

Multi-agency working and communication: learning briefing



What is multi-agency working?

It is recognising that West Sussex agencies are a partnership, committed to working together to support Adults experiencing risk, so your safeguarding practice needs to draw on all the relevant information and support available by others.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) define it as "providing a seamless response to individuals with multiple and complex needs. This could be as part of a multidisciplinary team or on an ad-hoc basis."

Why is effective multi-agency working important?

It is a reoccurring theme in Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) referrals, our audits, and frequently features in our SARs; we have highlighted two examples in this briefing.

Working effectively together

- Provides a high standard of services, increasing the quality of support and the outcomes for the Adult.
- The Adult is likely to feel better supported, improving engagement and satisfaction with the support provided.
- It lessens individual pressures on workers and agencies by sharing the workload and responsibilities.
- Leads to positive working relationships.
- It allows for best practice and experience to be shared.
- It allows for skill sharing and greater learning opportunities.

SARs with a theme of multi-agency working

Jean Willis was an 82-year-old woman who died in hospital in 2019. A safeguarding enquiry concluded that Jean "may have not received an adequate amount of health led input in the prior days to her being admitted to hospital."

The review identified:

- Missed opportunities for the coordination of care and assessment.
- Lack of multi-agency approaches to care, with no opportunity to ascertain together, the care required.
- A lack of coordinated response to deteriorating health, to ensure a coherent, collective, and timely response.

Kingswood was a Residential Care Home providing support for older adults. The home closed in 2020 following a visit by the Ambulance Service, where it was found that two residents had died and that several others were mildly to moderately hypothermic and dehydrated. Significant neglect was evident in relation to care needs and the environment.

The review identified the need to have:

- Clear multi-agency understanding of service requirements, safeguarding, quality and health and safety concerns.
- Clear understanding of actions required, when and by whom, when there are persistent concerns about services.
- The need to work together to use legal powers and responsibilities to improve quality and safeguarding.

Top tips for multi-agency meetings/working

Ask questions about what you want to achieve:

- How are we going to best work together? Do we need a formal meeting or process?
- Is there anyone else that needs to be involved? Check that those involved need to be involved and that they are adding value to the work needed.
- Think about and set Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound (SMART) goals.

Talk to the Adult, their family, and/or representatives:

Ask what they want, who matters to them most, and what existing support they have.

Develop strong working relationships, trust, and shared ownership:

Do this by being clear about responsibilities and expectations from the start; this may need a formal meeting to agree. Understand and respect each other's roles and responsibilities to reduce tension and misunderstandings. As workers may change, recording of discussions/decisions is vital.

Recognise differing systems and processes: Agencies differ in how they record information, with other agencies not being able to access these records. Therefore, consider other communication e.g., telephone calls or in-person meetings.

Sharing information: Sharing information is critical to make fully informed decisions about what action is best to take and how. Use our [Sussex Information Sharing Guide and Protocol](#) and accompanying [learning briefing](#) detailing how information should be shared. SCIE also have resources on their [website](#).

Decide who will review interventions: It is important that any decisions/plans are reviewed before closing involvement with the Adult; a risk assessment may be required. To find out more about Risk Assessment, we have a [Risk Assessment Learning Briefing](#) and [Podcast](#).

Review systems and processes: Ask yourself what you need to KEEP, STOP and START doing in order to improve systems and process.

What to do if you are unhappy about a decision

Use our [Sussex Safeguarding Escalation and Resolution Protocol](#), which supports consistent and timely decision-making where there may be disagreements or issues arising between professionals and agencies in relation to adult safeguarding.

The protocol includes guidance in relation to Mental Capacity issues and safeguarding and has a streamlined escalation process that explicitly ensures relevant safeguarding leads are consulted at an appropriate point.

Board meetings and protocols to support multi-agency working

The following supports the arrangement and process of multi-agency working:

- The [Multi-Agency procedures to support adults who self-neglect](#). This procedure contains an overview of the multi-agency self-neglect process. There is also an accompanying [learning briefing](#) and [podcast](#).
- The [Multi-Agency Risk Management Subgroup](#) ensures multi-agency communication and information sharing takes place on a regular basis to support professionals and their managers in managing the most challenging and concerning cases.
- The [Sussex Adult Death Protocol](#) tells you the process you need to follow to respond to an unexpected adult death where there is a suspicion, or it is known, that abuse or neglect by a third party directly contributed to the death. It brings together agencies at the earliest opportunity, ensures effective collaborative working, rapid risk assessment, and information sharing to make sure appropriate action is taken.
- The [Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Information Subgroup](#) (QASIG) seeks to improve the safety of services through early information sharing and intervention and maintains a single picture of the quality and safety of the local care market.

Feedback on this briefing

This briefing is designed to bring key issues to you, to support your learning and keep your practice current and in line with policy and procedure.

We constantly review what we are doing to improve what we produce, and this relies on feedback so, we would very much welcome your comments/views please to safeguardingadultsboard@westsussex.gov.uk