

Quality Assurance Framework



Keeping Children Safe

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1. Overview

The main goal of Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership is to make arrangements to ensure that, at a local level, organisations and agencies are clear about how they will work together to safeguard children and promote their welfare, gain assurance that local safeguarding arrangements for partners are working effectively, individually and together to support and safeguard children. (Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026).

This Quality Assurance Framework identifies the methods, processes and plan that will be used to provide assurance that those expectations are upheld, identify areas for improvement clearly and agree action to support continuous improvement.

2. Background

In 2023 there were significant changes to guidance and legislation that helped to define and influence the work of Durham Safeguarding Children's Partnership (DSCP). Changes were addressed through the publication of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA). Further information on these changes and the work that was completed can be found in the [DSCP Annual Reports](#) and [Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements](#).

The [DSCP Strategic Business Plan](#) sets out the priorities which reflect changes to our statutory context, insight from local safeguarding partners and local, regional and national practice.

3. Vision and Priority

3.1 Our vision and values are simple, it's about 'Keeping Children Safe' on the premise that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. It acts as an umbrella covering all that we do and is underpinned through our three Core Values – Tenacity; Curiosity; Openness.

3.2 **The Partnership looks to realise this vision by focussing on:**

- **Prevention through early intervention** – We will work together to prevent harm at the earliest opportunity
- **Joined up response** – We will respond bringing together the expertise of partners
- **Listening** – We will listen to and observe children ensuring their voice is heard even when they don't or can't speak out
- **Identifying** – We will identify those most at risk of harm by sharing information and data effectively
- **Challenging** – We will challenge, learn and continuously improve and by applying the following values:
 - **Tenacity** – acknowledge that there will be an element of endurance required by teams and individuals facing difficult and long-term problem solving where solutions are not immediately apparent. In the area, effective inter-agency working is vital to maintain a focus on keeping the child safe
 - **Curiosity** – it is essential that we look beyond the immediate presentation to ensure that the concerns about children are not being masked or hidden by individuals, circumstances or a lack of curiosity on the part of those responsible for safeguarding
 - **Openness** – we need to be open and empathetic to the child and the perspective of other agencies. This includes an openness to challenge and be challenged so that the best decision in the interests of the child are made

- 3.3 Our Quality Assurance Framework aims to test and assess evidence of partnership safeguarding activity and how our values are put into action to Keep Children Safe.

The DSCP has established priorities for the [DSCP Strategic Business Plan 2025-2027](#) which are shown below together with the outcomes and measures which will enable the DSCP to assess progress. A summary is provided below.

Vision **‘Keeping Children Safe’**

Core Values: **Tenacity; Curiosity; Openness**

Priority 1
Harm
Outside
the Home

Priority 2
Safeguarding Through
Early Identification and
Intervention

Priority 3
Trauma
Informed
Practice

3.4 Priority One; Harm Outside the Home

We recognise that children and young people who are at risk of Harm Outside the Home (HOtH) are not always visible to practitioners across the partnership. We want to strengthen and challenge the partnership to look at increasing awareness, offer a greater understanding of places and spaces where children and young people are vulnerable and focus on disrupting exploitation.

We will use quality assurance activity to explore how practitioners identify the risk of Harm Outside the Home for children and young people, and how they respond to help keep children safe, including supporting young people as they transition to adult services.

3.5 Priority Two; Safeguarding Through Early Identification and Intervention

DSCP learning from the two years prior to this business plan links to early intervention and missed opportunities at an early stage. There is a focus in the DSCP to drive practice, develop practitioners understanding of thresholds and have clear safeguarding processes and pathways, which includes cross boundaries and meeting the needs of families. This in turn will reduce cases going into crisis - coming through the correct process and early information sharing is key.

We will use quality assurance activity to seek assurance relating to identification of risk and intervention is at the right time, and that practitioners are confident in thresholds, safeguarding processes and pathways and leading early help assessment plans.

3.6 **Priority Three; Trauma Informed Practice**

The DSCP have committed to increasing understanding, identification and impact of trauma affecting our children, young people and parents and identifying joint improvement opportunities e.g. mental and emotional wellbeing, school behaviour and attendance and transitional safeguarding.

Learning from our Rapid Reviews and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) has highlighted heightened risk for young people who need support in adulthood.

All Rapid Reviews, CSPRs and priority work over the last 12 months have included learning around understanding complex trauma and assessing risk. This includes learning on how unaddressed trauma and distress can lead to family relationships breaking down.

Using our quality assurance framework, we will explore how well trauma informed practice is embedded and how trauma is identified, understood and responded to.

3.7 **Priority Four; Working Together and Towards Families First Partnership Programme**

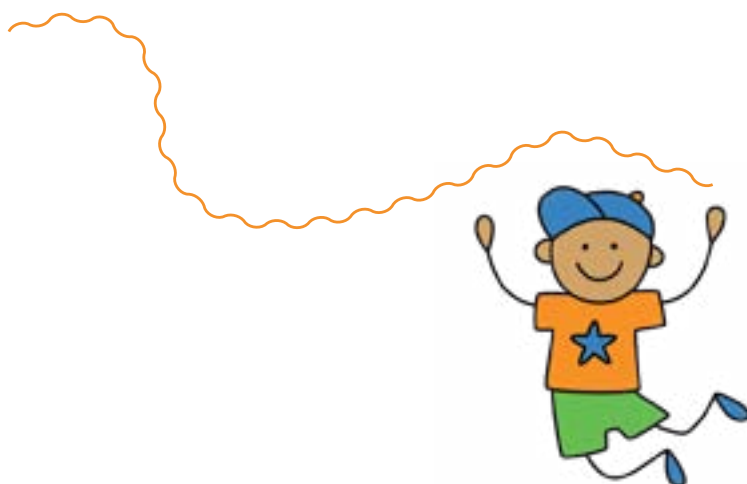
In December 2023 the Government published 'Working together to safeguard children 2023; statutory guidance on multi agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children which is supported by Children's Social Care National Framework, guidance on improving practice with children, young people and families and Stable homes, built on love (2023).

In light of these publications, the DSCP is undertaking a review of our local multi agency safeguarding practice arrangements and publishing our revised arrangements. Our quality assurance framework will enable us to understand our position and readiness in response to this.

3.8 **Golden Threads**

Throughout all of our work, the 'golden threads' should weave through everything that we do;

- Child's voice and lived experience
- Working together and sharing information across partners and boundaries
- Whole family approach recognising networks
- Pieces of the jigsaw through professional curiosity and cumulative lens
- Intersectionality including Special Education Needs and Disabilities
- Reflective strengths-based practice
- Mental health and wellbeing



4. Quality Assurance Framework

We will use five models of assurance; these are displayed below in Figure 1 with further detail in section five. There are a range of methodologies that are used and cut across the models, details of these are within section six.

Figure 1



We will utilise the Multi Agency Child Safeguarding (MACS) Evaluation Framework Theory of Change to understand our work, how it will lead to change and the outcomes of the work. The Theory of Change (TOC) is illustrated as a metaphor of a tree (figure 2) to represent the growth and development of change, reinforcing the importance of review, reflection and re-adjustment. Further explanation of the TOC can be found via The Association of Safeguarding Partners [website](#).

Figure 2



Outputs are measured to provide assurance against the five key outcomes of The Association of Safeguarding Partners (TASP) Guide to the Multi Agency Child Safeguarding (MACS), these are detailed in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3



5. Quality Assurance Models

5.1 Voice of Children and Young People

There is an expectation that all partners consider the voice of the child in all the work that they do. This means placing the child's voice at the centre of their work and ensuring that the right support is provided. The DSCP seek assurance in knowing that the child's lived experience is not only heard but responded to when undertaking assurance. When carrying out assurance activities, we consider the guidance from the Voice of the Child Toolkit to understand the effectiveness of listening to children and young people.

In addition, listening to, and considering the voice of children in direct practice, information from children is combined with knowledge, experience and learning, for example, from audits, data and reviews, to inform the design and delivery of our work. When carrying out assurance activities, we are seeking confirmation that this has been combined and developed to inform practice.

5.2 Assurance Model

The assurance model includes processes to provide assurance that multi-agency practice is reviewed and operating well, there are direct and indirect reporting mechanisms based on areas of priority and emerging themes. Where assurance is not evident, there is a requirement for the statutory safeguarding partners to engage, respond and improve operational systems and practice.

(HM Government, 2026)

5.3 Learning Model

The Learning Model uses both strong areas of practice and reflection and analysis of where improvements need to be made. When we highlight commonly recurring areas that may need further investigation, we can share learning, including from success to enable improvements. We then seek assurance that the recommended learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement positive changes to practice. Learning from local and national practice enables us to work proactively to identify learning opportunities and also to make improvements.

5.4 Performance Model

The performance model provides oversight of partnership performance, utilising quantitative and qualitative data and information, to enable partners to receive data, information and practice insight to empower the assurance of performance at a strategic level.

5.5 Scrutiny Model

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 requires safeguarding partners to ensure that there are arrangements for effective independent scrutiny in place for their local area. There are several functions of the Independent Scrutiny Role which are detailed in the Working Together guidance, in summary, the independent scrutiny should drive continuous improvement and provide assurance that arrangements are working effectively for children, families and practitioners

(HM Government, 2026).

The arrangements for independent scrutiny can be accessed via the [DSCP website](#).

6. Quality Assurance Methodologies

6.1 Methodologies

Various methodologies are utilised across the assurance models to ensure a holistic approach to understanding, identification, learning and confidence. A matrix to show the models, methods and the areas they provide assurance are detailed in Appendix 1. The DSCP have also produced relevant guidance documents on how to apply these methods which can be found within the local resources section of DSCP Trix online. The DSCP have developed a work plan which enables a cycle of activity across the span of the business plan to allow for various models and methods of assurance. The application of the methodologies via the work plan, is supported by the DSCP Communication Strategy.

6.2 DSCP Delegate Safeguarding Partners (Executive Group)

The DSCP governance structure is led by the Chief Officers Safeguarding Group, this group sets the strategic direction, vision and culture of the Partnership. The delegate partners sit within the Executive Group who are responsible for the delivery of the strategic priorities. The Executive Group receive assurance directly reported to them in line with the forward plan. In addition, learning and continuous improvement activities take place ahead of this final stage of assurance reporting, directed by the Performance and Learning Group (PLG) who are the management group driving the work of the partnership through five dedicated subgroups. Details of the structure can be found in Appendix 2.

6.3 Single and Multi - Agency Audits

The DSCP approach to audits and assessments evolved during 2023 when a predefined audit cycle was replaced by an innovative and proactive approach facilitated via the Improvement Delivery Group. Notwithstanding this, the value of audits and assessments is still prominent and utilised within the DSCP, however, the use of these tools differs depending on the area of work that is being explored.

Single agency data and single agency audit findings are reported via the Performance Think Tank, and multi-agency audits are designed in collaboration and assigned via work cycles with specific themes identified through local priorities, local reviews, inspection findings, performance data and national research.

6.4 Single and Multi-Agency Feedback, Assessments and Inspections

The partners within the DSCP provide open and transparent findings from single agency feedback, for example staff surveys, audits and inspections, as well as the DSCP seeking assurance on frameworks for multi-agency inspections such as the Joint Area Targeted Inspections.

6.5 Organisational Safeguarding Assessment

In 2023/24, the DSCP piloted a revised method for seeking assurance of the effectiveness of the partnership. The pilot involved completion of a self-assessment tool, analysis of the findings and a subsequent Reflection and Challenge Event. The combination of these methods enabled partners to reflect on both single and multi-agency areas of practice.

The DSCP agreed an annual programme for future organisational safeguarding assessments. Findings are reported to the DSCP Performance and Learning Group and DSCP Executive Group and subsequent action plans are monitored via the DSCP Business Unit.

6.6 Multi Agency Performance Data

Facilitated through the Performance Think Tank, as well as utilising information from subgroups, the DSCP focuses on eleven performance themes. The themes are derived from core child safeguarding data, data focused on the Business Plan priorities and also with a flexible approach that enables new or emerging trends to be monitored and explored. Both qualitative and quantitative data is used to understand trends and patterns, while also enabling areas to be explored to seek assurance, or learning actions as required. Information is reported on a quarterly basis to the Performance and Learning Group, considering a multi-agency view of trends and national benchmarking.

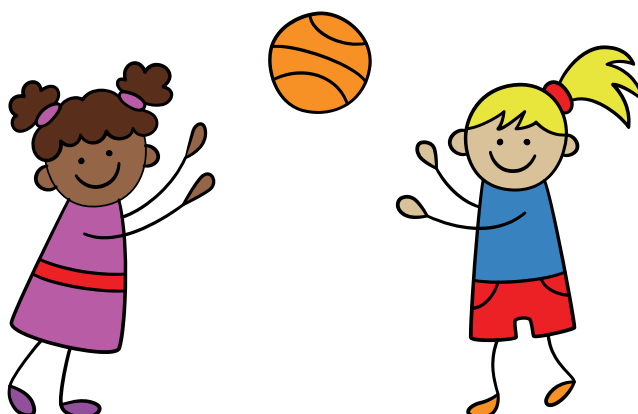
6.7 Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, Rapid and Single Agency Reviews

The DSCP creates a positive culture and learning environment relating to serious incidents, deaths and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. We embrace the opportunity to understand what has worked well, but we also consider local and national learning, for example, from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, to identify improvements that can be made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Understanding whether there are systemic issues, and whether and how policy and practice need to change, is critical to the system being dynamic and self-improving.

(HM Government, 2026)

6.8 Care Leaver Deaths

From January 2024 it became a statutory requirement that all local authorities must notify Ofsted and the Secretary of State for Education of the death of a care leaver aged up to 25, regardless of the cause or whether abuse/neglect is suspected. The DSCP consider learning from the Care Leaver Death process to identify issues, generate recommendations and maintain oversight of actions arising.



7. Quality Assurance Outputs

7.1 Training and Development

The DSCP Training Strategy is derived from a combination of sources, including Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, Local and National Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and research, findings as reported to the DSCP Subgroups, feedback from participants and trainers and a partnership training needs analysis. The training programme is developed considerate of the needs of the partnership with assurance being sought on all training courses using a variety of measures, such as attendance, evaluation and impact on working practices. The DSCP Training Annual Report 2024/25 provides information relating to this and is accessible within the DSCP Annual Report 2024/25.

7.2 Reporting and Policy

Throughout the implementation of the Quality Assurance Plan, several reports are produced to enable decision making for changes to policies and procedures where required. Examples include audit finding reports, performance data and Improvement Delivery Group and Workforce Development Group findings. These reports follow the governance structure for reporting and action plans are monitored and reviewed by the Performance and Learning Group.

8. Further Information

In addition to regular reporting through the DSCP Governance Structure, the DSCP publish an Annual Report that reflects on practice over a 12-month period and reports on progress made against the DSCP Business Plan. The DSCP Annual Reports are published on the website; [Annual reports](#)



Appendix 1

Quality Assurance Activity Matrix

The tables within Appendix 1 display the relationship between the assurance model and methodologies that will be used. In addition, this also highlights the relationship between The Association of Safeguarding Partners (TASP) Multi Agency Child Safeguarding (MACS) Evaluation Framework pillars and methodologies and the methodologies that will be used to measure the priorities.

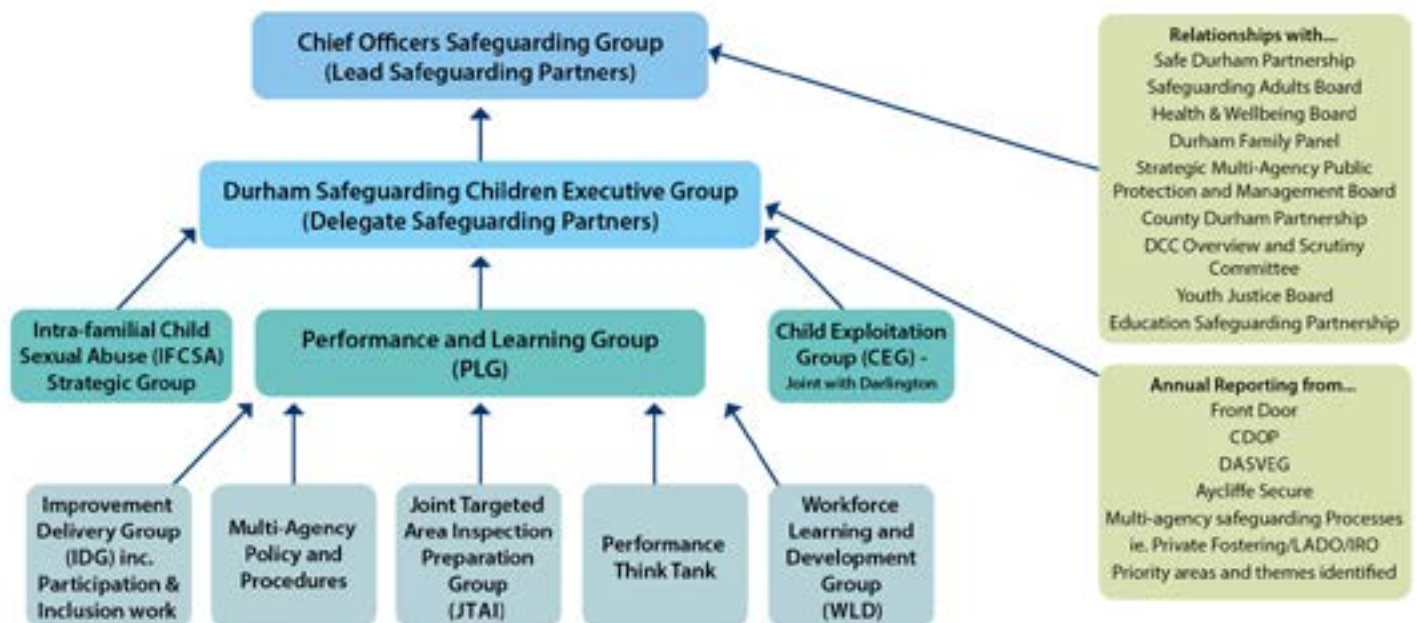
Assurance Activity	DSCP Assurance Models				
Activity / Method / Source	Assurance	Learning	Performance	Scrutiny	Voice of the Child
DSCP Business Plan 2025-2027 <i>Assurance of outputs, outcomes and impacts against the objectives for each priority area</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
Chief Officers Safeguarding Group <i>Assurance and scrutiny</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
Executive Group <i>Assurance is provided to the DSCP Executive Group three times per year. In addition, each of the DSCP subgroups reports through a governance structure to the DSCP Executive.</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
Performance and Learning Group; <i>Findings, recommendations and action planning</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
Performance Think Tank; <i>Single agency qualitative and quantitative data to utilise as a multi agency dataset</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
Workforce Development Group; Training strategy Training impact and evaluation Development Day impact and evaluation	Yes	Yes	-	-	-
Improvement Delivery Group; <i>Findings and recommendations</i> <i>Action plan; impact</i>	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes
JTAI Preparation Group Progress against JTAI frameworks (for applicable priorities/areas), assurance against objective of LSP's (WT 2023) Assurance against evaluation criteria (standards)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
Strategic Child Exploitation Group <i>Action plan and impact</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
Single and Multi Agency Audits	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes
Single and Multi Agency Feedback, Assessments and Inspections	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local child safeguarding practice reviews (LCSPR)	-	Yes	-	-	Yes
Rapid reviews / individual agency reviews	-	Yes	-	-	Yes
Care Leaver Deaths	-	Yes	-	-	Yes
Local, regional, national practice	-	Yes	-	-	Yes
Multi Agency Assurance; <i>Observations</i> <i>Action plan and impact</i>	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes
Independent Scrutiny Plan	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Compliments, complaints, escalations	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes
Communication plans; <i>Evaluation of communication campaigns</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
Voice of children, young people and families	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
Voice of practitioners	Yes	Yes	-	-	-
Organisational Safeguarding Assessment	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes

Assurance Activity	TASP MACS Evaluation Framework				
Activity / Method / Source	LEADERSHIP; Strong governance and decision making at strategic levels	ACCOUNTABILITY; Effective oversight, challenge and data driven decision making	PARTICIPATION; Meaningful engagement with children, families and communities	COLLABORATION; Strong multi agency partnerships and information sharing	CULTURE; A learning orientated environment that fosters safeguarding improvements
DSCP Business Plan 2025-2027 <i>Assurance of outputs, outcomes and impacts against the objectives for each priority area</i>	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Chief Officers Safeguarding Group <i>Assurance and scrutiny</i>	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Executive Group <i>Assurance is provided to the DSCP Executive Group three times per year. In addition, each of the DSCP subgroups reports through a governance structure to the DSCP Executive.</i>	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Performance and Learning Group; <i>Findings, recommendations and action planning</i>	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Performance Think Tank; <i>Single agency qualitative and quantitative data to utilise as a multi agency dataset</i>	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Workforce Development Group; <i>Training strategy Training impact and evaluation Development Day impact and evaluation</i>	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Improvement Delivery Group; <i>Findings and recommendations Action plan; impact</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
JTAI Preparation Group <i>Progress against JTAI frameworks (for applicable priorities/areas), assurance against objective of LSP's (WT 2023) Assurance against evaluation criteria (standards)</i>	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Strategic Child Exploitation Group <i>Action plan and impact</i>	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Single and Multi Agency Audits		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Single and Multi Agency Feedback, Assessments and Inspections	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Local child safeguarding practice reviews (LCSPR)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rapid reviews / individual agency reviews	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Care Leaver Deaths		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local, regional, national practice	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Multi Agency Assurance; Observations <i>Action plan and impact</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Independent Scrutiny Plan	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes
Compliments, complaints, escalations	-	-	-	-	Yes
Communication plans; <i>Evaluation of communication campaigns</i>	-	-	Yes	-	
Voice of children, young people and families	-	-	Yes	-	Yes
Voice of practitioners	-	-	-	-	Yes
Organisational Safeguarding Assessment	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes

Assurance Activity	Areas of Assurance					
Activity / Method / Source	Priority 1; Harm Outside the Home	Priority 2; Early Identification and Intervention	Priority 3; Trauma Informed Practice	Priority 4; WT 2023	Golden Threads	Joint Functions of lead safeguarding partners
DSCP Business Plan 2025-2027 <i>Assurance of outputs, outcomes and impacts against the objectives for each priority area</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Chief Officers Safeguarding Group <i>Assurance and scrutiny</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Executive Group <i>Assurance is provided to the DSCP Executive Group three times per year. In addition, each of the DSCP subgroups reports through a governance structure to the DSCP Executive.</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Performance and Learning Group; <i>Findings, recommendations and action planning</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Performance Think Tank; <i>Single agency qualitative and quantitative data to utilise as a multi agency dataset</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Workforce Development Group; <i>Training strategy Training impact and evaluation Development Day impact and evaluation</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Improvement Delivery Group; <i>Findings and recommendations Action plan; impact</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
JTAI Preparation Group <i>Progress against JTAI frameworks (for applicable priorities/areas), assurance against objective of LSP's (WT 2026) Assurance against evaluation criteria (standards)</i>	-	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Strategic Child Exploitation Group <i>Action plan and impact</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Single and Multi Agency Audits		Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Single and Multi Agency Feedback, Assessments and Inspections	-	-	-	-	-	-
Local child safeguarding practice reviews (LCSPR)	-	-	-	-	Yes	Yes
Rapid reviews / individual agency reviews	Yes			-	Yes	Yes
Care Leaver Deaths	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Local, regional, national practice	-	-	-	-	Yes	Yes
Multi Agency Assurance; Observations <i>Action plan and impact</i>	-	-	-	-	Yes	Yes
Independent Scrutiny Plan	-	-	-	-	Yes	Yes
Compliments, complaints, escalations	-	-	-	-	Yes	-
Communication plans; <i>Evaluation of communication campaigns</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Voice of children, young people and families	-	-	-	-	Yes	-
Voice of practitioners	-	-	-	-	Yes	-
Organisational Safeguarding Assessment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Appendix 2

DSCP Structure



The DSCP Governance Structure has four layers with the Lead Safeguarding Partners/Chief Officers Group positioned with the highest level of Oversight, setting the Strategic direction, vision and culture of the Partnership. The Delegate Partners sit within the Executive Group ensuring the delivery of the Strategic priorities. The Performance and Learning Group (PLG) is the management group which drives the work of the partnership through five dedicated sub groups. The Child Exploitation Group is the only themed sub-group which reports directly into the Executive Group whilst working alongside the PLG.

Reporting into → Relationship with ←

Version 2



