

## **City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership: Independent Scrutiny Annual Report 2024 – 2025**

### **1. 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 (CYSCP).

This report is for the period 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

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.

Independent Scrutiny should be objective, act as a constructive critical friend and promote reflection to drive continuous improvement.

### **2. Methodology**

The Independent Scrutiny Annual Report 2024 – 2025 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. ***Please see Appendix 1: Six Steps for Independent Scrutiny: Safeguarding children partnership arrangements; Jenny Pearce (2019).***

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 - adapted to Voice and Engagement of Children and Young People.
- 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 multiagency safeguarding children training.

In drafting this annual report, the Independent Scrutineer (IS) has also referenced the core elements and cross cutting themes from Working Together to Safeguard Children 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

### **3. Context**

National: During 2024 the CYSCP reviewed and implemented all changes as set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023: A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children (December 2023).

Local: During the reporting period, the City of York Children's Services received a full inspection of the local authority children's services (ILAC). The outcome was 'Outstanding'.

The Independent Scrutineer for the CYSCP has a dual role, Independent Chair and Independent Scrutineer for the Partnership.

The annual report is informed by scrutiny of:

- Facilitation of CYSCP Self-Assessment Health Check 2024
- Scrutiny of anonymized feedback from families, who have shared their feedback, following early help and support (June 2024).
- Scrutiny of strategic documents, including the York Children and Young People's Plan 2024-2027.

- Scrutiny of CYSCP governance arrangements
- Scrutiny of CYSCP strategies, procedures, briefings, training and development.
- Scrutiny of all reports to the CYSCP Executive Meetings, including Subgroup Assurance reports.
- Chairing the CYSCP Executive Meetings.
- Independent Scrutineer's Deep Dive Audit: Re-referrals to Children's Social Care (May 2024).
- Attendance and engagement with colleagues and partners at CYSCP Development Events.
- Scrutiny of the CYSCP Performance Management Information.
- Scrutiny of Serious Incident Notifications and Child Safeguarding Rapid Review Meetings and Outcomes.
- Comparison and scrutiny of best practice across Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership arrangements and JTAI (joint target area inspection) outcomes.

### **3. Key Headline Findings.**

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

There is considerable evidence of robust and highly effective governance arrangements for the CYSCP.

The three Delegated Safeguarding Partners who are represented on the CYSCP Executive, coalesce to provide strong and joined up leadership to the safeguarding partnership.

Despite competing priorities, the three statutory partners have continued their commitment during 2024/25 to holding bi-monthly Executive meetings, providing strong strategic oversight of the partnership's priorities:

- Prevention, Early Support and Early Help
- Child Exploitation
- Children Missing from Education
- Engaging with Fathers
- Mental Health and Wellbeing

The minutes of the CYSCP Executive provide evidence of the assurance and oversight that the statutory partners have, over the wide breadth of work and activity taking place, to drive forward the strategic priorities of the Partnership.

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

An example of this, was the DSP for the LA Children's Services respectfully holding Partners to account for attendance in person at Child Protection Case Conferences.

On the 15th of 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 CYSCP welcomed the revised statutory guidance, with a project plan agreed and quickly put into place, to review and drive forward the new arrangements.

The CYSCP Executive immediately invited the York Schools and Academies Board (YSAB) to nominate a MAT CEO to be part of the CYSCP Executive, embracing the strengthened role of schools and the education sector within local safeguarding arrangements.

The new arrangements were all successfully implemented within the national timescales, December 2024.

The CYSCP Annual Report 2023/2024 which sets out the strategic priorities for the partnership, was published by September 2024. This aligns with the York Children and Young People's Plan 2024-2027

The CYSCP Multi Agency Arrangements were reviewed and published by December 2024.

A Business Plan is in place, to assist the CYSCP Executive is maintaining oversight of progress for priorities and workstreams, providing assurance of pace and progress.

The City of York and the North Yorkshire Information Sharing Protocol, CYSCP Strategies, Practice Guidance, Resources and Procedures are all available and accessible to the CYSCP member agencies.

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

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

Wider safeguarding partners (including relevant agencies) actively helped shape the CYSCP Priorities for 2023/24 and the Young People's Plan 2024-2027, actively contributing to and attending all partnership and engagement events, including the CYSCP Development Day, 06/03/2023.

The independent scrutineer has found a high degree of commitment and engagement across the partnership. This is evidenced by a culture of openness to reflective learning.

The CYSCP Safeguarding School Conference, held on the 19/03/2025 was extremely well attended by colleagues across York schools.

The agenda, co-produced with school leaders, gave attention to the national reforms with delegates collaboratively shaping locally, a strengthened role for schools within the local safeguarding arrangements.

The CYSCP Executive are well sighted on strengthening even further, the strategic voice and influence on the CYSCP of the Early Years, Schools and Education sector.

### **Step 3: Voice and Engagement of Children and Young People**

This is an area of significant strength.

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.

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

The CYSCP 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.

Young people have directly influenced the CYSCP priorities with Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing being a priority area and focus for the CYSCP Voice and Involvement Subgroup.

In the Independent Scrutiny Annual Report 2023 – 2024 the Independent Scrutineer reported that the CYSCP Children's Rights and Involvement Strategy (October 2021) remained relevant but was due for a review.

This has progressed and the Independent Scrutineer is pleased to report that the Children and Young People's Voice and Involvement Strategy 2025-2028 is publicly available as a published document.

The CYSCP Development Day on the 18/07/2024 was attended by care experienced young people who challenged the partnership on their use of language and professional jargon.

In response, the Partnership all signed up to a Language Pledge acknowledging young people's experiences and views, which will receive scrutiny and assurance during the next S11 Challenge Event.

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

There are effective safeguarding procedures and information sharing agreements in place, to share information across the partnership.

Safeguarding information and data are available to the partnership, and well embedded within single agencies.

The CYSCP have developed a streamlined partnership data set, aligned to the partnership's priorities. This is continuing to evolve.

All agencies use and understand their own data, but there are opportunities for the CYSCP to review how it uses the **partnership's data set** to understand areas of strength and improvement, the impact and difference that the CYSCP are making for children and families, as well as identifying new and emerging risks to inform strategic planning.

Arrangements are in place for multi-agency audits. There are further opportunities for the Partnership to triangulate the learning from multi agency audits and reviews, seeking assurance in respect of how this learning has impacted both multi agency practice and, crucially outcomes for children.

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

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

Local arrangements are fully compliant with Working Together 2024/5 - Chapter 5 Learning from Serious Child Safeguarding Incidents

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

Equally, there is strong and shared governance of Serious Incidents, with strong and considered oversight of all incidents by the DSPs.

The CYSCP do not receive a high number of Serious Incident Notifications and for those that were made (3) during 2024/25, all were considered by a multi-agency Rapid Review Meeting.

The Independent Scrutineer is assured that there is not an under reporting. However, given that responding to serious safeguarding incident procedures are not undertaken routinely, the Independent Scrutineer would suggest that there are opportunities to manage the process more efficiently.

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

An area of real strength is the CYSCP 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.



**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: Voice and Engagement of Children and Young People. ***This is an area of strength.***

Step 4: Appropriate quality assurance procedures are in place for data collection, audit and information sharing. ***This is an area of strength.***

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 multiagency safeguarding children training. ***This is an area of strength.***

### Recommendations

- Implement and embed plans to strengthen even further, the strategic voice and influence on the CYSCP of the Early Years, Schools and Education sector.
- The CYSCP to consider how it maximises the safeguarding partnership's data set to understand areas of strength and improvement, the impact and difference that the CYSCP are making for children and families, as well as identifying new and emerging risks to inform strategic planning.
- In the Independent Scrutiny Annual Report 2023 – 2024 the Independent Scrutineer recommended that an area that could be strengthened further, was the co-ordination of systematic, outcome focused multi-agency audits/deep dives informed by quantitative data, local knowledge, with clear terms of reference.  
The Independent Scrutineer would invite the CYSCP Executive to consider if this has been achieved.
- Triangulate the learning from multi agency audits and reviews, seeking assurance of how this learning has impacted both multi agency practice and, crucially outcomes for children.
- The CYSCP to review the Serious Incident and Rapid Review processes.
- The CYSCP to consider the role of the Independent Scrutineer and how it can provide deeper assurance.

### **Conclusion**

My evaluation and reflection are that there remain strong and highly effective multi agency children's safeguarding arrangements in York, with a prominent level of

commitment from strategic leaders, the wider children's safeguarding workforce and the partnership Subgroups, which drive the work of the partnership.

The CYSCP Self-Assessment Health Check July 2024 concluded that the CYSCP was a mature partnership.

Relational practice is firmly embedded across the partnership.

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

The shared commitment and collaborative drive to lead and deliver effective safeguarding arrangements for children in York, was reported upon by Ofsted during their inspection of York Children's Services (2025).

***'Safeguarding partnership arrangements in York are embedded and mature, with a positive culture of respectful challenge and shared accountability.'***

***Links with housing have particularly enabled a significant improvement in outcomes and opportunities for care leavers.***

***Police and health partners have brought valuable knowledge and resources, including additional resources in attendance at ICPC and timely health assessments for children in care.***

***There is joint funding for new developments, for example clinical psychology support and access to speech and language therapy, and these collectively strengthen the approach to safeguarding children.***

***A comprehensive Children and Young Person Plan is owned across the partnership, which has impacted positively on the improvement of practice'.***

Ofsted. Inspection of City of York Local Authority Children's Services 24/02/2025 to 07/03/2025.

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 professionals across the partnership, who work tirelessly together, making sure that children and young people have the building blocks needed to be happy, to be healthy, to be safe and to be ready for the future.

Equally, thanks must go to the CYSCP Business Unit who so professionally coordinate and support the work of the partnership.

York is in a strong position to progress the national reforms of children's services, with steps already in place to co-produce local arrangements with and across the children's partnership.

Mel John-Ross

CYSCP Independent Chair and Scrutineer