healthwatch
Cornwall

Peoples' experiences of safeguarding

A review of UK findings and recommendations

Contents

Executive summary

The Making Safeguarding Personal initiative prioritises placing service users at the heart of safeguarding enquiries. However, across the UK local authorities are reporting that people are insufficiently supported to fully engage with their case.

In Cornwall the Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) have commissioned Healthwatch Cornwall on a project that seeks to understand peoples' experiences of adult safeguarding services. Locally, research has been undertaken to understand experiences of the services in Cornwall. As we look to increase our understanding of what makes a good experience of safeguarding, we have also assessed the findings and most importantly responses adopted by authorities across the UK.

The Care Act 2014 encourages service providers to adopt a person-centred approach to safeguarding adults. This approach places service users' wellbeing, wishes and needs at the centre of safeguarding processes. When applied the six principles of the Care Act help to involve service users and the people that support them to be actively involved in the safeguarding process. In doing so, it can give people a greater sense of control and satisfaction with their safeguarding case. The six principles of the Care Act are:

1. Empowerment
2. Protection
3. Prevention
4. Proportionality
5. Partnership
6. Accountability

Insights into other authorities' safeguarding services allows us to inform decision making on what matters most to people being safeguarded and strategies for strengthening how we respond to this.

To inform this report we have selected local authorities that share similar demographic and socio-economic characteristics with Cornwall, as defined by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting (CIPFA), as well as authorities that share meaningful, relevant insights that relate to Cornwall.

In summary, key findings from this report include:

1. There is no single, preferred method of collecting people's feedback on safeguarding experiences. Rather, a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods are used by authorities across the UK.
2. Challenges in recruiting people to participate are widely reported. Safeguarding is a sensitive topic which can be difficult for people to divulge information on, particularly when it is distressing to remember the experience.
3. Not all service users understand what 'safeguarding' is, that they are being 'safeguarded' or what 'safeguarding support' entails. This can inhibit some peoples' ability to engage with safeguarding support and achieve optimal outcomes that meet their unique needs and preferences.
4. People value good quality, regular communications with safeguarding professionals, to enable them to understand what is happening with their case and engage with it appropriately.
5. Receiving the right information at the right time helps people to engage with their safeguarding case and have a positive experience of the services. This includes receiving information on the safeguarding process, its powers, agreed outcomes and key contacts relevant to the individual.

6. People generally want to be included in their safeguarding case. However, not everyone feels as involved as they would like. Things that support involvement include personalised safeguarding approaches and sensitivity to families and carers.

7. Advocates, both formally appointed and friends and family members, can allow people to feel more in control during the safeguarding enquiry and give them confidence that their voice is being listened to.

8. The relationships that service users hold with safeguarding professionals can have a profound affect upon their overall level of satisfaction with the services. In particular people want to feel that safeguarding professionals are on their side, that they aren't judged for their life choices and decisions and that safeguarding professionals invest time to understand their unique circumstances, personalities and wishes.

On the basis of the findings and the strategies that authorities across the UK have implemented it is recommended that Cornwall's SAB considers:

1. Involving service users in the development of informationon safeguarding for service users, and the shaping of future service delivery methods.

2. The clear set of guidelines that can help service users understand for service users to understand why in some situations safeguarding needs to happen even when that is not their wish.

3. Production of a comprehensive guide for service users on what safeguarding is, standards of service, information to assist decision making, personalised key contacts and information on providing feedback on service quality.

4. Development of consistent standards on communication, to include provision of case updates and response times to enquiries.

5. Development of standardised information including feedback to service users on case progression to be issued to service users.

6. Production of standards on how safeguarding professionals will engage with service users.

7. Regular attainment of service user feedback to inform decision making on service change.

"People generally want to be included in their safeguarding case."

Introduction

Making Safeguarding Personal prioritises placing the service user at the heart of safeguarding enquiries. Gaining feedback from service users on their experiences of the services is essential to understanding how well services are achieving this.

"Learning from service users' feedback enables local authorities to meet the recommendations of best practice."

Furthermore, learning from service users' feedback enables local authorities to meet the recommendations of best practice outlined in the recently published Care and Support Act statutory guidance (June, 2020).

Seeking to learn from and strengthen adult safeguarding services in Cornwall, the Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) has commissioned this report to gain insights into national experiences of safeguarding services. This complements and is intended to be read alongside the recent local review of 'Experiences of Adult Safeguarding Services' (2020), undertaken by Healthwatch Cornwall.

In this national review, we assess and draw out the lessons learned on peoples' experiences of safeguarding from Cornwall's 15 'nearest neighbours'. These authorities are defined by the Chartered Institute of Finance and Accounting (CIPFA) as authorities which share similar demographic and economic characteristics, such as the Isle of White, Cheshire East and Calderdale.

In this report we seek to understand what peoples' experiences of adult safeguarding services are like in these areas and the actions the authorities have taken to improve experiences of the services. We do not assume that the people of Cornwall will have the same experiences as those reported within this report. However, the findings allow us to understand the broader context of safeguarding experiences and understand common themes shared between Cornwall's services and those of similar authorities.

In summary, this report considers common challenges and experiences in safeguarding services and the strategies that have been proposed to make safeguarding services truly personal.

How authorities collect feedback

The methods that local authorities use to capture an understanding of peoples' experiences of safeguarding services are incredibly diverse. The methods do however, fall into two categories – quantitative (e.g. closed question surveys) and qualitative (e.g. semi-structured interviews).

Each approach to attaining peoples' feedback on service quality has its own strengths and limitations. It is through understanding these qualities that we can inform decision making on the most appropriate and practical method for assessing peoples' experiences of safeguarding services in a particular area.

Demonstrating that there is no dominant method for capturing peoples' experiences viewed as 'ideal', there is an almost equal split of authorities adopting qualitative and quantitative methods. The types of insights that these methods elicit are however substantively different and allow authorities to use the information in different ways.

Qualitative research is particularly powerful at producing rich in-depth findings that allow the reader to understand why things have happened and the nuanced detail around them. Reflecting this depth, sample sizes of Cornwall's 'nearest neighbours' that adopt this method tend to be closely focused, with an average sample size of 12. This sample size reflects the norms of qualitative methods, which value depth of information over scale. Further to this, there are profound challenges associated with recruiting people to feedback on the often emotionally sensitive, complex issue of safeguarding. These challenges are reported by many authorities, as well as within the Making Safeguarding Personal Final Report (2018), which outlines similar challenges to attaining peoples' participation. Where studies have been conducted since the outbreak of Covid-19, a drop off in peoples' willingness to take part has also been reported in some areas.

There are a range of methods that local authorities have successfully used to recruit people to participate, which are listed below:

- Partnership with local advocacy service to share and facilitate sign up
- Commissioning of local Healthwatch to undertake research
- Partnership with local disability service to facilitate sign up
- Interview of people involved in safeguarding focus groups

Where quantitative methods such as standardised questionnaires have been used to gain insights into peoples' experiences, a wholly different approach is adopted to both the recruitment method and sample sizes. Generally, the invitation to participate is embedded in the standard safeguarding process, as social workers are responsible for asking people about their experiences in the end of enquiry review.

This, however, comes with particular limitations as service users have a tendency to report positive experiences when reporting to someone involved in their case. Alternative methods of issuing large scale quantitative studies include delivery by:

- Local authority performance management teams
- Employment of professionals unknown to the service user e.g. social workers not involved in their case
- Automatic issue of survey at the end of case reviews

Standardised surveys using questions closely aligned to the Making Safeguarding Personal Framework are common, alongside use of a small set of questions which allow generalisation of the data. This type of data is, however, restricted in its ability to tell us the why and how of peoples' experiences.

There is a third method of understanding peoples' experiences of the services, widely applauded as providing powerful service insights that can inform decision making. The use of story-telling, in which an in-depth case study on a particular service user's experience is read at the beginning of SAB meetings, is adopted by many different authorities including Herefordshire, Shropshire and South Gloucestershire. This method of gaining and communicating insights into current, real experiences of safeguarding services is praised for grounding decision making at board meetings. Case studies used in this fashion allow for a close connection between service users and the SAB, also providing a strong method of embedding decision making in peoples' experiences of the services.

Findings

Understanding safeguarding

'Safeguarding' is a term and practice familiar to professionals working in adult services, including social services and the police. However, the public's understanding of safeguarding can be divergent to professional interpretations.

Tensions between professional and public ideas of safeguarding can impact upon peoples' engagement with safeguarding support and their satisfaction with the services. In the first instance, where there is a lack of understanding about what safeguarding is and how it can help, people can feel that safeguarding doesn't apply to their circumstances. Where people have been referred to the services yet do not fully understand the purpose and powers of the services, it can lead to frustration as they can expect more from the support than it is able to deliver, thereby falling short of their expectations.

In practice, it is common for people undergoing a safeguarding enquiry not to know that they are being safeguarded. This can affect the extent to which people engage with their case and achieve outcomes that align to their personal circumstances and wishes. As one participant explained – if they do not know that they are being safeguarded how can they engage with the process or judge if it is being undertaken well? (Surrey, 2019).

The benefits of working towards consistently high standards of service quality is clear, as it provides the basis for all service users to have an equal chance of engaging with and achieve satisfactory outcomes from safeguarding

There are diverse strategies employed to develop consistent levels of understanding on safeguarding services, these include:

- Making Safeguarding Personal service user guides, which inform users on what safeguarding is and what to expect from services. This includes practical information about the process, standards of service, information to assist with setting desired outcomes and the feedback questions which will be asked at the end of the enquiry.

- A staff guide which promotes a consistently good quality of safeguarding services including 'our promise' to service users, actions to be undertaken during the inquiry and feedback questions (Cheshire East).

- A fact sheet for families on the safeguarding process and what to expect (South Gloucestershire).

- Involving service users in the development of processes and practices, to make them more inclusive and responses to peoples' needs (Wolverhampton).

- Continue to raise awareness, relevance and accessibility of safeguarding with the next of kin and loved ones of those at risk (Surrey).

- Provide information on safeguarding at key social and healthcare milestoneseg. at the start of domiciliary care, community healthcare, residential care (Surrey).

- Emphasise and demonstrate that anyone can trigger a Safeguarding alert. For example use case histories to communicate ability/value/ease of making a referral as a lay person or carer (Surrey).

Communication

During the provision of safeguarding support, feeling listened to and well informed is important to service users, who are often experiencing exceptionally challenging times in their personal lives.

There remains however, a significant proportion of people using safeguarding services who report that they would like improved standards of communication with safeguarding professionals. At its most basic level, people express wanting to be kept "in the loop" about their cases (Essex). The importance of this is thrown into stark aspect, as the risk of not achieving basic standards of communication during a person's case can have a detrimental impact upon their mental health.

The aspects of communication that matter to many people include:

- Provision of regular updates on case progression
- Timely responses to queries
- Consistent standards on response times
- Effective internal communication between those involved in a case, to ensure people tell their story only once wherever possible

Work is also being undertaken at a strategic level, to ensure good, meaningful standards of communication are embedded at a practice level. As a result of the reviews into safeguarding experiences, many authorities advocate the benefits of service user involvement in setting future standards in communication. This simultaneously supports both the Making Safeguarding Personal best practice standards of co-production, whilst simultaneously ensuring that proposed standards meet local expectations and needs.

Approaches to improving communication include:

- Providing feedback to those who raise a concern where this is possible
- Peoples' experiences of adult safeguarding services: a review of UK findings and recommendations
- Developing a standardised way of communicating with service users about their safeguarding review and outcomes, including information on the process, contact details and a 'timeline' to help manage expectations.
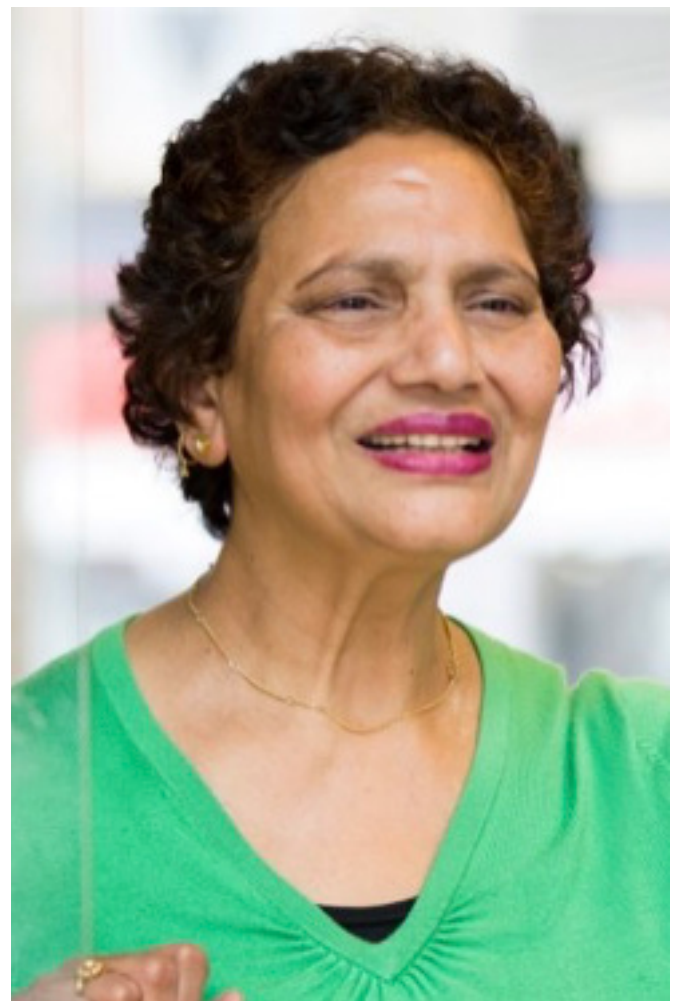
Information

Good quality information supports peoples' ability to make their own decisions – a key aspect of empowering people, as outlined in the six principles of the Care Act (2014). The quality of information that people receive during their safeguarding review is also one of the most common things people say matters to them.

Having the right information on their case, at the right time has many benefits including helping people:

- Know what to expect from a safeguarding enquiry
- Feel in control
- Know what a 'good' safeguarding service looks like
- Hold safeguarding professionals to account when levels of service don't meet basic standards
- Engage with their case and get the most from it

Each of these factors has a strong relationship to peoples' sense that the safeguarding process is supportive of their needs and unique circumstances. Where authorities fail in this, service users describe how it can create new distress.

There are a wide range of measures that authorities have implemented to make good quality information a standard component of their services.

What matters to people is that they are provided with:

- Timely provision of information
- Acknowledgment that their safeguarding referral is being dealt with
- Clear written information on the safeguarding process that is communicated in an understandable format, to include key worker contacts and case progression
- Accessible information on their safeguarding case
- Timely, regular feedback on what is happening with their case
- A clear place to go for information and to gain clarifications, both before a safeguarding enquiry is initiated and during proceedings

There are a range of measures which authorities employ to achieve these standards, including:

- Development of a consistent process and standards in front line provision of information. This can include standardised issuing of information on the:
  + Event triggering the referral of concern
  + Expected process
  + Enquiry's objectives
  + Value of the enquiry
  + Powers of enforcement
  + Named contacts, job titles and department name
  + An end-of-enquiry communication which includes a final report on outcomes
- Service user led groups, who develop and check information which is intended for service users and the public. These groups are responsible for issues including development of:
  + Standards for engaging with service users
  + Staff and service user guides on service standards

- + Planning awareness programmes on safeguarding
- + Planning and sense checking information intended for service users e.g. posters, websites, public information
- A communications and engagement sub-group set up under the board. This includes representatives from partner's agencies and is tasked with the development of marketing and dissemination of information about safeguarding. Responsibilities also include updating of the website to ensure easy accessible and user friendly information.
- Further actions that authorities have adopted to improve their standards of information include:
  + Provision of regular events based on themes (e.g. self-neglect) to improve service practice
  + A fact sheet for families to help them know about and understand the safeguarding process if they or a family member are involved following a safeguarding concern being raised, so that they have knowledge about what to expect
  + A multi-agency approach to a campaign on 'what is safeguarding'

Involvement and outcomes

Peoples engagement in their own safeguarding case is a central aim of the Making Safeguarding Personal initiative (Local Government Association, 2017). Despite this it is common for many service users to feel excluded from their own case and setting of outcomes. Where people are inadequately involved, it can have stark impacts on their wellbeing and mental health.

Lord Munby emphasises a balance between reducing risk and peoples' happiness, when he states "what good is it making someone safer if it merely makes them miserable?" (2010). Enabling people to have a voice and influence their case is then an important factor to achieving outcomes that align with their goals.

Factors that can affect the extent to which people feel involved heavily relate to the key components discussed in this report; quality information at the right time; good communication with people involved in their case, trusting, respectful relationships with safeguarding professionals and being offered an advocate. In addition to these building blocks of person-centred safeguarding service, is the persons involvement in planning their own safeguarding case. This includes the planning of safeguarding outcomes and how they are achieved. Through ensuring people are involved in creating the safeguarding plan, it can increase the extent to which they have ownership of and satisfaction from achievement of their safeguarding outcomes.

Although the importance of involving people in their safeguarding case is widely accepted by safeguarding professionals, authorities from across the UK discuss the challenges to achieving this gold standard in MSP practice.

Important factors that help to optimise how involved people feel in their case include:

- A consistent approach applied to all safeguarding enquiries
- Agreeing, negotiating and recording their desired outcomes; working out with them how best those outcomes might be realised
- Professionals being sensitive to families' and carers wishes (whilst keeping the person central)
- Being offered the choice of an advocate or family member to provide support throughout the enquiry
- Flexibility in the safeguarding process, that allows service users to change their mind on agreed planned outcomes – an elastic service
- Safeguarding enquiries personalised to meet service users' needs
- An end of enquiry review on what has been achieved and how these meet their planned outcomes
- Planned outcomes helps people understand and gain closure
- Continuous gathering of feedback from those that have been through the process

Achieving these high standards in service user involvement has many benefits, including giving people a greater capacity to shape their outcomes and sense of control. The strategies that authorities use to enhance peoples' involvement in their case are varied, as the following list illustrates:

- Formation of a virtual network of service users and carers willing to be involved in the SABs work (East Riding of Yorkshire).

- Development of a service user led group, who lead on engagement for the SAB. Example outputs of the group include production of consistent standards for safeguarding services, implemented through a staff and service user guide on what level of service they can expect (Cheshire East).

- MSP training delivered to all teams within Adult Services to build a culture where making safeguarding personal principles are embedded as best practice (East Riding of Yorkshire, Calderdale).

- A patient experience panel to promote engagement and ensure that the voice of the patient is at the forefront of service delivery. This includes an active workforce of volunteers from the local community across a wide number of services helping to deliver the vision (East Riding of Yorkshire).

- Service user development of a set of 'always events' that safeguarding services should always be considering in their services (East Riding of Yorkshire).

"A number of authorities are increasing the role of advocates in supporting people through safeguarding."

Advocacy

Advocates play an important role supporting people to navigate and engage with safeguarding services.

Where people have the support of an advocate, be it a formally appointed advocate or friends and family, they are credited with facilitating people to achieve better engagement with their case and satisfaction with their experiences.

In response, a number of authorities are increasing the role of advocates in supporting people through safeguarding. In Wiltshire, recommendations to improve their services include increasing the extent to which advocates are offered to service users. Family members and friends can also prove powerful at promoting good communication and understanding between service users and safeguarding professionals.

Further benefits that people attribute to advocacy support include:

- Feeling able to access safeguarding support quicker

- Having increased confidence that their voice is listened to by safeguarding professionals

- Feeling more in control of the safeguarding process

- Feeling more able to determine the agreed outcomes

Where people lack mental capacity Making Safeguarding Personal is equally important and formal independent advocacy is cited as essential to enabling positive outcomes (East Riding of Yorkshire). However, there are often inconsistencies in practice, including the circumstances in which people are offered an advocate. Acknowledging the extent to which advocates facilitate a positive experience of safeguarding has led to authorities including Wiltshire and East Riding of Yorkshire, to recommend making the offer of an advocate a standardised aspect of the safeguarding service.

Relationships

The relationships that people have with safeguarding professionals can have a profound impact on their experiences of the services. Where people trust the professionals that support them, they report being more able to "open up" about their circumstances and accept help (Wiltshire).

This supports peoples' ability to gain access to the right support and desired outcomes. The alternative aspect of this is where a breakdown in trust occurs between professionals and service users it can compound peoples' sense of vulnerability and unwillingness to accept the support of safeguarding.

The key factors that help to build a good relationship with safeguarding professionals include:

- Investment of sufficient time to understand people's unique circumstances, personalities and wishes

- Not feeling judged for life choices and decisions

- Assurances that information disclosed will remain confidential

- Helpful attitude of professionals

- A flexible process that's accommodating to peoples' changing needs and desired outcomes

"The relationships that people have with safeguarding professionals can have a profound impact on their experiences."

Recommendations

On the basis of these findings and the effective strategies implemented by authorities which share similar socio-economic characteristics with Cornwall it is recommended that:

- Service users are involved in the development of resources to support people through safeguarding services and the development of service delivery methods.

- Production of a comprehensive guide for service users on what safeguarding is, standards of service, information to assist decision making, personalised key contacts and information on providing feedback on service quality.

- Development of consistent standards on communication, to include provision of case updates and response times to enquiries.

- Development of standardised information to be issued to service users, which includes:
  + Acknowledgement that their concern is being dealt with as a safeguarding enquiry
  + Event triggering the referral
  + Expected process
  + Enquiry's objectives
  + Value of the enquiry
  + Powers of enforcement
  + Named contacts, job titles and department name
  + An 'end of enquiry' communication on what has been achieved and how this meets the planned outcomes

- Production of standards on how safeguarding professionals will engage with service users, to include:
  + Development of a consistent process on how safeguarding enquiries should be conducted
  + The circumstances in which formal advocates will be offered
  + Agreement that safeguarding enquiries will support people to adapt their plan and change their outcomes
  + Agreement that safeguarding enquiries and the approach adopted will be personalised to meet the needs and wishes of the individuals, as much as practicable
  + Regular attainment of service user feedback on the services, used to inform decision making on service change

"Development of consistent standards on communication, "

Conclusions

Making Safeguarding Personal, or the practice of placing service users at the heart of safeguarding enquiries is of growing significance for local authorities across the UK. In Cornwall, the local Safeguarding Adults Board is seeking insights from across all areas of knowledge, from local reviews through to national assessments of research on people's experiences of safeguarding services. These insights can facilitate fully informed decision making on the most appropriate methods of improving peoples' experiences of the services in Cornwall.

This review of Cornwall's 'nearest neighbour' authorities demonstrates that people across the UK hold similar values when judging what makes an experience 'good'. At its most fundamental level, people want good relationships with the safeguarding professionals that are supporting them and to feel like they are in it together. To achieve this, people need to be provided with consistently good levels of service. People want to be kept up to date with what's happening with their case, but more than this they need to understand what is happening. It is here that advocates (whether formal or informal) play a vital role in helping people to engage in their case. People also need clear, relevant information on safeguarding and their case, to enable them to understand and play an active role in shaping and achieving their planned outcomes.

Transparency is vital. Lessons from Children's Safeguarding show us the importance of having challenging conversations with families. The benefits of being honest and working together in the practice of adult safeguarding are therefore clear.

As we move forward with delivering improved safeguarding services it is important to continually review and reflect upon people's current experiences of the services. With a commitment to listening to people's experiences of safeguarding services and informing decision making with this new knowledge, authorities can be best placed to meet and exceed guidance on how to meet requirements of the Care Act in relation to safeguarding services (2014).

Broadening our insights through continually reviewing people's experiences of safeguarding will then facilitate more fully informed decision making on how to strengthen safeguarding services.

Appendix

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