

## Safeguarding Early Adopters programme

### Learning example

#### Early Adopter: Hertfordshire

Learning theme: Independent Scrutiny

#### Introduction

Hertfordshire has been developing a new approach to the independent scrutiny of its partnership arrangements.

#### Background, aims and objectives

When the statutory partners in Hertfordshire started planning the transformation to the new partnership arrangements, they were keen to prioritise developing a new approach to independent scrutiny, as they felt it would play a vital role in the success of the arrangements in improving safeguarding practice.

The aim was to develop an approach to independent scrutiny that was more robust and met the new statutory requirements, but that also retained the successful elements of multi-agency working that had been built up in Hertfordshire over many years. The new approach had to be workable in practice and ensure accountable oversight and feedback on performance and outcomes; and ultimately it had to lead to practice improvement.

#### Approach

Given scrutiny would run throughout the work of the whole partnership, it was clear that a wide range of partners needed to be engaged in developing the new approach. The existing LSCB Strategic Board was used as the mechanism for bringing these partners together, with two separate half day Development Workshops held within a two month period, focusing on developing the approach to scrutiny.

It was acknowledged that external expertise would be valuable to help partners decide on how to use scrutiny in the new arrangements, and two experts were commissioned to support the project.

At the first workshop, an independent LSCB Chair from another area (Phil Picton) provided some peer challenge by presenting some background information about different types of scrutiny, their focus and how they could be combined into a system. This was then followed by a general discussion.

At the second workshop, an independent facilitator from Research in Practice used an appreciative inquiry approach to take the Board through a series of interactive group exercises that encouraged them to consider what scrutiny and challenge meant, what worked well currently and what their aspirations were for the future.

Feedback from these workshops was then used to develop the Partnership's approach to scrutiny.

### **Challenges**

The biggest challenge to the project was time. Considering and developing the right approach to scrutiny required significant discussion and thought, and with a large number of partners involved this took more time than originally expected. Although the broad approach and principles were agreed following the workshops, further work will need to be undertaken in the first year of the Partnership's operation to develop and define the scrutiny system through the agreement of a consistent set of principles for scrutiny and an annual scrutiny plan. All partners in Hertfordshire are committed to a learning approach to the new Partnership, so taking the more detailed development forward into the first year of the Partnership's work is considered in line with that principle of continuous improvement.

In hindsight the second workshop could have been longer, which would have allowed partners to take their thinking further and begin to develop more of the detail of how the arrangements will work in practice.

### **Successes**

The project succeeded in developing a new approach to independent scrutiny that includes consideration of both the *culture* of scrutiny and the *system* of scrutiny.

Partners have agreed that scrutiny in Hertfordshire will be focused on learning as its outcome and will be positive in its approach. The Partnership will aim to build a culture where everyone involved in safeguarding children from the front line up to the Strategic Board, welcomes scrutiny and actively participates in it; trusting and learning from each other as well as taking accountability. It is anticipated that this approach should bring significant benefits as it should ensure that everyone involved in safeguarding children fully engages in scrutiny.

Partners have also agreed to a system of rolling scrutiny that uses multiple forms, with oversight from an independent Scrutineer. This approach brings benefits as it ensures scrutiny is embedded throughout the work of the Partnership and that someone independent of the statutory partners will require assurance of whether all agencies are fulfilling their responsibilities to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Factors that contributed to the development of this approach include the genuine engagement of all partners in the project, and the use of appreciative inquiry as a tool, which the partners will now go on to use as part of the scrutiny system.

### **Conclusion**

A new approach to independent scrutiny has been agreed in Hertfordshire as a result of this project.

Importantly, the process of developing the new approach through engagement with partners has already led to the start of a culture change in how scrutiny is viewed locally. Partners are starting to view scrutiny positively as a tool that allows agencies to learn from what works and continuously improve their practice, rather than a purely administrative process, and it is expected that this culture will grow stronger as the Partnership moves to its next phase of development.