the Children's Trust. For example, the Assistant Director at NYCC whose remit covers education learning and skills interacts with schools and other services covered by her remit. Some themes come to the Executive, such as Elective Home Education or school attendance and exclusions. However these matters are not represented in NYSCP's published structure, and I have not yet attended any subgroups covering her remit. There is now no other countywide Partnership body than NYSCP that takes as its core business issues such as attainment and achievement. Any review of the diagram above, which represents what NYSCP looked like in September 2019, should consider creating a new visual representation showing all elements of work on childhood, so that the whole childhood agenda is covered by an accountability and partnership framework under NYSCP.

On an agreed annual rota, the Executive discusses activity and assurance, risk assessment and management reports from providers in the Health economy, youth bodies including those run by the voluntary and community sector, and other organisations working with children and young people. These groups present to the Executive because they cover issues that the Executive needs to decide on or direct; or because there are issues which have arisen that need a problem-solving discussion to resolve matters.

At every Executive, if there are issues concerning cases of concern where a child or young person has not been kept as safe as they should have been, or safeguarding problems serious enough to require a Local or Rapid, or externally commissioned Local Safeguarding Practice Review, the agenda includes a discussion of progress, where the Executive notes or agrees either emerging or final lessons learned. Guided by the Local Safeguarding Practice Review Group that does this challenging work in detail and effectively, the Executive approves contacts with the National Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, signs off reviews of which there have been a number in 2020-2021, and keeps critical track of what the proof is that lessons are being learned when something goes wrong for a child. These reviews have all been conducted with great partnership commitment, thoroughness and diligence, and the Partnership's judgement on whether a Rapid Review or Local Learning Review should move on to be a Local Safeguarding Practice Review has always been accepted by the National Panel. Where an individual agency identifies a need to investigate its, the Executive is also kept aware of the progress in and lessons learned from single agency Serious Incident Notifications, investigations and reports

The Executive also takes a considered view on and makes shared decisions about all matters likely to affect children and young people either for good or ill, and seeks examples of good practice to be foregrounded and made public, including via social media and the Partnership's website. It also assures the content of the website so that it is both kept up to date, and reflects what agencies and the Partnership wishes either to highlight, or to ensure lessons are learned across all practice.

Increasingly, Executive agendas are configured so that all sections are closely matched to the agreed key themes in the refreshed “Being Young in North Yorkshire 2021-2024,” work to complete which has been completed in 2020-2021. The themes are based on the county’s and the Partnership’s agreed ambitions for all children in North Yorkshire. The themes agreed as key for the work to be done with and for children and young people between 2021 and 2024 are shown below:



These four linked themes refer to, and in delivering the strategy partners seek to enhance the life chances of, every child and young person. Executive agendas are now moving to all business being themed to steer work done on these four themes. NYSCP subgroups’ terms of reference, as they are reviewed over time, will also be linked to the four themes to ensure fulfilment of “Being Young in North Yorkshire” is assured between now and 2024.

The Executive's agenda also covers concerns that require agreed effort across a number of organisations, or that are being discussed at national scale with relevance for the County. Examples include Government's or inspection bodies' requirements that could shape service responses; the difficult and challenging effects of funding settlements and their effects on programmes of work; issues raised when a sector undergoes change or reform, such as is now happening in the National Health Service under the 2021 Health White Paper which will lead to change for both commissioning and provision of health services.

Executive standing items include quarterly reviews of data that shows trends in how well children and young people are faring in health, education including SEN/D, Elective Home Education and related issues, social care, family law, policing and criminal justice. NYSCP subgroups each deal with this data in far greater detail than does the Executive, but the latter notes and questions trends in what data tells us about the need for deep dives or reviews of practice, or reasons for a trend that is unusual. A small number of Standing Items also allow consideration and decision making on challenges in any institution or service, whether publicly funded or otherwise. The position of all such bodies as Relevant Agencies means the Executive has the duty to hold them all to account.

INDEPENDENT SCRUTINY

Independent scrutiny provides assurance by reflecting and reporting on the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children, including arrangements to identify and review serious safeguarding cases. It is part of a wider system which includes inspectorates' single assessments and Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs.) Safeguarding partners ensure scrutiny is objective and a constructive critical friend, and promotes reflection to drive continuous improvement. My role is to consider how effectively arrangements work for children, families and practitioners, and how well partners provide strong leadership.

NYSCP partners acknowledge that the independent scrutineer is never the sole provider of feedback or reflection. Working Together 2018 is clear mutual holding to account, support and challenge are part of how statutory partners and relevant agencies ensure impacts are clear, understood, co-owned, and contribute to progressively improving children and young people's lives. I provide constructively critical appraisal, challenge and ongoing appraisal of the partnership's work.

I was appointed to:

- Assess how well organisations work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and to hold each other to account for effective safeguarding
- Write this annual report on the effectiveness of arrangements, performance and effectiveness of services
- Assess the effectiveness of help provided to children and families, including through universal and early help services
- Assess whether the three statutory safeguarding partners fulfil their statutory obligations
- Scrutinise quality assurance activity including reviewing statutory and local reviews, findings from audits, and processes for identifying lessons to be learned from tragedy and crises in children's lives
- Scrutinise the effectiveness of training whose aim is to equip staff to safeguard and promote the wellbeing and welfare of children
- Provide evidence based and transparent assessment of the extent to which partners

- and relevant agencies fulfil their duties to keep children safe
- Evaluate the operation of the safeguarding partnership and attend meetings and activities including visits to partners and relevant agencies
- Support implementation of findings and outcomes from safeguarding reviews
- Assess what effective performance management, audit and quality assurance mechanisms are in place to support the three safeguarding partners in fulfilling their statutory objectives, enabling the partnership to identify and measure impact
- Ensure voices of children, young people and families are appropriately represented and heard by the partnership.

I attend and feedback on the work of NYSCP's subgroups at meetings over a given year, and seek to spend time with vital groups including representatives of children and young people when circumstances allow. I also chair and help facilitate bi-annual all-partners development days, parts of which include my feedback on progress. At present, because of Covid 19, all this work is done through virtual means.

I have attended all NYSCP subgroups seen on page 4 as a participant observer including the shared CDOP and CDRP, having been furnished with all papers ahead of each meeting. I have not yet attended locality-based Local Safeguarding Partnerships (LSPs) which combine work in each locality across the Safeguarding Children, Vulnerable Adults and Community Safety Partnerships running strategically at County level. NYSCP Executive considers reports back from these. The business they cover feeds into work in partner agencies of NYSCP.

The common features of all of the subgroups shown in the diagram on page 3 are as follows:

- They reflect the maturity of partnership working. They are well chaired, run efficiently and in a professional, mutually respectful manner which ensures all partners have the opportunity, and are expected, to contribute to, and where possible to chair or lead.
- They are diligent in attention paid to themes NYSCP has asked them to focus on, and there is a great deal of in-depth knowledge shown in their meetings by professionals who know only their own briefs, and the issues others at the table are dealing with.
- They are well attended, with a high level of consistency in who, and from what levels of decision making and responsibility, attends and ensures input.
- They are efficiently serviced by the small Business Unit that ensures the smooth running of NYSCP's business and discussions at the Executive.
- Subgroups' work visibly feeds into training and development for all agencies; to 7-minute and Coffee Break briefing materials, also furnished through NYSCP's website and social media accounts; to "lessons learned" presentations; and to the Safeguarding Week event which happens every two years.
- Where a subgroup or activity is shared, for example in audits of practice across NYCC and City of York, and in the Child Death Review Process (CDRP) and Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) covering the same footprint, the thoroughness of work done and the agreement of co-owned practice are to be applauded.
- Subgroups' agendas and reports to NYSCP Executive contribute to policies, protocols and procedures, including in contested territory such as ongoing work on differing medical opinions on Non-Accidental Injuries (NAIs) in non-mobile babies. This has

become a high-profile national issue during the pandemic, and NYSCP's work on it is a strong reflection of what is being done in Partnerships nationwide.

- Discussions on difficult subjects are well-led led by subgroup Chairs and members. Such difficult discussions are not avoided by the Executive, but are undertaken with professional care and mutual respect until conclusions are reached, including when compromises must be made.
- As scrutineer I can give assurance that executive and scrutiny bodies in each represented agency are kept informed of NYSCP's key business as it applies to all parts of the partnership; and that where there is a particular subject for their agency, they are briefed in detail

In both elements of my role, I seek to enable NYSCP to comply with the requirement both to work concertedly and successfully in partnership, and from the resultant position of confidence, to publish an Annual Report on activities, successes, and continued or new challenges. The report reflects on the following broad themes.

- How the partnership has developed: NYSCP took over from an effective, developing LSCB and absorbed the work of the Children's Trust. NYSCB reached a strong consensus during 2018-2019 that "blank sheet of paper" thinking was not necessary in creating the NYSCP. The former NYSCB, and now NYSCP, provide a strong foundation for agencies' future practice, not least because many people central to good work by NYSCB have continued in role, meaning the NYSCP is progressing well.
- The 3 statutory partners have created, and agencies' governance and scrutiny bodies and staff have agreed, a model that serves the county, its many communities, and the organisations that work for and with children and young people. A Partnership structural model shown on page 4 operates well, reflecting a strong shared commitment to partnership. NYSCP is also looking at how well connectivity between universal services such as education, and more specialist services at higher levels of intervention, work together in the interests of all children and young people, including those with additional and special educational needs (SEN), with or without a disability (SEN/D.) The move to examine a wider range work fulfilling "Being Young in North Yorkshire" could usefully be accompanied by a review of the NYSCP 2019 structure as it reaches the end of its second year of operation, so that any missing elements of what the Children's Trust oversaw can be included.
- The configuration, terms of reference, membership and attendance of NYSCP subgroups is a reflection of the fact that without a Board like the NYSCB, ownership of and work on safeguarding has moved closer to services' front lines. Making the Partnership the single statutory accountability body for children and young people means work is now "held," and to a high degree driven, by the subgroups. That Executive members also account to each other, and hold themselves to account, is central to NYSCP's success.
- The pledges to enhance children's life chances, regularly renewed by professionals who have contributed to several partnership development sessions during 2020-2021, reflect well on what has happened in the year and will help to shape both strategic and operational plans for future of work across the Partnership. This Annual Scrutineer's

Report seeks to reflect on what has been achieved, and what remains to be done. It confirms the three Statutory Partners' assurance of their compliance with the requirements of "Working Together (2018.)

- The NYSCP's work through strong subgroups which have "buy-in" and leadership from staff across agencies promotes cross-partnership ownership of safeguarding at every level. The work of the NYSCP covers a year of purposeful activity from 2020-2021 that has been positive and productive. Scrutiny of Agency and subgroup Assurance reports, regularly reflected on by the Executive and its subgroups, show the NYSCP's strengths, and the accuracy of its identification of areas for continued development.
- This Report is inevitably influenced by the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic on services and communities. The potential for threats to stability, work done to ameliorate those threats, and the potential for positive developments in partnership working when the pandemic passes, have all rightly been on the minds of all involved. Given the success of the vaccination programme and the likelihood that the virus will become an endemic presence for future years, all services are now turning their thinking towards what Recovery looks like, notwithstanding the current uncertainty about further waves or variants. The "new normal" will involve some working from home for many staff, alongside as much face to face work as possible with children and young people.

WHAT FOLLOWS: ISSUES FOR NYSCP IN 2021-2022 AND BEYOND.

North Yorkshire County Council and its District Council second tier bodies are now aware of a Unitary future for local government in the County. It is vital that NYSCP's relentless focus on high quality, partnership based and secure, self-aware and self-critical work for children and young people is maintained, as there is a period of continued change and development to come before the start of this structural change in 2023, and then in the years to follow. There must be no detriment to any child or family, given planning for successful and secure continuity and change will take up time and energies, needing to be factored into how services are planned for and delivered.

Staff across many agencies are largely working from home, use of office accommodation being reserved for those who either cannot do so or who need occasional office time. Staff of all agencies and the small team working in the Safeguarding Unit already ensure regular KiT meetings. NYSCP members contribute to countywide discussions regarding how both responses to the pandemic and plans for the future can be assured.

Some agencies (police, emergency services, Children's Social Care, many health bodies, many schools and colleges, for example) throughout the pandemic have been engaged in work as near "business as usual" as possible, with virus protection measures as part of their work. Meeting in the virtual environment since March 2020, at both Executive and subgroup levels, has not seen a break in stride in work for NYSCP. Many members, and all agencies, are now pondering how best to strike a balance between the continued efficiency of meeting virtually and not spending a great deal of their working days driving across a large county to meet; versus the human and professional need both to connect face to face across the Partnership, and to pick up on the "incidental five-minute catch-ups" on the fringes of a working session that do not happen online as people move, back to back, from meeting to meeting online.

A great deal of work is being done to good effect. The Executive has, however, also reflected on and accepts that there is a great deal of tiredness among staff, and a feeling of relentlessness in the working day that is not healthy in the long term. The Executive also recognises that throughout the pandemic, some services have worked as they did before Covid 19. Emergency services, police in community and response roles, many educators, social care staff, senior leaders who provide strategic leadership and “backstop” functions in life-and-limb services, those planning for changes in the NHS despite also being pressed to deliver solutions to Covid 19, are all examples. The section of this report on what comes next will pick up these threads.

The NYSCP Business Manager and his small team continue to keep me, and all partner bodies, apprised of developments and issues for discussion or concern, and facilitate my contributions to and presence at Executive and NYSCP subgroups so that assurance can be given, as both parts of my role require. The Executive meets six times a year, enabling it both to hold all others to account and to direct the Partnership’s work so safeguarding maintains its strengths and does not lose pace or focus. The Executive calls in senior staff across agencies and partners, taking Assurance, individual agency and Activity reports so NYSCP can drive forward what is required of services and agencies across the county.

Whole-partnership Development Days have been online during the pandemic, giving all concerned the opportunity to reflect on progress and discuss the challenges Covid 19 has presented, non-Covid challenges, how they should all be dealt with, what support children and young people continue to need, and what might happen next in NYSCP’s ongoing development. Whilst the virtual environment and technology create challenges, attendance is good and colleagues value the opportunity to maintain connections with and support for each other, and thereby children, young people, families and communities.

Subgroup attendance, actions lists and the minutes of each group illustrate that partners remain committed, attending virtually and finding work arounds for technology challenges. Chairs and the business support team construct agendas, ensure meetings are recorded appropriately, send out actions for completion, and ensure the Executive is kept closely informed. Subgroups’ business continues, and the Partnership goes on developing its ability to steer the work done with children and young people, using both the subgroups and the Executive to hold all concerned to account.

The Partnership continues both its audit and learning and development activity, albeit again all online. Section 11 multi-agency and Section 175 schools’ safeguarding audit cycles are agreed annually, some in partnership with the neighbouring City of York partnership. Such audits provide assurance on the quality of practice, and draw out lessons to be learned. The business support team sends out CPD briefings, updates and newsletters on Covid 19 issues and safeguarding more generally. Partners and relevant agencies value these. Examples are on the NYSCP website, where there is a wealth of other information, guidance and professional support materials, along with materials for children families and parents or carers. NYSCP also makes effective use of social media including Twitter and Facebook.

NYSCP remains keen to ensure support on safeguarding is given to schools, and that where necessary challenges and suggestions for improvement are provided. Throughout the pandemic an adequate number of schools remained open, at the very least to provide “hub” services, particularly for vulnerable children and children of keyworkers. When fuller opening took place, and despite some “stop-start” effects on hard pressed and tired staff children and families, North

Yorkshire services have supported schools to ensure changes have been handled in as seamless a way as possible. Every school has been supported in their safeguarding work, despite the additional workload inherent in creating “blended” learning, and since Christmas 2020 the return of some anxious children.

Support has been valued by schools, which have, like schools across the country, been less well and less clearly supported by central government’s many changes and last minute guidance and support. Schools will go on needing this. Their issues are regularly discussed by NYSCP Executive, including in key areas such as a growth in numbers of children educated at home, and the challenges of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEN/D) where, as in most of England’s localities, rising demand cannot be met by levels of resources. NYSCP’s wider remit captured in “Being Young in North Yorkshire” means the partnership is already planning to discuss schooling across many themes at future meetings.

Face-to-face safeguarding training ceased after the pandemic began. CPD, guidance and professional information have all continued virtually, both at Partnership level and within individual agencies, and been well received. The Partnership’s “lessons learned” briefings, master class sessions and 7-minute briefings continue to be added to, as do other offers to ensure as many of the workforce as possible can access up to date safeguarding training. The continued content-refreshes on the NYSCP website are valued for the high quality of support and advice provided, and for the ease of access to vital information for professionals, parents, children and young people alike. The newly developed and still growing “Be Aware” section of the site is of particular quality and value.

Early Help services are supported by a refreshed Early Help Strategy, and continue to respond to requests for appropriate interventions in line with it. Rates of referrals into different levels of service are closely monitored, especially where they may be concentrated in less affluent communities. Early Help reaches out, making it clear that even in the pandemic period, services remain available to help families to avoid crisis. The intention is that Early Help, early intervention and prevention, go on “keeping the heat out of the top of the system,” and the goal is to ensure families attract and receive support that keeps them together. Intervening early and appropriately will no doubt continue to be a theme of work for children and young people once the pandemic’s ongoing restrictions are lifted. That Early Help is not solely the province of social care teams but relies on schools, early years, youth, health and other services, is well understood and will remain a vital part of the offer.

The NYSCP team is also involved in work across the county and the city of York on Domestic Abuse and Violence, which includes agencies across voluntary, community, and survivor-led and focused bodies. Such a focus on a vital issue for some children and young people is a marker of partners’ insistence that vital work must go on no matter what, and it is hoped that its positive effects will be felt by children and their families who may be at risk. Given Royal Assent was given to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 in late April, those involved are now planning so as to ensure a way forward, especially as York will develop its own strategic steering body, but much of the work done will need to go on being done in partnership.

WHAT NEXT FOR THE PARTNERSHIP? ISSUES OF NOTE, AND RISKS TO BE DEALT WITH

New issues continue to surface as Covid 19 restrictions continue to be lifted as this report is issued. These may last for the longer term, even once post-pandemic future planning is

implemented. The Partnership is aware, and the Executive has discussed issues that focus around the fact that staff across all agencies have given a great deal since early 2020, often over and above pre-Covid 19 efforts and many are now tired and stressed. Post-pandemic there may be problems “in the wings” since March 2020 that will come to the fore. Everybody involved in NYSCP needs the energy, time and resources to think and plan as far ahead as possible.

Current circumstances are best characterised as those of continued change. NYSCP members are aware the extraordinary circumstances of the past 17 months have taught services a great deal about working together, facing contingencies they could not have planned for. These challenges, and the responses to them, should be used to embed what have become new ways of working.

Partners are also aware that post-pandemic times are likely to give rise to different demands, needs, challenges and opportunities, not least if the economy struggles to revive sustainably and takes a long time to recover – a situation which could place some families’ lives under severe challenge. The issues discussed below will undoubtedly present challenges to every agency. Once the pandemic subsides and especially in light of the success of the vaccination programme, the period of “Afterwards” is likely to present circumstances that will not be what we remember as “normal” pre-Covid 19. Deciding as a Partnership what to do then is accepted by members as unlikely to be simple, quick, or cheap. Some of the issues identified as this report is completed include the following:

- Schools returned to as near “normal” as possible from the Spring of 2021, but educational professionals are aware circumstances across much of their practice are still not as they were prior to March 2020. Exam and testing regimes are under continued critical scrutiny, leaving pupils and teachers in extended uncertainty and stress. Schools are acutely aware children from some vulnerable families have been slow to return or may not do so, and that sporadic attendance and elective home education are on the rise. This is an ongoing issue that partners are aware need to be addressed, potentially over the long haul. These issues are national as well as local. The same is true of the “stop-start” and poorly funded nature of what government continues to call “catch-up” activities which school leaders prefer to think of in more rounded and social terms than simply offering more formal lessons over longer school days.
- There are children and young people with special educational needs, with or without disabilities, who need support beyond the resources available, whose situation may have been exacerbated by restrictions during the pandemic. There are some whose planned appointments with medical staff were stood down whilst health services dealt with the pandemic, who will not recover as they might had services continued as they were. It will take time for the picture to clarify, and resources are hard to increase to deal with the challenges, but these matters are already on the agenda of schools and the county’s services. The potential for expenditure to outstrip even carefully managed resources is a real and ongoing risk, as is the continued pressure on health and social care services as well as educational ones to work with children and families at the centre of their practice in SEN/D.

Rates of referrals into some higher-level children’s services were initially lower during 2020 than in pre-pandemic times across all agencies. This manifested in lower levels of children caught up in County Lines and other Criminal Exploitation, lower referral and self-referral in mental health services, and lower reported cases of domestic abuse and violence. All of these indicators of extreme vulnerability have resurfaced and are rising in frequency and complexity. Partners are

experiencing this increase, and noting that in many cases there is a greater than usual prevalence of higher end, crisis level safeguarding, criminal justice, and mental health services activity, for all of which there is little or no corresponding rise in resources. There has also been a rise in the need for intervention in a minority of families which either struggled behind their own closed doors and did not ask for help during lockdown periods, or turned help away using Covid 19 in the home as an excuse for doing so.

Reductions in some areas of work are now being matched by rises in others, including a clear trend of some families needing help or intervention when they were not “on the radar” pre-pandemic. These include families where a child has developed an eating disorder which has worsened beyond the reach of earlier or lower-level support and requires serious clinical intervention; and a noted rise, echoed nationally, in very young children who are pre-mobile being affected by non-accidental injuries, inflicted by adults responsible for their care.

The increase in family poverty caused by adults’ job uncertainty and leading to a need for more access to free school meals or other practical support, added to some families dealing with state benefit difficulties or housing problems and in worsening poverty, all affect some children’s lives far more than others. Partners are all acutely aware that these issues require an all-agency response, and the Executive and its subgroups are furnished with data analysis and trends that help their discussions about developing the appropriate responses countywide.

If referrals discussed in previous sections continue to rise but financial resources stay at pre-pandemic levels, there will be ever harder decisions to make in localities, and potentially a growth in children’s and young people’s unmet needs – itself a predictor of safeguarding difficulties in some families. Decision makers, policy and service shapers, and the Partnership’s many agencies, will need to remain aware both of these externally driven but locally felt circumstances, and the need to shape services so multi-disciplinary learning is built on. This will require sustained commitment, and may not be easy to maintain once the post-pandemic period is properly underway.

Resources to deal with new challenges are likely to have been depleted during 2020-2021. This includes in voluntary sector bodies, whose losses in funding may mean their ability to be delivery partners is severely curtailed, as NYSCP Executive has already discussed in some detail.

What will need to happen to address these many issues could be complex, and will require the input of leaders, staff, children and young people, and the county’s adult citizens. It is clear detailed planning, and a readiness to act as swiftly and in as close a partnership as has become the hallmark of Covid 19’s ways of working, will be needed.

There is an additional layer of risk of which all partners are aware, broadly categorised as continued organisational change that could destabilise progress, the key ones of which are summed up below. Together and taken cumulatively they must be recorded as presenting present considerable challenges to an already-busy and sometimes stretched system in all public services and their partner bodies. All of them should therefore be noted as potential risks to the smooth, efficient and effective operation of safeguarding and other services for children and young people, though the will to get them all right and keep things safe and on track is impressive and determined across North Yorkshire.

The Assistant Chief Constable who was a fundamental part of and determined leader in the Police Service's contributions to NYSCP, retired as this report was finalised. The interim replacement senior officer is known to partners and warmly welcomed, but there will be period of continued uncertainty regarding the likely arrival of a substantive post holder. This could be at least a year away from publication of this report, or perhaps even longer.

A new PFCC was elected in May 2021 and needs both to learn the intricacies, requirements and boundaries of the role, and what partnership working will require of him and his team going forward into 2021-2022 and beyond. The OFPCC is a significant commissioner of a range of services, some of which directly impact on the lives and life chances of groups of vulnerable children and young people, and NYSCP will need to ensure communication is effective and clear so that the work of services across the county is enhanced by what the OFPCC's commissioning budget can fund.

The potential for a now-confirmed local government reorganisation creating periods of adjustment, changes to and reviews of services, and attendant potential uncertainty cannot be underestimated, however carefully managed the changes will undoubtedly be. Such change again will not happen at speed and planning will take into account what it will mean once all concerned are clearer about what will happen between now and 2022-2023. With a "go-live" change in 2023.

What might broadly be termed the Health economy is undergoing a great deal of what some experts in it are calling seismic change as CCGs are stood down, far bigger sub-regional Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) take their place at commissioning levels, and locality-based or place-shaping health alliances and providers' collaboratives step in to configure and deliver services, tailored to evidenced community and locality needs rather than heavily centrally driven. The current situation in the midst of this change process remains at least in part unknown, both because NHS England is saying less than localities need to know and act on about relationships between the centre and localities, and because all partners will need to step in alongside Health service professionals and governance bodies to make the new health landscape work. The change on the ground is being handled, managed, led and delivered by senior professionals already more than fully occupied with the jobs they were already doing, who are also still leading on the ongoing response to Covid 19. The pace of required planning and readiness is fast, but relatively unsupported from the centre. These factors taken together mean, as health economy leaders have been clear, that risks abound in trying to land what North Yorkshire needs in physical and mental health services for people of all ages and for NYSCP, particularly children and young people.

MY WORK IN 2021-2022

A pattern of meetings was established in diaries beginning in September 2019 and has worked well to date. In 2021-2022 I will continue to chair the Executive and to attend, observe at, and note the contents of and decisions made at meetings of every subgroup, on a cycle matched to busy diaries.

It is important, given my earlier remarks on the "missing pieces of the jigsaw" at present, that we ensure my scrutiny encompasses more than the current NYSCP subgroups if the picture I then present on 2021-2022 is as full as it can be in the first year of "Being Young in North Yorkshire 2021-2024." This may mean adjustments to diaries and potentially an increase in days per year assigned

to my work. Given savings are currently made by my not having to travel or add other out of pocket expenses, this should not be beyond possibilities but will need to be agreed.

For as long as NYSCP's work goes on largely on a virtual basis, there are limits on what else can be done with the remainder of days of my time on which the Executive or subgroups meet. Were my visits and scrutineer days once again to be done face to face, there would be greater potential to undertake additional meetings in the other halves of days. Such meetings could usefully take place with:

- Those at Chief Executive or equivalent decision-making levels in Statutory Partner bodies, as envisaged in Sir Alan Wood's Spring 2021 review of the new Partnership arrangements and as Working Together 2018 also envisages. *To note; I already meet on a regular Keeping in Touch basis with the DCS and the County Council's CEO. 2021-2022 should expand these KiT arrangements to embrace the CCGs and the OFPCC.*
- Relevant Agencies' leaders, governance, and managerial staff: principals and head teachers, governors, leaders in community or faith organisations, those working in programme, service or team manager roles in services, and so on.
- Representatives of children and young people, particularly when they are involved in decision making
- Others as partners and agencies deem fit

I will continue to facilitate full NYSCP Partnership Days. These will be virtual events for the duration of Covid 19 regulations, and for however long afterwards partners see fit, given returns to face to face event-based or large group meetings will take time. The Partnership days will, as they do now, consist of all-participant co-appraisals of progress, and Partnership members' reflections on it, plus opportunities for all attendees to be part of learning and information exchanges. There is also a planned Safeguarding Week, reaching across the County, the City of York, and their widest possible LSCPs' footprints, in late June 2021. This will include my participation and contributions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER'S ASSURANCE STATEMENT

As both Executive Chair and Independent Scrutineer, I present this end of year report as a snapshot in time, not as a definitive document. I have attended, virtually through Microsoft Teams, both the Executive and every subgroup as an active participant observer. All are running well, and the commitment to ensure they continue to do so has not broken stride, despite the pressures under which every service and staff team are working. I have also kept track of the NYSCP's website materials and its offers of support and guidance to all who may need it.

I conclude that the Partnership and the agencies and services which belong and account to it are compliant with Working Together 2018. All concerned are aware that communications both within and between partner bodies need to go on being a focus for concentration and continuous improvement, to avoid duplication and to ensure that all the key safeguarding themes with which NYSCP engages are in the consciousness, and influence the work, of all services and agencies in the county.

I conclude by being able to give assurance that the Partnership is running as it should, and that people across all agencies remain committed to making it work successfully. I look forward to continuing to work with, chair the Executive of and independently scrutinise the Partnership, and I express my hope that at some point in 2021-2022, on whatever limited a basis, at least some of the work can take place face to face given the limitations of the virtual environment. Partnership members have expressed a similar wish, given that although online working is proving efficient and productive, there is a great deal missing when the human factor of being in the same space to tackle the same issues is lost.



Professor Maggie Atkinson
Chair of the Executive and Independent Scrutineer,
North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP)

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APPENDIX 1

MY WORK, SET AGAINST NATIONAL REQUIREMENTS ON THE NYSCP

Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASAs) such as NYSCP are bound by statutory guidance in “Working Together the Safeguard Children” (2018, updated but not radically changed in 2020.) This is clear the MASA does not work in isolation but is part of any locality’s broader, all-agency means of ensuring citizens’ wellbeing. The central tenets are below.

“Working Together” 2018, Chapter 3 states:

The purpose of local arrangements is to support and enable local organisations and agencies to work together in a system where:

- children are safeguarded and their welfare is promoted
- partner organisations and agencies collaborate, share and co-own the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children
- organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively
- there is early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats
- learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice
- information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families.

In order to work together effectively, the safeguarding statutory partners, with other local organisations and agencies, should develop processes that:

- facilitate and drive action beyond usual institutional and agency constraints and boundaries
- ensure the effective protection of children is founded on practitioners developing lasting and trusting relationships with children and their families

Effective arrangements link to other strategic partnership work locally that supports children and families, including other public boards: Health and Wellbeing Boards, PFCCs’ boards and panels, Adult Safeguarding Boards, Channel Panels, Improvement Boards, Community Safety Partnerships, the Local Family Justice Board and MAPPAs. (This list is not exhaustive.)

Strong leadership is critical for arrangements to be effective in bringing together organisations and agencies. It is important that the lead representative from each of the three safeguarding partners plays an active role. The lead representatives for safeguarding partners are: the local authority chief executive, the accountable officer of a clinical commissioning group, and a chief officer of police.¹

All three safeguarding partners have equal and joint responsibility for local safeguarding arrangements. In situations that require a clear, single point of leadership, all three safeguarding partners should decide who would take the lead on issues that arise.

Should the lead representatives delegate their functions they remain accountable for any actions or decisions taken on behalf of their agency. If delegated, it is the responsibility of the lead

¹ Sir Alan Wood in his recently published report remains of the opinion that Chief Executives of LAs, Chief Constables and Accountable Officers of CCGs should sit on Partnership Executives in person. It is my view that this is untenable, given the breadth, depth and coverage of their respective roles; and that the levels of delegation to very senior Officers who lead the actual work is appropriate, so long as they can assure each other and me that their Chief Executive level post-holders are regularly and clearly informed of the NYSCP’s work.

representative to identify and nominate a senior officer in their agency to have responsibility and authority for ensuring full participation with these arrangements.

The representatives, or those they delegate authority to, should be able to:

- speak with authority for the safeguarding partner they represent
- take decisions on behalf of their organisation or agency and commit them on policy, resourcing and practice matters
- hold their own organisation or agency to account on how effectively they participate and implement the local arrangements

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