

Experiences of Adult Safeguarding Services

Interim Report

Contents

Executive summary	3
Introduction	4
Methodology	5
Findings	6
Having a say in what happened	6
Understanding the safeguarding plan	6
People and Organisations	7
Communication	7
Listening	8
Information	8
Satisfaction with how the concern was dealt with	9
Dealing with concerns in a good time frame	10
Understanding what changes have been made	10
The difference support has made	10
Feeling safer	11
What happens when people don't want help	11
Satisfaction with what was done to help	11
Further Findings	12
Recommendations	13
Conclusions	14
Appendix A: Research questions	15

Executive summary

Improving adult safeguarding services in Cornwall is at the heart of the Safeguarding Adults Board's (SAB) purpose. Cornwall's SAB commissioned Healthwatch Cornwall, who have extensive experience of conducting co-produced research into health and social care services, to conduct in-depth research into people's experiences of the services in Cornwall.

Working together with service users, a series of semi-structured interview questions have been designed. These interview questions, which have been developed in accordance with the Making Safeguarding Personal framework, allow us to gain deep insights into the experiences of people engaged with safeguarding services in Cornwall.

This interim report presents the findings from 15 interviews. Those interviewed include a diverse range of demographics, backgrounds and perspectives including reasons for safeguarding, age ranges, genders and representations from carers.

Findings from the research include:

- Many people feel listened to during their enquiries. However, carers and official advocates may be at particular risk of not feeling listened to.
- Memory problems can inhibit people's ability to engage with and understand their safeguarding plan and further support may be beneficial to support people's involvement.
- The police are often praised for their support and communication during safeguarding enquiries. Further to this more people expressed the desire for the police to be involved in their case, as they sought successful criminal prosecutions.
- Good quality relationships between safeguarding professionals and individuals is a recurrent determinant of how satisfied people are with the quality of communication and outcome they experienced.
- Where relationships with safeguarding professionals are under strain, people described greater dissatisfaction with the services. Many people feel well listened to during their concerns. However, for those who have experienced safeguarding conferences, they describe meetings which leave them feeling uncomfortable and unable to speak freely.
- Despite descriptions of issues with the service, the majority of people feel satisfied with the service and the outcomes they achieved.

On the basis of these findings recommendations include that a plan for the consistent application of the safeguarding process, including standards around the sharing and recording of information, is made. This will enable more people to understand and effectively engage with their safeguarding case. Further to this, the distress caused by safeguarding conferences may be mitigated by greater engagement of those being safeguarded in determining how the conferences are conducted.

Introduction

Making Safeguarding Personal is a key strategic priority for Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly Local Safeguarding Adults Board's (SAB).

Adult safeguarding services interact with people at some of the most difficult times in their lives. The Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP) initiative provides local authorities with best practice guidance on how safeguarding services can be evaluated and developed.

Cornwall's SAB has commissioned Healthwatch Cornwall to deliver a project that invites people who have been safeguarded to share their experiences of safeguarding services. This rich source of feedback is intended to inform and assist agencies improve how they support people through safeguarding.

This interim report documents key findings from interviews with service users and presents recommendations based on the findings.



Methodology

In order to elicit rich information on people's experiences we have adopted semi-structured interviews. This method allows us to understand the reasons for people's experiences and the impact upon them. Interviews are offered in either telephone conversations or online surveys, giving individuals choice in how they participate.

Participants are identified by social workers who assess whether it is safe to invite people to participate. The Safeguarding Improvement Project Officer then contacted these individuals and gained their consent. Healthwatch Cornwall contact them to offer a survey or telephone interview as method of participation. Healthwatch Cornwall have been supplied with the contact details of 15 people.

There is a high rate of uptake of the offer to participate in the study, with a 97% acceptance rate. This contrasts with similar studies who have experienced interview acceptance rates ranging from 9%-70%.

The participants interviewed come from a rich mix of backgrounds and demographic groups. There is an almost equal representation of men and women's experiences in the study (53% men/47% women). The participants include those from a wide age range, those directly in receipt of safeguarding support and their carers.

Further to this, those interviewed have diverse experiences including financial abuse, physical abuse and neglect that resulted in a safeguarding enquiry.

Interview questions have been co-developed in partnership with a service user group, who produced questions that align to both the Making Safeguarding Personal Framework and their priorities as a service user. The interview questions explored peoples' experiences of adult safeguarding services and their satisfaction with the outcomes. Full details of the interview questions can be viewed in Appendix A.

The findings presented within this report document experiences of the services.



Findings

Having a say in what happened

Service users were asked whether they felt they had a say in what happened during the safeguarding case.

More than half of service users (9/15) felt they had a say in what happened to help them feel safe. Where people felt they had a say they described feeling listened to and engaged in decision making.

“They asked my opinion and they listened to me.” (P8)

However, of those interviewed, some did not feel they had had a say.

The majority of family members who supported the person being safeguarding did not feel they had a say (4/5 family members). This group felt their opinion was not listened to, including in cases where the family member was acting as the person's formal advocate. Exemplifying this experience, the parent of a service user explained:

“They only wanted to hear what P said. It made me angry as P felt nothing but I knew it was a problem.” (P14)

Although the majority of people interviewed feel listened to, the findings indicate that family members acting as advocates may be at particular risk of not feeling they have a say in what happens.

Understanding the safeguarding plan

People generally understood the safeguarding plan to help them feel safe (12/15). Participants praised the police for their rigorous approach to managing their case and keeping them fully informed as their case progressed.

Where people did not understand their safeguarding plan, there were a number of reasons cited. It was described how repeated changing of the safeguarding plan was confusing and resulted in a failure to understand the plan (1/15).

Memory problems also prevented a number of people (3/15) from fully understanding their safeguarding plan. Within these cases memory problems impacted on the ability to recall details of the case. These people described how they were not given a record of what was happening with their case and key contacts, affecting their ability to understand what was happening.

Where people had learning difficulties or memory problems, advocates and family were praised as being important to assisting understanding of the plan (4/15).

The findings suggest that the majority of people interviewed feel listened to. However, where people have memory problems they may find understanding and engaging with the safeguarding process more challenging.

People and organisations

The majority of people described how they would have liked additional organisations and/or people involved in their safeguarding case (10/15). In many cases it was not possible to include these people or organisations, due to people no longer holding relevant job posts and family members living too far away.

A lack of understanding of the safeguarding process also hindered some people's ability to involve the people and organisations that they would have wished to. This was attributed to an insufficient understanding of the safeguarding process and their rights and options within that process.

Where people did identify which organisation they would have liked involved, the police were the most commonly cited (3/15). The motivation for involvement of the police at an early stage of the enquiry was to increase the chances of building a successful criminal case against the person accused of doing harm. It was described how:

“I wanted the police involved. If they were involved sooner there could have been a criminal case but they were brought in too late and that meant we missed the chance to take it down the criminal route.” (P2)

Although the majority of people are satisfied with the organisations that are involved in their cases, a significant number expressed the desire for the police to be involved sooner.

Communication

The quality of communication between service users and safeguarding professionals is a common determinant of their satisfaction with the service. The majority of people interviewed (10/15) described satisfaction with the communication they had received during their enquiry.

A good relationship with safeguarding professionals and timely communications are important to the people interviewed. Furthermore, service users valued instances where safeguarding professionals worked closely to help them understand what was happening with their case:

“My social worker was very good at helping me to understand better.” (P5)

“I liked the people I was dealing with and we were all on the same page.” (P4)

Three participants described delays in receiving communications from safeguarding professionals, causing dissatisfaction. One person was kept waiting on hold for 45 minutes to speak to their social worker, leading them to feel “frustrated”. In another case, an individual attempted to speak with their social worker, as they were concerned they were at risk of immediate harm. During the following 5 days they waited for a response from their social worker, during which time they were “really worried something bad was going to happen”.

Good relationships and timely communications with safeguarding professionals can impact upon the quality of people's safeguarding experiences and outcomes.

Where relationships with safeguarding professionals breakdown it may lead to dissatisfaction with the service.

Listening

The majority of people (11/15) felt listened to during their conversations with people involved in their safeguarding, including social workers and police. In particular where the police were involved the police service was described as both supportive and effective.

“They were really good. They rang me up and came over to the house - I couldn't fault them.” (P9)

However, safeguarding meetings are described by those who attended them (2/15 participants) as a point within the enquiry that they felt not listened to. There are a number of commonalities between the accounts of the safeguarding meetings, listed below:

1. Having the person suspected of doing harm in the same room caused distress to the individual, including feelings of being “intimidated” and “gagged”
2. Not being invited to safeguarding meetings (where that person is a family advocate and power of attorney) invoking feeling of “exclusion” from the case
3. Not feeling they could ask questions
4. Feeling generally uncomfortable and ill at ease during the meeting.

Below are a number of quotes that illustrate these experiences:

“In the meetings the care company said things that I know aren't true but I couldn't outright say they are lying (because they were in the same room) - so that was hard to counter their claims.” (P4)

Another person described how they felt:

“very intimidated in the same room as the accused and felt that they had the upper hand. I felt gagged. If there was a separate room for the accused I could have spoken more freely.” (P2)

Most people interviewed feel listened to during their concern. However, safeguarding conferences can cause people distress, particularly when their preferences for who attends and how they are conducted are not taken into account.

Information

The majority of people received the information they required in a format that they could understand (9/15), while a small number of people (3/15) described memory problems which hindered their understanding both of the safeguarding process and events within their case.

Exemplifying this, one person with self-declared memory problems recalled how they were confused by the information they received and often forgot what was happening. They did not receive additional support to allow them to record progress on their case. They described how:

“there were lots of confusing things. I don't have a good memory because of the medication I'm on. There were things that were supposed to happen to help me move place. I kept calling people to find out what was happening and because of my memory I'd forget who I'd talked to.” (P15)

Information presented in easy to understand formats can assist with people's understanding of safeguarding proceedings. Maintaining a record of key contacts, events and actions may be particularly beneficial for those with memory problems.

Satisfaction with how the concern was dealt with

The majority of people interviewed were satisfied with how people dealt with their concern (11/15). A number of people also praised social workers for their support and the outcomes they achieved.

“I’m all satisfied. I say thank you as no one else looks after me.” (P6)

Of the people who were not satisfied, they attributed this to insufficient involvement in their case and not feeling listened to.

In addition to this, this group of service users described particular issues that affected their satisfaction including:

- Feeling they had not been adequately taught how to prevent the issue re-occurring
- Not wanting or accepting the safeguarding intervention
- Insufficient trust in safeguarding professionals
- A strong desire that the police had been involved in the early stages, to increase the chances of a successful prosecution



Dealing with concerns in a good time frame

The majority of people felt that their enquiry had been dealt with in a good time frame (11/15).

Where people did not it was attributed to:

- A case which took over 2 years to close
- Long gaps between safeguarding meetings
- Long time periods to achieve change

Within these accounts, the quality of communication with safeguarding professionals and understanding what changes were being made as a result of the enquiry affected how satisfied they were with the time it took to close their cases.

Understanding the changes that had been made

Most people understood what changes had been made as a result of their inquiries (12/15).

They're not taking money from me anymore and I've got a new care agency and they're excellent. (P1).

Provision of a written description of the changes that were made was credited with helping to provide clarity.

Three people described not knowing what changes had been made as a result of their safeguarding enquiry. Within each of these cases they had not received an explanation as to what had changed as a result and as their cases had been closed they were unable to attain further information.

The findings indicate that provision of information on the changes and outcomes made as a result of the safeguarding case may be beneficial for some people, particularly in complex cases.

The difference that the support made

Most interviewees (12/15) described how safeguarding had positively improved their life or the life of the person they care for. It was described how:

"It has made a big change in my life as before my Dad would never let me speak out and he would never get the help I needed." (P5)

"Having the moral support was very good and knowing how to handle it if it ever happens again... goes a long way." (P11)

Where people did not feel it had made a difference it was attributed to not understanding what changes had been made as a result of their case.

Of the 12 individuals who described positive impacts upon their life, 3 also cited complaints with some aspects of their service. This indicates that although some

people may not be entirely satisfied with their safeguarding experience, it does not preclude them from feeling positively benefited by it.

"It has made a big change in my life as before my Dad would never let me speak out and he would never get the help I needed."

Feeling safer

Most people interviewed felt safer as a result of the help received (12/15). Where people did not feel safer reasons described were that:

- They did not understand what changes had been made as a result of the concern
- There was no long-term strategy to prevent the harm reoccurring
- They did not want safeguarding support and refused support from the service

People have diverse experiences of safeguarding. Good communication between individuals and their safeguarding professionals, which allows for responsive discussions, can help people to understand their case and communicate their desired outcomes more clearly.

What happened when people didn't want help

Not everyone interviewed wanted or accepted help from safeguarding services (1/15).

A complex personal history of engagement with social workers had led to feelings of mistrust in social services. A sense of fear over the negative repercussions of accepting safeguarding support was also described

When asked what social workers did to help them feel safer they explained:

“They came to the house and said they could give help but I didn't want it. So they said ‘ok then we'll leave it to you’”. (P7)

Following this interaction they did not have further contact with the safeguarding team.

This person explained that they may have accepted the help, had the “social workers spent more time listening to (them)” and “not feeling judged”.

People may have complex personal circumstances and relationships with social services. In these cases achieving the trust required to accept help, may require extensive work from the safeguarding professional.

Satisfaction with what was done to help

Most people describe being satisfied with what professionals did to help them feel safe (11/15).

“(I'm) 120% very very grateful for their help - I wouldn't have been here without them.” (P4)

“I'm very satisfied. I felt that the process worked and I wasn't disappointed. It was very comforting to know that the process works when you need it.” (P10)

Where people were not satisfied, a failure to achieve the planned outcomes was cited as the reason for dissatisfaction. The reasons for this were:

1. The person did not achieve the planned outcomes and they did not feel safer as a result of the help received
2. Their memory problems impaired their ability to engage with their safeguarding case and this impeded their ability to achieve the satisfactory for their case.
3. They did not want safeguarding support

These cases exemplify the diversity of people's experiences of safeguarding services. Furthermore, where memory and comprehension is problematic the benefits of additional support to understand and engage with safeguarding can be seen.

Further Findings

Of the people interviewed, it is notable that a number of people did not understand or relate to the fact that they had been subject to a safeguarding enquiry or formal support (3/15). Rather, they understood it as period of time when they had received help from a variety of services for a particular issue and not as a formal intervention.

It must also be noted that two of the people who did not recognise themselves as being “safeguarded” self-identified as having memory problems. This indicates that where people have memory problems, it may be additionally important to ensure that they are supported to fully understand why they are being safeguarded and what this involves.



Conclusions

People who undergo safeguarding do so for diverse reasons. What this review indicates is that even taking this into account, people can have inconsistent experiences in the quality of the service they receive.

Issues across a number of areas may be linked to the quality of the relationships people hold with safeguarding professionals involved in their case. On initiation of their case, there is a group of people who did not feel they had a say. Where family members are acting as advocates for the person being safeguarded, they may be at particular risk of feeling excluded. The safeguarding plan is generally well explained, as most people understood what the plan was to help them feel safer. However, where people have memory problems, understanding and engaging with their safeguarding case may be problematic. The majority of people would have liked additional organisations and people involved in their case. Where they would like others involved, the police are most commonly cited, in order to be able to seek a successful prosecution.

Of those individuals who attend safeguarding conferences, all had difficult experiences at the meetings. In particular, being in the same room as the person suspected of doing harm, feeling intimidated by professional staff and unable to speak freely impacted upon their ability to satisfactorily participate. Issues with

communication may also arise where there are significant time delays in people being able to contact and communicate with safeguarding professionals. In some instances this may lead to an increased feeling of being vulnerable, as they are unable to access timely support.

The quality of relationships with professional staff can impact upon many areas of people's experiences, including feeling listened to and involved in their case and their understanding of the changes. Many people have good relationships with their safeguarding professionals. However, for those that do not it can have far-reaching consequences on their experiences of safeguarding and can impact upon peoples decision to engage with safeguarding support.

Most people have adequate information about their safeguarding case. However, for some people not having documentation on the safeguarding process, their rights and a record of their case progress can be problematic. Where people have memory problems or complex cases a lack of written documentation that they can refer to may cause particular issues. Despite issues that some people cite regarding their service, the majority of people feel satisfied with what was done to support them.

Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings it is recommended that:

1. Safeguarding conferences engage with service users and their representatives, to understand their preferences for the meeting. This may include but is not limited to, identifying the people and organisations they do and do not want present; inclusion of advocates or representative family at their request; and holding conferences in a space in which they feel comfortable.
2. Consistent provision of information, to facilitate people's engagement with their case. This includes information on the purpose of safeguarding and their rights during the case e.g. to request an advocate, to request the involvement of other people or organisations. It is also recommended that people are provided with a record of their case, to include key contacts in their case, planned actions, next steps and progress.
3. Consistent standards of communication, to include response times to service users. This is also to include the standardisation of regular updates to service users on their case progress (where it is safe and appropriate to do so).
4. Service users are more involved in developing safeguarding services. This is to ensure communications and services more closely respond to users needs.



Appendices

Appendix A: Research questions

1. Did you get the chance to say what you wanted to happen to help you feel safe?
2. Did you understand what the plan was to help you feel safe?
3. Did you feel you had a say in any decisions made?
4. Were the people and organisations you wanted involved in helping during your concern?
5. Did you feel listened to during conversations with people about helping you to feel safe?
6. How satisfied are you with how people communicated with you during the concern?
7. Did you get all the information you needed to help you make decisions about the concern?
8. Did you get information that you could understand during the concern?
9. How satisfied are you with how people dealt with the concern throughout?
10. Do you feel that things were dealt with in a good time frame?
11. Do you know what changes have been made as a result of your concern being dealt with?
12. What difference did the support you received make to you?
13. Do you feel that you are safer now as a result of the help received during the concern?
14. Is there anything you think could have been done better during the time of this concern by the organisations involved?
15. If you didn't want the safeguarding process, what did people do to help you feel safe?
16. How satisfied are you with the end result of what people did to try to keep you safe?
17. Would you like to be kept up to date with what happens following this research?



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