

# Safeguarding

Score: 3

2 – Evidence shows a good standard

## What people expect

I feel safe and am supported to understand and manage any risks.

## The local authority commitment

We work with people to understand what being safe means to them and work with our partners to develop the best way to achieve this. We concentrate on improving people's lives while protecting their right to live in safety, free from bullying, harassment, abuse, discrimination, avoidable harm and neglect. We make sure we share concerns quickly and appropriately.

## Key findings for this quality statement

Safeguarding systems, processes and practices

Arrangements for systems and practices which aimed to protect people from abuse and neglect were in place. Screening processes for safeguarding issues at the front-door to adult social care were timely, despite low staffing levels to screen safeguarding referrals at this process point. The local authority recognised the risk of having this low level of resource and they were looking at ways to strengthen capacity. Staff and partners said relationships and communication was good between the safeguarding team, other frontline teams and external organisations. There was strong awareness among staff groups of specific interventions to keep vulnerable people safe, such as the local authority's High Risk Adults Panel (HRAP) and the introduction of a safeguarding lead in 2021. Work was needed to improve clarity of safeguarding referral thresholds, particularly amongst out-of-area partners as there were some inappropriate referrals being made. Whilst this did not impact negatively on people, it could lead to ineffective use of resources.

The local authority partnered with three neighbouring local authorities to form a Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB), which met quarterly. The TSAB delivered a co-ordinated, whole-system approach to safeguarding adults locally and regionally and continuous learning through audits and Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs). SARs were reviewed by local authority leaders between TSAB meetings to ensure leaders and staff were aware of individual responsibilities in relation to any cases, and staff said learning was effectively cascaded through the organisation. Safeguarding champion roles had helped promote learning from the TSAB across and between organisations in the Teeswide area. Additionally, learning from another Safeguarding Adults Board in the region prompted the local authority to review and update Best Interest Assessor practices. Staff reported positive outcomes from these interventions as a means of identifying, protecting, and supporting vulnerable people.

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Partners and leaders said the local authority had a strong voice within the TSAB and contributed to priorities such as protecting vulnerable people by participating in HRAP meetings. The local authority provided the TSAB with safeguarding data relating to care providers' safeguarding concerns. Leaders told us there was a process in place for safeguarding concerns and issues to be communicated to senior management and the TSAB. For example, workers would complete a Quality Assurance Multi-Agency Information and Intelligence Sharing Form to record concerns about contracted providers, which would be shared with the Quality Assurance & Compliance team for further review and action. While some frontline staff were not aware of processes to feedback safeguarding concerns or themes from providers, leaders were assured that concerns were being shared via supervisions, with supervisors escalating any identified issues. Additionally, emerging risks and safeguarding themes were analysed and reviewed monthly through the Quality Assurance Dashboard, providing further assurance that safeguarding issues were being shared and acted upon by the local authority.

It was acknowledged that strategic decisions and investment had been made to ensure no-one requiring a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) authorisation waited more than 24 hours to be seen by the Local Authority, which ensured no-one experienced an unlawful deprivation of their liberty. Feedback from partners about the local authority's management of DoLS authorisations was very positive and reflected the investment that had been made in this area.

There was an effective multi-agency safeguarding partnership between the local authority and other statutory partners. Roles and responsibilities for identifying and responding to concerns were clear. Information sharing arrangements were in place so that concerns were investigated without delay. Safeguarding strategies were well-aligned with health partners and care provider feedback on access to safeguarding support from the local authority and working with the safeguarding team was mainly positive.

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National data from Skills for Care (October 2024) showed that 42.38% of independent or local authority staff completed safeguarding adults training, which was slightly lower than the England average of 48.70% and indicated an area for improvement for the local authority. Leaders told us staff training and upskilling around safeguarding was a priority regularly discussed at TSAB meetings and provided through other learning and development opportunities.

## Responding to local safeguarding risks and issues

Staff and leaders recognised and understood local safeguarding issues and risks the residents of Stockton-on-Tees faced, including child and domestic abuse, homelessness, substance misuse, organised crime and modern slavery. Rough sleeping and exploitation were significant risks for young people who lacked support and accommodation that met their care needs during transition. The local authority recognised a lack of wrap-around support for this group, which was exacerbated by disjointed pathways between children's and adult services. An ongoing review was taking place to address this.

The local authority worked with safeguarding partners across the system to reduce risks and prevent abuse and neglect from occurring. A 2022-2028 Domestic Abuse Strategy, developed in partnership with care providers, focused on key priorities such as ensuring comprehensive support for victims, providing safe accommodation, and holding perpetrators to account. Interventions included workforce development, awareness raising, and working with partners to develop preventive programs and initiatives such as a lived experience charter.

There were processes in place to support people who did not meet the Care Act threshold for safeguarding intervention. For example, scamming was becoming increasingly prevalent, and the local authority had forged links with community groups where people could be signposted for support.

## Responding to concerns and undertaking Section 42 enquiries

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There was a process in place to respond to concerns following initial safeguarding enquiries, including those which did not progress to a Section 42 enquiry. The local authority told us 99% of peoples' outcomes from completed Section 42 enquiries were either partially or fully met, which was higher than the overall 91% for the TSAB area.

The local authority reported there were no safeguarding concerns awaiting initial review; all safeguarding concerns were reviewed by the 'First Contact' Team or passed straight to the safeguarding team. No Section 42 enquiries were waiting to be allocated, and the maximum time for allocation over the previous 12 months had been 27 days. The average completion time for Section 42 enquiries between November 2023 and November 2024 was 80 days.

The local authority told us, for 97% of safeguarding referrals, action was taken to mitigate risk with the risk(s) being reduced or removed. There had been a significant increase in safeguarding concerns recorded by the local authority in 2023 compared with previous years, and far fewer of these had progressed to Section 42 enquiries (Safeguarding Adults Collection, August 2024). The average number of concerns between 2017 and 2022 was 1808, with an average of 908 progressing to Section 42 enquiries (a conversion rate of 50%). In 2023, 665 of 3020 total safeguarding concerns progressed to Section 42 enquiries, which was a conversion rate of 22%. Leaders told us this trend was a result of the local authority changing the way concerns were recorded.

There were clear standards and quality assurance arrangements in place for addressing serious concerns about local care providers or partner agencies.

## Making safeguarding personal

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People and partners told us the local authority's approach to safeguarding could be personalised and compassionate, but this was not always the case. Views on whether the local authority carried out safeguarding enquiries sensitively and without delay, keeping the wishes and best interests of the person concerned at the centre, were mixed. A person involved in a safeguarding concern said the local authority worker made them feel safe and supported, while another person said they did not feel supported during the process.

Information received from the local authority stated staff were expected to record how safeguarding had been centred round the person involved, and that this was monitored. The TSAB independently audited the local authority's approach to the six safeguarding principles underpinning making safeguarding personal, and they were provided with regular Making Safeguarding Personal monitoring data.