



Department
for Education

Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements

Independent Scrutiny Advisory Group - Terms of Reference

Purpose

To establish a multi-agency Independent Scrutiny Advisory Group that will provide expert insight, challenge, and guidance to central government on the role and impact of independent scrutiny within safeguarding partnerships. The group will contribute to quality assuring research outputs, shaping national policy, improving practice, and ensuring that scrutiny is proportionate, effective, and inclusive of the voices of children, young people, and families.

In addition, the group may be asked to offer informed perspectives on wider policy development that may affect safeguarding partnerships, ensuring that the implications for local practice and accountability are fully considered.

Attendees will draw on their experience, expertise, and knowledge as representatives from varied multi-agency backgrounds and organisations. Members will bring a range of perspectives and levels of experience with the scrutiny process. Together, the group will work to achieve the following aims:

Aims

- To establish a structured and inclusive forum where independent scrutineers, and those with experience of being subject to the scrutiny process, can share experiences, challenges, and examples of effective practice directly with central government.
- To shape and inform national policy and guidance development on independent scrutiny by drawing on the group's collective expertise and diverse perspectives, providing practical suggestions and solutions to ensure clarity and importance of the role.
- To provide oversight and quality assurance for research outputs, ensuring that any case studies, tools, resources, or products developed for the sector are robust, relevant, and ready for implementation. The group will also play an active role in promoting and championing the use of these products across the sector to support consistent and effective practice.
- To champion the inclusion of children, young people, and families' voices in all aspects of the scrutiny process. Ensuring their lived experiences inform both local practice and national developments, shaping the role and future of the young scrutineer as a key contributor to meaningful change, leadership, and accountability

Objectives

1. Provide quality assurance for research outputs

- Support a Department for Education internal research project to produce tools/resources/case studies to support consistent practice across the sector, for example, identification of, and agreement on, strong practice examples
- Provide feedback and quality assurance on research outputs, tools, and resources to ensure they are robust, relevant and aligned with sector needs.
- Support the dissemination of information within their networks.

2. Champion inclusion of the voices of children young people and families

- Contribute towards the development of innovative approaches to engage children and young people (CYP) and families as a formal part of the scrutiny process, ensuring their experiences shape both local and national developments.
- Maintain a strong focus on championing the voices of children, young people, and families, recognising that accountability to them requires further development and ongoing commitment.

3. Support the development of national policy and guidance

- Provide informed experience, evidence-based recommendations to central government on the development and refinement of national policy and guidance relating to independent scrutiny.
- Ensure that the advisory group's input reflects the realities of practice and the needs of those subject to scrutiny taking a solutions-focused approach in sharing recommendations, advice and guidance.
- Contribute to upcoming updates of statutory guidance and other key documents, where required.

4. Support sector readiness

- Support roll-out and sector implementation of any updated legislation and statutory guidance as required
- Support the dissemination and application of learning across the sector to build a culture of reflection and growth
- Promote the adoption and use of research related products/outputs across the sector to drive improvement and coherence in practice.

Membership and governance

- The Multi-Agency Independent Scrutiny Advisory Group will include experienced independent scrutineers, senior leaders and multi-agency representatives from local authorities, police and health.
- Membership will also include policy officials from other government departments as observers. The group will link with other DfE governance networks/working groups providing quarterly updates to the National Multi-Agency Child Protection and

Safeguarding Advisory Group; therefore, membership of this group may suit individuals who currently are not members of other governance groups.

- The advisory group will be chaired by Adrian Loades (National Safeguarding Partner Multi-Agency Facilitator), supported by Mel John-Ross (North West Regional Improvement Pilot Programme Independent Scrutineer | Independent Consultant) who will take on the role of chair if the chair is absent.
- All members are expected to set aside any organisational or personal interests when participating in the group. Any conflicts of interest must be declared.
- All members are expected to offer advance notice if they can no longer participate in the advisory group and wish to withdraw their membership.
- Membership of the group is voluntary. All members are invited to participate in the group and in doing so agree to the terms of confidentiality.
- All members are invited to participate in the group for a period of up to twelve months, the purpose and continued relevance of the group will be reviewed at this point.
- All members will make a commitment to use their knowledge and experience in advising government and supporting the reform programme. Only in exceptional circumstances will members be permitted to send a deputy, and this must be agreed in advance of the meeting.
- Government officials and external guests may be invited to attend and present at working group meetings where appropriate but will not obtain standing membership.

Terms of engagement

- The group will receive papers and research outputs that share ideas and findings that are not government policy to give members the opportunity to contribute early to research quality assurance and policy development.
- Any documentation, research outputs and papers will be shared with group members in confidence, and content must not be shared outside of the group without express agreement from government officials – this includes within the organisations of group members.
- Members will want to discuss and debate issues as they share advice and expertise with government. All members are expected to engage in respectful conversation.
- Membership of the group does not equate to endorsement of the final content of final policy direction.

Meetings

- The meetings will take place every month for 60 minutes, with participation taking the form of virtual meetings via video-conferencing technology. We will require a minimum of the chair/deputy chair and 6 other members to hold a session.
- The frequency and duration of meetings will be kept under review with the potential to increase frequency or length should the need arise.

- The Department for Education will provide a small secretariat function that includes arranging meetings, supporting members to attend and producing minutes to support transparency.
- Exceptional meetings or engagement via correspondence or involvement of individual members of the group at other points may also be required at appropriate times, at the request of officials, or other members of the group.

Confidentiality and use of official information

- Confidential information associated with emerging policy and research findings will be shared with members appointed to the group only. The meetings may contain confidential and/or privileged information and may be legally protected from disclosure. Confidentiality is vital and members of the group must treat sensitive information appropriately.
- The contents of any communications (such as emails, email attachments, phone calls, video conferencing) between the Department for Education and members of the Independent Scrutiny Advisory Group are intended solely for the members of the group and should not be shared unless the Department for Education has provided clear permission to do so. Any other use, dissemination, copying, or storage of confidential information is strictly prohibited.
- Members should continue to comply with this confidentiality if/when they leave the group. When members have left the group, it is recommended that they delete any documents or messages that contain information that is still restricted.
- The Department for Education will collect and use members' contact details (such as email addresses and phone numbers) solely for the purpose of facilitating the normal operation of the Independent Scrutiny Advisory Group. This includes arranging meetings, sharing documentation, coordinating group activities, and enabling communication between members where appropriate.
- All personal data will be handled in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Members' contact details will not be shared outside the group or used for any other purpose without explicit consent. Members have the right to access, rectify, or request deletion of their personal data at any time

Review

- The Terms of Reference and membership will be reviewed every 12 months.

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