

Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel: Impact evaluation summary

**Authors: IFF Research with
recommendations from Research in
Practice**

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Foreword

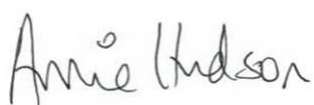
The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) commissioned this research to help understand better the impact of the Panel's work. Evaluating impact is notoriously complex and challenging, however, this report provides valuable insights on how the Panel can most effectively support the child safeguarding sector to learn and improve how we help and protect children and their families. Alongside the recently published report on the Panel's Learning Support and Capability Project, this research provides valuable intelligence and analysis about how the Panel might need to evolve, develop, and shape its future work to secure maximum impact on safeguarding practice and policy.

A key message from this research is that, whilst the Panel's multi agency make-up and multi-disciplinary approach is seen as a key strength, we must get better at making Panel learning easily accessible for local leaders and practitioners. This necessarily involves giving continued attention to building good collaboration and dialogue with safeguarding partnerships and with other stakeholders, including government and other national bodies.

This report provides the Panel with rich and helpful ideas about how we might enhance work with stakeholders to support continuous learning and improvement. The Panel is now carefully reflecting on the findings and recommendations in this report, and what this means for our future work and in the important context of national work to establish a child protection authority and to progress major multi-agency reforms.

I would like to thank, on behalf of the Panel, colleagues in IFF Research and Research in Practice for their expertise, patience, and hard work in delivering this important project. It is important too to thank all those who participated in the research for their help and valuable contributions to identifying how the Panel can continue to improve our work.

My tenure as Chair of the Panel will shortly come to an end and I know my successor, with other Panel Members, will carefully consider best to how to utilise this research to create a stronger, evidence-based system that puts children first.



Annie Hudson

Chair, Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.

Introduction

This report summarises findings from research commissioned by the Panel in November 2024 to assess its impact on child safeguarding policy and practice. The evaluation sought to provide qualitative, self-reported evidence of the Panel's influence and capacity to drive meaningful change in safeguarding practice. IFF Research were commissioned to undertake this research, in partnership with Research in Practice (RiP) who created recommendations for the Panel based on the research evidence.

The research objectives were to:

- Assess the impact of the Panel's activities and products on child safeguarding policy and practice.
- Understand safeguarding stakeholders' awareness of the Panel's functions and their expectations regarding the Panel's safeguarding systems.
- Provide actionable recommendations on strategic and operational changes for the Panel's work, and for evaluating its impact in the future.

Current Panel functions

The Panel's functions are summarised from the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (HM Government, 2017) and Working Together to Safeguard Children ([HM Government, 2023](#)).

Statutory functions

The Panel has three main functions:

1. Overseeing and supporting the system of local reviews
2. Identifying serious child safeguarding incidents for improvements to practice and national learning
3. Identify learning by deciding on and then commissioning national reviews

Overseeing and supporting the system of local reviews

Local Safeguarding Partnerships (LSPs) identify and then review serious child safeguarding incidents in their areas and bring these to the attention of the Panel. The local authority, on behalf of the safeguarding partners, has a duty to notify the Panel about all serious incidents that meet the criteria. While the Panel can offer advice where appropriate, it cannot mediate or resolve differences between safeguarding partners.

The Panel can also advise on how to conduct the process of a rapid review, and on the format of the final product. This is commonly done through general panel guidance. It does not prescribe a set format or template; ultimately, local safeguarding partners must identify and act on learning which is useful to them.

The LSP determines when undertaking a rapid review whether a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) is appropriate, and the Panel can offer advice on conducting and completing LCSPRs. The Panel may question the decision to conduct an LCSPR if it does not feel there is sufficient justification or information about the need for further review, and if it feels that the rapid review has not adequately explored the learning. In this case, the Panel advises the LSP to conduct an LCSPR, even when the LSP did not think it was needed. The Panel may also question an LSP decision not to undertake an LCSPR if it believes that there is evidence of the need for further learning.

The Panel will write letters back to local safeguarding partners following Panel discussion about the review, confirming their views about the review and to offer feedback on the decision making, analysis and learning, or to request further information. Feedback shared through MS Teams meetings is also provided to support LSPs in their decision-making and the LCSPR process, especially for complex incidents.

Identifying serious child safeguarding incidents for improvements to practice and national learning.

The Panel oversees the system of national and local child safeguarding reviews and assesses how effectively it is operating. The Panel is responsible for identifying, then reviewing serious child safeguarding incidents that, in its view, are complex and/or of national importance. The Panel assesses evidence from reviews undertaken by LSPs, wider national evidence and intelligence from multi-agency and multi-disciplinary stakeholders and networks to decide on the focus of national reviews.

Identify learning by deciding on, then commissioning national reviews

Reviews may be thematic, addressing common issues, or focused on individual children. By reviewing incidents that are complex or raise issues of national importance, the Panel aims to improve safeguarding practice, influence national policy, support local safeguarding partnership work, and ensure the best possible protection and help to children across the country.

The Panel oversees the evidence gathering and commissions lead reviewers for national reviews. The process starts with evidence from local reviews and may, depending on the theme, involve LSPs in the evidence gathering and analysis process. If the review is about a specific child/children then the Panel would involve local areas from the outset. The Panel has a pool of approved reviewers but may also select external experts if needed. They use other evidence (such as inspection reports and other research) when making decisions.

The impact of the Panel: strengths to build on

1. Promoting multi-agency working

Current functions and impact

Many national and LSP stakeholders identified the Panel's multi-agency representation and reputation as a key strength for meeting its statutory functions.

The Panel selection and recruitment process targets people with relevant sector experience from key safeguarding agencies - local authority, health, police, the voluntary sector, and legal backgrounds. This brings expertise and aids decision-making on multi-agency practice. Such participants felt the cross-sector composition ensures reviews and wider evidence are considered from different perspectives, to offer comprehensive recommendations.

“The Panel members themselves are very experienced and hold and command the roles that they that they achieve together very well.”- *LSP, Children’s Services*

Most research participants felt the Panel provided a good multi-agency practice model for others to follow. Several research participants felt the Panel’s multi-agency culture had helped move the safeguarding sector away from a culture of blame.

The reputation of Panel members was also viewed by research participants as strengthening the value of Panel outputs and recommendations. Some LSP representatives from Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and children’s services recognised the mixed-expertise panel offers guidance, learning and support.

Areas for development

Some felt the Panel’s independence and multi-agency working was weakened because the Panel is housed within the Department for Education (DfE). Some stakeholders and a few LSP Police and ICB leads felt the Panel’s relative distance from other Government departments may result in lower recognition of their views, concerns and suggestions compared to DfE’s. Some external stakeholders (including Third Sector participants) were unclear on the Panel’s exact role and function.

Government representatives felt the Panel had weaker connections with other government departments such as the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC). This was attributed at least partially to the wider government culture of siloing activities, rather than an issue specific to the Panel. Participants thought high-impact, high-attention reviews achieved more buy-in across different departments. Several government stakeholders felt that greater consideration for the needs and realities of their

government departments would enhance take-up of recommendations. These realities include departmental budget, policy priorities, workload and working culture.

“I don't think collectively, and this is not down to them, but we together have not managed to crack the ... whole of government buy-in to this being a valuable thing for the whole system.” – *National, government departments*

2. The culture surrounding child safeguarding practice

Current functions and impact

ICB and Children's Services stakeholders were encouraged to take up recommendations because they felt the Panel fosters a culture of learning and support. Some ICB and Children's Services LSP representatives felt the Panel had helped the sector move away from a previous culture of blame. Many described communication between the Panel and various local and national stakeholders as constructive rather than punitive or critical. Police and ICB representatives especially appreciated when communication was tailored and locally relevant, which was seen as facilitating implementation of advice.

"We feel we're working with rather than being talked down to, and I think that's important for the maximum learning." – *National, Health*

3. Informing and influencing national practice

Current functions and impact

Some participants observed impacts on national policy that they attributed to the Panel's activities. A couple perceived that the content of the government's recent Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill was influenced by Panel learning and recommendations (HC Bill, 2025). For example, the Panel's repeated call for Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams is proposed within the Bill. This idea was advanced by the DfE's pathfinder programme, along with the requirement for representation from education within those teams (CSPRP, 2022a).

Most participants who highlighted national policy changes resulting from the Panel's work referred explicitly to the national review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, indicating that this report was particularly resonant.

“[The Panel's] recommendations post Star and Arthur [...] have made a massive difference and they are really driving transformational change across both the local authorities as well as the whole child protection landscape.” – *LSP, Police*

Several participants noted the Panel's influence on the national safeguarding system through its contribution towards the revised Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance in 2023 (HM Government, 2023). A LSP member from the Police highlighted the Panel's influence in this area, and a government stakeholder described how Panel members were really involved in the working group brought together to revise the guidance. They noted that having Panel members on the group made the resulting guidance a better product, as they were able to contribute their breadth of knowledge and experience of the national safeguarding system.

Further acknowledgements of the Panel's recommendations from the Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings national review (CSPRP, 2022b) and the Safeguarding Children in Elective Home Education Panel learning briefing (CSPRP, 2024a) are apparent within this Bill. One government stakeholder suggested that should the Bill be passed, this would be seen as a "massive impact" for the Panel.

Stakeholders' high regard for the Panel leads them to value its advice and other outputs. All those that we spoke to perceived the Panel as having a strong reputation and a core role in nation-wide system learning. The expertise and practical background of Panel members contributed to that reputation; some saw members as collaborative peers. Participants said Panel members were well-connected within national stakeholder and strategic groups, which helped the Panel influence national policy. The Panel's reputation also helped stakeholders to promote the Panel's recommendations in their wider networks. For example, one participant noted that in the sphere of health, they needed the Panel to act as a "catalyst" for change, as their organisation lacked the capacity to generate the same "powerful narrative" of the Panel.

"I think they are well respected nationally because of their role. You know, there is a fundamental role for them that we all have to take seriously and abide, a key part of the process for learning from child death, serious injury, abuse, neglect." – *LSP, Police*

4. Oversight and guidance on local practice

Current functions and impact

Research participants shared examples of how the Panel's support and guidance through the review process had benefited LSP practice. Participants commonly noted that Panel advice and support gave the LSP more confidence in their own safeguarding actions and practice.

A few Children's Services and Police LSP representatives noted that the advice they received from the Panel on appropriate review thresholds for reviews, and the time to escalate to a LCSPR, was very helpful. They said that Panel advice led to more frequent reviews being undertaken more quickly, and to a higher quality. Panel advice also meant decisions about escalation were made with greater confidence.

"[The Panel are] ratifying that decision of whether they're happy that it can be dealt with via rapid review, which is good." – *LSP, Police*

Panel oversight also encouraged accountability amongst LSPs. Several LSP lead partners drew a clear line from Panel recommendations and guidance to changes in their wider safeguarding practice. These changes included improved methods to document, benchmark, validate or record actions the LSP took to improve safeguarding, and to monitor the impact of these changes. LSPs also reported how they were able to use the recommendations provided in Annual Reports and national reviews to validate and focus local action. A couple said that national reviews brought their attention to themes they would not otherwise have put much local focus on. For example, recommendations related to considering racial, ethnic and cultural identity in service-provision, taking a whole-family approach to risk assessment and support, and recognising the vulnerability of babies.

"It's just given us additional teeth; it's not something that we hadn't recognised. We certainly had recognised it but to see that this is an issue across the country it just gives additional teeth to some of the work that we're doing." – *LSP, ICB*

Views on the selection of topics for national reviews were mixed. A large proportion of national stakeholders and LSPs thought that the Panel effectively selected themes that reflected those of local reviews and provided relevant evidence and guidance to inform practice.

"They are really an important source of information for us to use and share, in particular with thematic reviews coming from them. They're the ones that are really important so you can see what you can do about that and it's surprising how many of them are the things that we come across locally, so they really are helpful." – *LSP, ICB*

Areas for development

Some felt that the Panel was less effective at influencing change at a local level. Several national stakeholders and LSP representatives queried whether learning identified in the Panel's reports could impact safeguarding practice, noting that key practitioners may not be aware of the Panel and its work, or may not have the capacity to engage with it.

“I’m not sure I fully understand [the Panel’s work] beyond [publishing reports]. I know kind of annual reports make reference to conversations with Ministers, for example, but [I’m] not sure I can think of any significant change that the national Panel has brought about” – *LSP, Children’s Services*

A few participants felt Panel recommendations did not follow SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) criteria. This means it is difficult to track whether progress had been made against recommendations. Evidence of the Panel’s impact is therefore largely anecdotal.

“So, [organisation] says they read our review. It’s really important. And they might e-mail us and say what they’ve changed or like different teams might get in touch and say, oh, we’ve changed this because of XYZ. But actually, until we start mapping that stuff we don’t know if we’re having an impact.” – *Scoping interview*

The impact of the Panel: areas which could be developed further

1. Communications

The Panel's communication strategy was seen as an opportunity to improve its operations, and ultimately its impact. Some LSP representatives felt the use of letters to communicate review decisions was outdated. Awareness of the Panel's newsletter was low among some local audiences, and one participant suggested creating a newsletter. Those who had attended webinars found them useful, as they provided easy access to expert insights. Many LSP stakeholders, however, lacked the time to attend the Panel's in-person conference and some made a generalised point that they would be unlikely to have time to attend any future in-person events. Effective communication was seen as important for explaining decision-making and influencing the implementation of practice recommendations.

The Panel's relationship with LSPs is crucial for an effective national safeguarding system, and oversight and information sharing underpinning this relationship is achieved through communication channels. According to participants, Children's Services representatives from LSPs communicated more directly with the Panel than police and ICB representatives. Those who reported their direct two-way communication with the Panel was effective said they felt listened to; LSP representatives with less direct communication with the Panel were likely to feel less positive about their interactions. Many LSP and government participants felt the Panel would benefit from modernising its online presence, to better share its work and facilitate learning. Panel members have tried to improve communications, including an online presence, but felt restricted by design limitations on the gov.uk website.

2. Actionable recommendations

Research participants felt the Panel could do more to ensure the recommendations it develops in its national reviews are actionable for local practitioners and more clearly defined.

Some recommendations from reviews, such as those on information sharing, teamwork, training, and leadership, have been long-standing. Many participants felt that recurring recommendations indicate challenges in encouraging change or translating the Panel's suggestions into practice. While it is not the Panel's role to enforce local implementation, several LSP stakeholders felt some recommendations were difficult to act on or did not meet SMART criteria.

Many participants across all audiences mentioned recurring recommendations and themes in Annual Reports. Participants gave examples of recommendations on better information sharing and joined up working, knowledge, training and skills, and culture and leadership, which all featured in the Panel's Annual Report 2018/19 and 2022/23 (CSPRP 2020; 2024b). Some participants felt these recurring recommendations showed limited progress to address issues was being made and that the subsequent impact on local practice was therefore minimal. One national stakeholder described hearing from Directors of Children's Services that they do not see the Panel offering them something that can improve practice as they see the same learning points repeated in multiple reports. However, recommendations often highlight large scale and complex issues, so it may not be realistic to expect significant change over a few years.

The reflective questions for practitioners provided in the most recent Annual Report from the Panel were praised as being accessible and actionable for LSPs, with the potential to lead to positive impact on safeguarding practice.

“[The reflective questions were] really helpful because that's something kind of tangible that ... we were able to kind of share. Finding ways to support areas in having an impact, I think should be a real priority for the national Panel.” – *LSP – Children's Services*

3. Increased transparency

Research participants wanted greater transparency in the Panel's decision-making process, which they felt may bring about efficiencies in the Panel's ways of working.

The Panel has a heavy workload, particularly with the number of rapid reviews it handles each year. Research participants suggested streamlining processes to give the Panel more time for communication and making its communication more accessible. Ideas included using rapid review templates and creating a more consistent structure for letters. These changes were felt by research participants to help LSPs better understand how the Panel operates and reduce pressure on the review process.

Some LSP stakeholders and, to a lesser extent, government representatives felt the Panel's decision-making process on what to review was unclear. Several LSP stakeholders did not understand how the Panel decided on advice related to rapid reviews and LCSPRs.

A small number of participants who were critical of the way that topics are selected for national and thematic reviews said that the Panel should be more transparent with its decision making. They say this would assuage concerns that they are not being listened to and provide clarity on how widespread various issues are.

“The concept is good, but we don’t appear to be able to influence them on their decision making of what to look at as a national review. My biggest frustration is I don’t get a good enough explanation as to why. For example, is it only us that see this as an issue? If so, say that and I will leave it. We need more transparency.”- *LSP – Children’s Services*

4. Enhanced analytical approach

Participants also felt that learning could be acted upon more efficiently if the Panel provided ‘real-time’ updates on emerging trends outside of its Annual Reports and national reviews. Several suggested that periodic communications from the Panel synthesising the outcomes of local reviews would be useful information to guide practice without needing to wait for full reports. The newsletters currently issued by the Panel already make efforts to do this. However, the relatively low awareness of, and engagement with, newsletters among participants suggests that this content does not always effectively reach stakeholders and practitioners.

Many participants felt the Panel should review what works in addition to major system failures (which is also outside the statutory purpose). These participants advocated reviews of effective practice, including worked examples of LSPs or practitioners successfully implementing new or adapted practice based on Panel recommendations.

Recommendations

Several repeated themes emerged through the interviews, which together provide useful principles to guide and underpin future development of the Panel. Between the Panel and LSPs, professionals and key national and regional stakeholders from across agencies, there needs to be:

- Meaningful collaboration and partnership
- Greater dialogue to identify and enable ongoing learning and improvement
- Increased transparency and consistency on decision making
- Accessible and regular communication

The recommendations here build on the priority areas for change outlined in the Learning & Capability Support Project¹ (Research in Practice, 2025) in relation to:

- Increased capacity at a regional level for LSPs to maximise and share resources, provide professional development opportunities and peer support and greater connectivity for thematic learning and improvement across regional contexts.
- Development and implementation of a Learning Framework.² This is a broad framework that would set out how systems learning needs to be identified and enabled at every level of the system. A Framework would support decision-making, including whether to notify an incident and undertake a review. The Panel could also use the Learning Framework to identify and make decisions about national and thematic reviews.

For national government and Panel to address in partnership:

1. Develop learning and capacity through bringing together Panel reports and materials into a central hub or website.

- Improve visibility of the Panel, its work and the outputs it generates with a dedicated website, the identity of which is distinct from standard government websites thereby enhancing 'brand recognition' for the Panel and its work.
- Provide increased digital visibility and location for LSPs to access national reviews, briefings, related research and guidance and tools.

¹ See pages 12 to 17 of the Learning & Capability Support Project Report

² Ibid, pp.14-15

- Develop a consistent dissemination strategy for the publication of national reviews. All long form reviews should be accompanied by short briefings targeted at key stakeholders. The strategy might also include hosting webinars, podcasts and useable slide decks to share with local areas. The Panel have already used a similar approach with some recent publications.

Outcome: Increased accessibility of Panel outputs for LSPs, independent reviewers and scrutineers.

2. Build data capacity and infrastructure so that the Panel can make better use of data to enable learning at every level of the system.

- Data on characteristics and EDI themes.
- Serious Incident Notification, rapid review and LCSPR trends to enable LSPs to compare referral rates and situate regional, local trends and related activities.

Outcome: Panel and LSPs make better use of data relating to trends and themes to enable learning at every level of the system.

3. Ensure Panel includes members with recent strategic experience in child safeguarding contexts.

- Continue to ensure the Panel stays abreast of changes in the sector. Recruitment of Panel members should continue to ensure inclusion of people with recent experience in a strategic role in child safeguarding and protection.
- Ensure that Panel member induction includes shadowing and other activities to help them keep in touch with the priorities of the work of LSPs and key professionals involved in reviews, including independent reviewers and scrutineers.

For the Panel:

4. Increase Panel capacity at regional level by growing and promoting the role of the dedicated Panel leads for each region.

- Develop Panel engagement with regional partnership arrangements further to strengthening regional infrastructure and capacity as recommended by the Learning & Capability Support Project.
 - a. Increase from annual to bi-annual meetings with regional groups of LSPs to identify and discuss regional trends and themes and shape targeted support.

- b. Report annually on regional trends identified.
- c. Panel regional leads to offer support to build local and regional capabilities for learning from reviews. This to take account of local/regional context and input support proportionality. LSPs across the country have very different levels of capacity.

Outcome: Increased opportunities for LSPs to connect across localities, share resources, and give and receive peer support. Builds connectivity for thematic learning and improvement within regions.³ Increases connectivity and dialogue between the Panel and regional leaders.

5. Build the learning programme for LSPs. Increase two-way dialogue between LSPs and Panel.

Commission materials that will provide practical support in review and learning methodologies. This might include evidence-informed methods for participation and co-production.

- Begin to follow up on Panel recommendations in a sample of local areas each year to gain understanding of how these have been implemented using regional partnership arrangements as a key point of contact and engagement.
- Share examples of local action plans for responding to recommendations of national reviews.
- Increase the use of digital platforms, such as MS Teams, in place of or in addition to written communication for regular communication with LSPs as low cost, high impact means to facilitate interactive discussions and learning between the centre, the regions and localities.
- Develop a more flexible digital hub. This might include blog posts in which local areas share 'you said, we did' responses to Panel recommendations or their work on local implementation of learning from national reviews.
- Promote the multi-agency expertise and leadership of Panel members through website profiles, Panel member blogs and communications.

Ensure communications to LSPs, including on undertaking reviews, are consistent and provide clarity and transparency around decision making. This will be helped by

³ Northwest Regional Improvement Pilot Programme (RIPP), Partnership Workstream.

development and implementation of a Learning Framework to enable a shared and consistent approach to decision making about local and national reviews.

Outcome: LSPs and other stakeholders are engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the Panel about system learning. Increased capacity for LSPs, supporting high quality review activity. Coherence about the reasons for undertaking RRs, LCSPRs and national reviews.

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