

Introduction

This guidance is for multi-agency staff to inform them about the purpose of Serious Case Reviews.

Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) are statutory multi-agency partnerships that have a co-ordination and scrutiny role to challenge local agencies to protect children and young people in the local area. LSCBs are not responsible for running local child protection services. Every Local Authority has to ensure there is an LSCB for their area. Section 14 of the Children Act 2004 sets out the objectives of LSCBs, which are:

- (a) to coordinate what is done by each person or body represented on the Board for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area; and
- (b) to ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each such person or body for those purposes

LSCBs do not deliver services for children in need, children subject of a child protection plan or looked after children.

In Sunderland the LSCB is called Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board or SSCB.

What is a Serious Case Review?

The SSCB undertakes reviews in respect of children and young people only.

The Department for Education states that a Serious Case Review must be undertaken by LSCBs where:

- Abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected and
- Either
 - The child has died or
 - The child has been seriously harmed and there is cause for concern as to the way in which the authority, the LSCB partners or other relevant persons have worked together to safeguard the child.

The Chair of the SSCB is responsible for deciding if a Serious Case Review is to be undertaken.

It is also important to remember that the Review is not a public enquiry, a disciplinary process or grievance hearing. The focus of the Review has to be on how agencies worked together on this case and to identify ways in which local practice might be improved in future.

What is the Process?

In Sunderland the SSCB Business Manager is usually informed that a child has died or has been seriously harmed. The Business Manager then discusses the case with the SSCB Independent Chair and the SSCB Learning and Improvement in Practice sub-committee Chair. A decision is then made if a scoping meeting should be held. If a scoping meeting is to be held Board partners are asked to complete a scoping meeting template about the child and family. The scoping meeting is held and a recommendation is made to the SSCB Chair. The Chair then makes the decision.

If a Serious Case Review is to be held, Ofsted, the Department for Education and the National Panel of Serious Case Reviews are informed. If a Serious Case Review is not to be held another form of review can be held (see the SSCB Learning and Improvement Framework Toolkit which can be found at www.sunderlandscb.com).

How long do Serious Case Reviews Take?

A Serious Case Review should be completed within six months, but this can be extended because of on-going police investigations or criminal proceedings. Even if the Review process has not been completed, lessons to improve multi-agency practice are identified at an early stage and action is commenced. It is important that any lessons that can be learnt are implemented and shared at the earliest opportunity. It can also depend on many factors such as the scale and complexity of the case.

Who Writes the Serious Case Review Overview Report?

An independent person is commissioned by the SSCB to lead the Serious Case Review process and write the Overview Report. The SSCB has to publish the Overview Report to evaluate the effectiveness of the recommendations in improving local practice. The model for the Serious Case Review can be different depending on the case (see the SSCB Learning and Improvement Framework Toolkit which can be found at www.sunderlandscb.com).

What are the Potential Outcomes of the Serious Case Review?

The Serious Case Review will make a series of recommendations aimed at improving practice across and between agencies that work in Sunderland. The aim of all of the recommendations is to improve how agencies work together to safeguard children and to reduce the likelihood of other children being seriously harmed or killed in the future.

Implementing the learning from the Review and the recommendations is monitored closely by partner agencies and the SSCB.

Scrutiny

The learning from Serious Case Reviews and the impact of the learning is analysed by OFSTED during the LSCB Inspection. The SSCB also has to publish an LSCB Annual Report which clearly identifies what the learning is from any Serious Case Reviews that have been undertaken.

Could Serious Case Reviews Lead to Disciplinary Action/Dismissals/Further Legal Proceedings?

Serious Case Reviews do not in themselves lead to disciplinary action, grievances or further legal proceedings. A Serious Case Review does not recommend action against an individual; it seeks to look at how the whole system can be improved to protect children from harm. However the findings of the Serious Case Review may be used in subsequent actions by individual agencies after it becomes a public document.

Once a Serious Case Review is published is that it? Does anything else happen to it?

As well as the Overview Report, the SSCB publishes information about actions which have already been taken in response to the review findings; the impact these actions have had on improving services; and what more will be done.