

NORTH YORKSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (NYSCP)**ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021.****MAGGIE ATKINSON, CHAIR OF NYSCP EXECUTIVE AND INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER****STATUS: DRAFT FOR FINAL AGREEMENT****INTRODUCTION**

This report covers what I have observed as both Chair of the Executive and Independent Scrutineer of the NYSCP in the financial year 2020-2021. Inevitably the report is influenced by work done by all partners to ensure children's and young people's safety and wellbeing during the continuing Covid 19 pandemic. It therefore reflects on work by a large number of partners who, since March 2020, have worked remotely rather than as previously, face to face. It also reflects on non-Covid-19 issues, given much work with children and young people has continued uninterrupted, however adapted to circumstances it has been.

As both Executive Chair and Independent Scrutineer I am assured that the County Council, District Councils, CCGs, Police Service, OFPCC, other partners and relevant agencies, have done far more than simply stand by children and young people in challenging times. They have sustained the development of how the Partnership works, at subgroup and Executive levels, to keep children and young people as safe as possible. In many services this has been manifest in staff working longer hours than normal. There was no staff travel between appointments involved for much of 2020-2021, the corollary being that staff have moved from meeting to meeting in an unbroken string during long working days. This presents challenges to people's sustainable stamina that will go on needing to be addressed post-pandemic.

Staff and leaders are aware that as well as challenges, gains have arisen during the pandemic. They are determined to hold onto a good deal of remote working and the efficiencies it brings, and to work on a longer-term programme that accepts ways of working will need to go on using "hybrid" meeting models that mix such remote working with meeting face to face. Covid 19 may be with us for a long time, in endemic rather than pandemic form. What services do with each other, children and young people, goes on regardless across North Yorkshire.

The NYSCP's model, terms of reference for and meeting schedules of the Executive and subgroups, along with a great deal of material that guides and supports professionals, parents or carers, and children and young people themselves, are all available on the Partnership's website at www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk

In 2020, government asked Sir Alan Wood to review Local Safeguarding Children Partnership arrangements, notwithstanding that this review was launched less than a year after most MASAs were launched, and was undertaken and is now published in the midst of a pandemic that has inevitably influenced both practice and partnership working. It sets out some lessons that have emerged and should be considered alongside this Annual Report. In the same way, so should the Annual Report from the National Children Safeguarding Panel hosted by the Department for Education. North Yorkshire's developments and partnership practice are well within the range of what both Sir Alan Wood and the National Panel consider good practice.

MY COMBINED INDEPENDENT EXECUTIVE CHAIR AND SCRUTINY ROLE

I open this section with a note exercising Scrutineer powers, rather than as Chair of the Executive.

As NYSCB closed and NYSCP launched, the county stood down its multi-agency Children's Trust which had been created, as in every top tier Local Authority area, in response to the 2004 Children Act and its predecessor Green Paper *Every Child Matters*. The Children's Trust covered all elements of childhood, and services from the Universal level (maternity services, early years, schools, GP and 0-19 health services, youth clubs, faith, community and voluntary bodies and more) through targeted services providing early intervention and help, to statutory interventions across SEN/D, social care and health.

LSCBs replaced, and expanded the remits of, Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs.) LSCBs ran from 2005 to September 2019 and focused on safeguarding issues, largely driven by social care and child protection concerns and trends, but with a requirement to oversee universal and targeted services' and settings' work on safeguarding.

The NYSCP took up the Children's Trust's remit as well the NYSCB's. NYSCP Executive agendas are gradually expanding to ensure a focus on what the Children's Trust steered, across all five national Outcomes set out in the Children Act 2004 (Stay Safe, Be Healthy, Enjoy and Achieve, Make a Positive Contribution, Achieve Economic Wellbeing.)

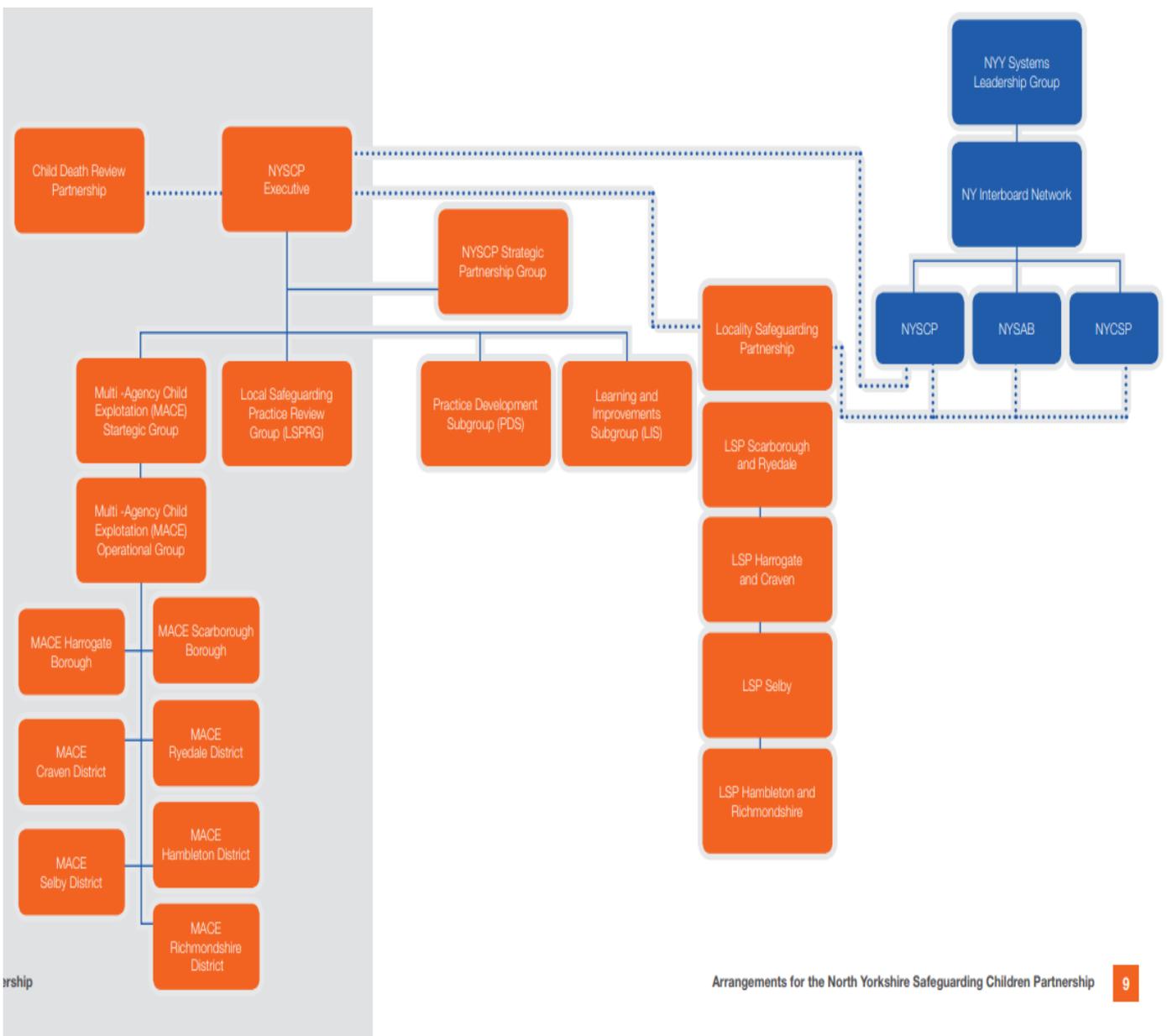
The first NYSCP Annual Report (2019-2020) was entirely focused on the safeguarding agenda that NYSCP inherited from NYSCB, given there was also a closing annual report from the Children's Trust. That report contained text from me alone, not from services provided to and working with children and young people. This Report is the first that covers a financial year in which both the former Children's Trust and the NYSCP's agendas are covered by the NYSCP.

However, my scrutiny in 2020-2021 has covered only the Executive and the subgroups of the NYSCP, which do not at present include groups or steering and reference bodies which cover: education for all North Yorkshire children and young people; 0-19 general health services; youth and community, or other universal services.

As this report is drafted, partners are in discussion on ensuring all themes in "Being Young in North Yorkshire" are part of a published annual report for 2020-2021, and then for subsequent years at the appropriate time. My advice is that the NYSCP's Annual Reports should not focus solely on my reflections and feedback as Chair of the Executive and Independent Scrutineer. Rather it should include reporting from all partners in NYSCP.

My work as Independent Chair of the Executive

NYSCP’s published structure is in the diagram below. The Executive meets for half a day per meeting six times a year. Throughout 2020-2021, all meetings of both the Executive and subgroups were online. Executive meetings follow a standard pattern. On an annual rota, leaders from both commissioning and delivery bodies are required to attend the Executive to present and be questioned on their activity reports. They are asked to consider what they need to draw to the Executive’s attention as both successes and challenges, and to look both back on what has happened since their last report, and forward to what they expect in the period to come. The Executive is expected to have read all reports, considering any questions or comments members may have for the agencies concerned. Discussion covers these, and reaches agreed conclusions, which are duly recorded. If further information is required or matters need to come back to the next Executive, this occurs. On a similarly rota, we receive detailed reports from the Chairs of each NYSCP subgroup (see structure below), and the shared North Yorkshire and City of York Child Death Review Partnership (CDRP.) The Executive discusses reports, notes the contents, and decides on any actions requested or required.



In the diagram above there are missing themes, regarding the elements of childhood or youth not directly connected to safeguarding as such, but featuring in “Being Young in North Yorkshire.” These would have been covered by the Children’s Trust.

For example, I am aware that the Assistant Director at NYCC whose remit covers education learning and skills oversees and interacts with schools and other services covered by her remit. Some themes in her work come to the Executive, for example matters such as Elective Home Education or school attendance and exclusions, but as Scrutineer I have not yet attended any subgroups covering her remit, and there is now no countywide Partnership body that takes as its core business issues such as attainment and achievement, as the Children’s Trust would have done. Any review of the diagram on the previous page, which represents what NYSCP looked like as it launched in September 2019, will need to consider creating a visual representation of all elements of work on childhood, so that the whole childhood agenda is covered by an accountability and partnership framework.

On an agreed annual rota, the Executive undertakes appraisal and discussion of activity and assurance reports from providers in the Health economy, youth bodies including those run by the voluntary and community sector, and other organisations working with children and young people. These groups present to the Executive because they cover issues that the Executive needs to decide on or direct; or because there are issues which have arisen that need a problem-solving discussion to resolve matters.

At every Executive, if there are issues concerning cases of concern where a child or young person has not been kept as safe as they should have been, or safeguarding problems serious enough to require a Local or Rapid, or externally commissioned Local Safeguarding Practice Review, the agenda includes a discussion of progress, where the Executive notes or agrees either emerging or final lessons learned.

Guided by the work of the Safeguarding Practice Review Group that does this probing and challenging work in detail and very effectively, the Executive approves contacts with the National Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, signs off reviews of which there have been a number in 2020-2021, and keeps critical track of what the proof is that lessons are being learned when something goes wrong for a child. These reviews have all been conducted with great partnership commitment, thoroughness and diligence, and the Partnership’s judgement on whether a Rapid Review or Local Learning Review should move on to be a Local Safeguarding Practice Review has always been accepted by the National Panel. Where an individual agency identifies a need to investigate its safeguarding practice in the case of a child who has not been kept as safe as they would wish, the Executive is also kept aware of the launching of, progress in and lessons learned from, single agency Serious Incident Notifications, investigations and reports

The Executive also discusses, takes a considered view on and makes shared decisions about, all matters likely to affect children and young people either for good or ill, and seeks examples of good practice to be foregrounded and made public, including via social media and the Partnership’s website. It also directs and assures the content of the website so that it is both kept up to date, and reflects what agencies and the Partnership wishes either to highlight, or to ensure lessons are learned across all practice.

Increasingly, Executive agendas are configured so that all sections are closely matched to the agreed key themes in the refreshed “Being Young in North Yorkshire 2021-2024,” work to complete which has been completed in 2020-2021. The themes are based on the county’s and the Partnership’s agreed ambitions for all children in North Yorkshire. The themes agreed as key for the work to be done with and for children and young people between 2021 and 2024 are as follows:



Four key themes

Theme One

A safe life

- Protected from harm
- Live in safe communities
- Supported by Family networks

Theme Two

A happy family life

- Families are empowered to be resilient
- School Years are happy
- Community Support Networks help families thrive

Theme Three

A healthy life

- Families are empowered to be resilient
- School Years are happy
- Community Support Networks help families thrive

Theme Four

Achieving in life

- Ensure children are ‘School Ready’
- Raise Achievement levels for all
- Create environments where children have aspirations for their future

These four linked themes refer to, and in delivering the strategy partners seek to enhance the life chances of, every child and young person. The Executive’s agendas are now moving to all our business being themed to ensure we can steer work on these four ways forward. NYSCP subgroups’ terms of reference, as they are each reviewed over time, ensure they are also linked to the four themes to ensure fulfilment of “Being Young in North Yorkshire” is assured between now and 2024.

The Executive’s agenda also covers matters of concern that arise, require agreed effort across a number of organisations, or are being discussed at national scale but with relevance for the County. Examples include Government’s or inspection bodies’ requirements that could shape services’ responses; the difficult and challenging effects of funding settlements and their effects on budgets or programmes of work; issues raised when a sector undergoes change or reform, such as is now happening in the National Health Service under the 2021 Health White Paper which will lead to change that for every Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and networks or alliances of providers.

The Executive's standing items include a regular review of quarterly data that shows trends in how well children and young people are faring in health, education including SEN/D, Elective Home Education and related issues, social care, family law and criminal justice. The NYSCP subgroups each deal with the data in far greater detail than does the Executive, but the latter notes and questions trends in what the data tells us about the need for deep dives or reviews of practice, or for finding reasons for a trend that seems unusual or of concern. A small number of Standing Items also allow consideration, and where needed decision making, on difficulties or challenges in any institution or service in North Yorkshire, whether publicly funded or otherwise. The position of all such bodies as Relevant Agencies means the Executive has the duty to hold them all to account if they are working or interacting with children and young people.

Independent Scrutiny

Independent scrutiny provides assurance by reflecting and reporting on the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children, including arrangements to identify and review serious child safeguarding cases. It is part of a wider system which includes inspectorates' single assessment of individual safeguarding partners, and Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs.) Safeguarding partners ensure scrutiny is objective, is a constructive critical friend, and promotes reflection to drive continuous improvement. The independent scrutineer considers how effectively arrangements are working for children, families and practitioners, and how well safeguarding partners provide strong leadership. Having been NYSCB Chair starting in Summer 2018, NYSCP appointed me as Executive Chair and Independent Scrutineer from September 2019.

All NYSCP partners acknowledge that the independent scrutineer is never the sole provider of feedback or reflection. Working Together 2018 is clear mutual holding to account, support and challenge are part of how statutory partners and relevant agencies must operate to ensure impacts are clear, understood, co-owned, and contribute to progressively improving children and young people's lives. Scrutiny is a key part of judging the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children. I provide constructively critical appraisal, providing challenge to and ongoing appraisal of the partnership's work, both in the scrutiny work I undertake, and by chairing the Executive.

I was appointed to:

- Assess how well organisations work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and to hold each other to account for effective safeguarding
- Write this annual report on the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, the performance and effectiveness of local services in their safeguarding work
- Assess the effectiveness of the help being provided to children and families, including through universal and early help services
- Assess whether the three statutory safeguarding partners are fulfilling their statutory obligations
- Scrutinise the quality assurance activity (including reviewing statutory and local reviews, the results and findings of multi-agency case file auditing, and North Yorkshire's processes for identifying lessons to be learned from tragedy and crises in children's lives)
- Scrutinise the effectiveness of training, including multi-agency training, whose aim is to equip staff to safeguard and promote the wellbeing and welfare of children
- Assess the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements in North Yorkshire

- Provide a rigorous, evidence based and transparent assessment of the extent to which partners and relevant agencies are fulfilling their statutory duties to keep children safe
- Evaluate arrangements for the operation of the safeguarding partnership and attend a range of meetings and activities including visits to partner and relevant agencies
- Support the implementation of findings and outcomes from safeguarding reviews
- Assess whether effective performance management, audit and quality assurance mechanisms are in place within partner organisations which will support the three safeguarding partners to fulfil their statutory objectives, and which will enable the partnership to identify and measure its success and impact
- Ensure that the voices of children, young people and their families are appropriately represented and heard in the work of the partnership.

As Scrutineer, I attend and feed back on the work of all of NYSCP's subgroups at a range of meetings in the course of a year, and seek to spend time with vital groups including representatives of children and young people. I also chair and help to facilitate bi-annual all-partners and all-agencies development days, part of which also include my feedback on progress. At present, because of Covid 19 restrictions, all of my work in both element of my role is done through virtual means.

I have attended all of the NYSCP subgroups shown in the diagram on page 3 above as a participant observer including the shared CDOP and CDRP run across North Yorkshire and the City of York, having been furnished with all relevant papers and agendas ahead of each meeting. I have not yet attended locality-based Local Safeguarding Partnerships (LSPs) which combine work done in each locality on the business of the Safeguarding Children, Vulnerable Adults and Community Safety Partnerships that run strategically at County level. The Executive of NYSCP receives and considers reports back from those LSPs. The business they cover feeds into work in partner agencies that sit on NYSCP, and is followed through at both locality and County level.

I am pleased to report that the common features of all of the subgroups shown in the diagram on page 3 are as follows:

- They reflect the maturity of partnership ways of working in North Yorkshire. They are well chaired, and each runs efficiently and in a professional and mutually respectful manner which ensures all partners have the opportunity, and are expected, to contribute to, and where possible to chair or lead the groups.
- They are diligent in the attention they pay to the themes NYSCP has asked them to focus on, and there is a great deal of in-depth knowledge and wisdom shown in their meetings, by professionals who know not only their own briefs, but the issues others at the table are facing and dealing with.
- They are well attended, and there is a high level of consistency in who, and from what levels of decision making and responsibility, attends and ensures input from each agency present.
- They are efficiently serviced by the small Business Unit that ensures the smooth running of NYSCP's business and the discussions the Executive has on the work of the subgroups.

- The subgroups' work noticeably and visibly feeds into the training and development off the NYSCP makes to all agencies; to the creation of 7-minute and Coffee Break briefing materials, also furnished through that website and NYSCP's social media accounts; to "lessons learned" documentation and presentations; to the Safeguarding Week event which happens every two years and is due to occur in a virtual environment as this report is drafted in mid June 2021.
- Where subgroup or activity is shared, for example in audits of practice across NYCC and City of York Council and their partners, and in the Child Death Review Process (CDRP) and Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) covering the same shared footprint, the thoroughness of work done and the agreement of co-owned practice regardless of boundaries, are to be applauded.
- Subgroups' agendas and reports to the Executive also contribute to the development of policies, protocols and procedures, including in contested territory such as ongoing work on differing medical opinions on Non-Accidental Injuries (NAIs) in non-mobile babies. This has become a high-profile national issue during the pandemic, and NYSCP's work on it is a strong reflection of that done in Partnerships nationwide.
- Discussions on difficult subjects often admirably well-led led by subgroups' Chairs and wider groups of members. Such difficult discussions are not avoided by the Executive, but are always undertaken with due professional care and mutual respect until conclusions and agreements are reached, including when compromises must be made.
- As scrutineer I can give assurance that executive and scrutiny bodies in each represented agency are kept informed of NYSCP's key business as it applies to all parts of the partnership; and that where there is a particular subject for their agency, they are briefed in detail

In both elements of my role, I seek to enable NYSCP to comply with the requirement both to work concertedly and successfully in partnership, and from the resultant position of confidence, to publish an Annual Report on activities, successes, and continued or new challenges. The report reflects on the following broad themes.

1. How the partnership has developed: NYSCP took over from an effective, still-developing LSCB, and absorbed the work of the Children's Trust, which then stood down. It had already reached a strong, all-agency consensus during 2018-2019 that "blank sheet of paper" thinking was not necessary in moving to a Safeguarding Children Partnership. The former NYSCB, and now-ongoing NYSCP, provide a strong foundation for agencies' future practice, not least because although the inter-agency body changed in 2019, many people central to good work by the NYSCB have continued in role, to ensure that the NYSCP is progressing well.
2. The 3 statutory partners have created, and multiple agencies' governance and scrutiny bodies and staff groups have agreed, a model that serves the county, its many and varied communities, and organisations that work for and with children and young people across services. A Partnership structural model published in summer 2019 is operating well, reflecting a strong shared commitment to both working and learning in partnership. The partnership is also looking at how well connectivity between universal services such as education, and rather more specialist safeguarding children services at higher levels of intervention, work together in the interests of all children and young people, including those with any of a wide range of additional and special educational needs (SEN), with or without a

disability (SEN/D.) This move to examine a wider range of bodies' work based on fulfilling the refreshed "Being Young in North Yorkshire" could usefully be accompanied by a review of the NYSCP 2019 structure as it reaches the end of its second year of operation, so that any elements of what the former Children's Trust oversaw that are missing from that 2019 NYSCP structure diagram can be included.

3. The configuration, terms of reference, membership and attendance of NYSCP subgroups is a reflection of the fact that without a Board like the NYSCB, ownership of and work on safeguarding has moved closer to services' front lines, where children and young people experience them. NYSCP subgroups also contribute to themed or project-based working, and to task and finish groups. Making the Partnership the single statutory accountability body for children and young people means work is now "held," and to a high degree driven, by the subgroups. That the Executive's members also account to each other, and hold themselves to account, are both central to NYSCP's continuing success.
4. The pledges to enhance children's life chances which are regularly renewed both across the partnership and by large numbers of professionals from a wide range of organisations who have gathered at and contributed to several partnership development sessions during 2020-2021, reflect well on what has happened in the year and will help to shape strategic and operational plans for the future of work across the Partnership in coming years. The 2020-2021 Annual Report seeks to reflect appropriately on what has been achieved, and what remains to be done. It confirms the three Statutory Partners' assurance of their remaining compliant with the requirements of "Working Together (2018) and contain details on activities to fulfil the intentions captured in "Being Young in North Yorkshire," refreshed and reissued as this report is published.
5. The NYSCP's way of working through strong subgroups which have "buy-in" and leadership from staff across agencies allows services to take ownership for getting safeguarding right, at every level. The work undertaken by the NYSCP covers a year of purposeful activity from 2020-2021 that has been both positive and productive. Scrutiny of Agency and subgroup Assurance reports, regularly reflected on by both the Executive and the subgroups, show both the NYSCP's clear strengths, and the correctness of its identification of areas for continued development.
6. This Annual Report is inevitably influenced by the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic as its effects on services and communities continue. The potential for threats to stability, and work to ameliorate those threats, plus the potential for positive developments in partnership working when the pandemic passes, have all rightly been on the minds of all involved. Given the success of the vaccination programme and the likelihood that the virus will be an endemic presence, all services are now turning their thinking towards what a Recovery phase will look like, notwithstanding the current uncertainty about further waves. The corollary is that services can begin to plan for a "new normal" likely to involve some working from home for many staff, but a ever more face to face work being done with children and young people.

WHAT FOLLOWS: ISSUES FOR NYSCP IN 2021-2022 AND BEYOND.

- North Yorkshire County Council and its District Council second tier bodies are in the midst of dialogues with government about the future for local government in the County. It is vital that NYSCP's relentless focus on high quality, partnership based and secure, self-aware and self-critical work for children and young people is maintained, as there is a period of uncertainty to come between now and some way into 2022, and potentially a period of change beyond that date that will place demands on all concerned. There must be no detriment to any child or family in any process that follows decisions by central government. Planning for any change will take up time and energies that must be factored into how services are planned for and delivered, as all concerned clearly recognise.
- Staff across many agencies are largely working from home, use of office accommodation being reserved for those who either cannot do so or who need occasional office time. Staff of all agencies and the small team working in the Safeguarding Unit ensure regular KiT meetings. NYSCP leaders contribute to regular countywide discussions regarding how both responses to the pandemic and plans for the future are assured. Some agencies (police, emergency services, Children's Social Care, many health bodies, many schools for example) are, and through the pandemic have been, engaged in work in as near a "business as usual" fashion as possible with virus protection measures as part of their work. Meeting in the virtual environment since March 2020, at both Executive and subgroup levels, has not seen any break in stride in work undertaken within or for NYSCP. Many NYSCP members, and all of their agencies, are now pondering how best to strike a balance between the continued efficiency of meeting virtually and not spending a great deal of their working days driving across a large county in order to meet; versus the human and professional need both to connect face to face with fellow members of the Partnership, and to pick up on the "incidental five-minute catch-ups" on the fringes of a working session, that do not happen online as people move, back to back, from meeting to meeting.
- There is no doubt that a great deal of work is being done, to good effect. The Executive has, however, also reflected that there is equally a great deal of tiredness and a feeling of relentlessness in the working day that is not healthy for staff at any level in the long term. The Executive also recognises that throughout the pandemic there are services which have simply delivered as they did before Covid 19. The emergency services, police in community as well as response roles, many educators, social care staff, senior leaders who provide both the strategic lead and the "backstop" function in often-life-and-limb services, those planning for changes coming in the NHS despite also being pressed to deliver solutions to Covid 19 at scale and speed, are all examples. The section of this report that examines what comes next will pick up these threads.
- The NYSCP Business Manager and his small team continue to keep me, and all partner bodies, apprised of developments and issues for discussion or concern, and facilitate my contributions to and presence at Executive and NYSCP subgroup meetings so that assurance can be given as both parts of my role requires. The Executive which I chair meets six times a year, enabling it both to hold all others to account and to direct the Partnership's work so that safeguarding maintains its many strengths and does not lose either pace or focus. The Executive calls on the presence and expertise of senior staff from across agencies and partners for these meetings, including through taking Assurance, individual agency and Activity reports as part of its agenda, so that the NYSCP can drive forward what will be required of services and agencies across the county.

- Several whole-partnership Development Days have been held online during the pandemic, giving all concerned the opportunity to reflect on progress to date, what challenges Covid 19 has presented, what non-Covid challenges are, how they should all be dealt with, what support children and young people continue to need, and what might happen next in the NYSCP's ongoing development. Whilst the virtual environment and technology create challenges, attendance is good and colleagues clearly value the opportunity to maintain their connections with and support for each other, and thereby children, young people, families and communities.
- Subgroup attendance, actions lists and the minutes of each group illustrate that partners remain committed, attending virtually and finding work-arounds for technology challenges. Chairs and the business support team construct agendas, ensure meetings are recorded appropriately, send out actions for completion, and ensure the Executive is kept closely informed. The business the subgroups do continues, and the Partnership goes on developing its ability to steer the work done with children and young people, using both the subgroups and the Executive to hold all concerned to account.
- The Partnership continues both its audit and learning and development activity, albeit again all online. Section 11 multi-agency and Section 175 schools' safeguarding audit cycles are agreed annually, some in partnership with the neighbouring City of York partnership. Such audits are done as a means of providing assurance on the quality of practice, and to draw out lessons to be learned. The business support team sends out CPD briefings, updates and newsletters both on Covid 19 related issues, and safeguarding more generally. Partners and relevant agencies value these. Examples can be found on the NYSCP website, where a wealth of other information, guidance and professional support materials, along with materials that children families and parents or carers can also use. NYSCP also makes careful and effective use of social media channels including Twitter and Facebook.
- The NYSCP remains keen to ensure support on safeguarding is given to schools, and that where necessary challenges and suggestions for improvement can also be provided. Throughout the pandemic an adequate number of schools remained open, at the very least to provide "hub" services, particularly for vulnerable children and children of keyworkers, of whom there are substantial numbers in some communities. When fuller opening took place, and despite some "stop-start" effects on already hard pressed and tired staff and children and families, North Yorkshire services have supported schools to ensure changes have been handled in as seamless a way as possible to support families and ensure their children were safe to return. Every school has been supported in their safeguarding work, despite the additional workload experienced inherent in creating "blended" learning as the pandemic continued, and since Christmas 2020 dealing with anxious children and worried families.
- Support to their work has been valued by schools, which have, like schools across the country, been less well and less clearly supported by central government's many changes and last minute guidance and support. Though committed to safeguarding, schools and particularly their leaders are also struggling with tiredness, and the responses of a minority of families who will not, or consider they cannot, send their children back in. Schools will go on needing support and their issues are regularly discussed by NYSCP Executive, including in key areas such as a growth in numbers of children educated at home, and the challenges presented by Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEN/D) where, as in most of England's localities,

rising demand cannot be met by increased resources in North Yorkshire. NYSCP's wider remit and the requirements in "Being Young in North Yorkshire" means that the partnership is already planning to discuss schooling across a wide range of themes at future meetings.

- Face-to-face safeguarding training ceased after the pandemic began. CPD offers, guidance and professional information have all continued virtually, both at Partnership level and within individual agencies. The Partnership's "lessons learned" briefings, master class sessions and 7-minute briefing materials continue to be added to, as do other offers to ensure as many of the workforce as possible can access up to date safeguarding training. The continued content-refreshes on the NYSCP website are valued for the high quality of support and advice provided, and for the ease of access to vital information for professionals, parents, children and young people alike. The newly developed and still growing "Be Aware" section of the site is of particular quality and value.
- Early Help services are supported by a refreshed Early Help Strategy, and continue to respond to requests for early and lower-level social care interventions, in line with this new strategy. Rates of referral into different levels of services are closely monitored, especially where they may be concentrated in less affluent communities where children can live particularly challenged lives. Early Help reaches out, making it clear that even in the pandemic period, services have remained available to help families avoid crisis. The intention is that Early Help, early intervention and prevention, go on "keeping the heat out of the top of the system," and the goal is to ensure families attract and receive support that keeps them together. Intervening early and appropriately will no doubt continue to be a theme of work for children and young people once the pandemic's ongoing restrictions are lifted. That Early Help is not solely the province of social care teams but relies on schools, early years, youth, health and other services, is well understood and will remain a vital part of the offer.
- The NYSCP team is also involved in work underway across the county and the city of York on Domestic Abuse/Domestic Violence which includes many Relevant Agencies in voluntary, community, and survivor-led and focused bodies. Such a focus on a vital issue for some children and young people is a marker of partners' insistence that vital work must go on no matter what, and it is hoped that its positive effects will be felt by children and their families who may be at risk. Given Royal Assent was given to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 in late April, the current joint coordinating group is looking to ensure a way forward, especially as York may develop its own strategic steering body, but much of the work done will need to go on being done in partnership.

WHAT NEXT FOR THE PARTNERSHIP? ISSUES OF NOTE, AND RISKS TO BE DEALT WITH

New issues continue to surface as Covid 19 restrictions continue to be lifted. These issues may last for the longer term, even once post-pandemic future planning is implemented. The Partnership is keenly aware, and the Executive and wider partnership have discussed the issues that focus around the fact that staff across all agencies have given a great deal since early 2020, often over and above what they would have done before Covid 19, and many are now tired and stressed. Post-pandemic there may be problems in the wings since March 2020 that will come to the; and that NYSCP needs the energy, time and resources to think and plan as far ahead as possible.

Current circumstances remain extraordinary and are undergoing continued change. NYSCP members are aware the extraordinary circumstances of the past 16 months have taught services a great deal about working together and facing contingencies they could not have planned for. These challenges, and the responses made to them, should now be used to embed what have already become new ways of working. Partners are also aware that post-pandemic times are likely to give rise to different demands, needs, challenges and opportunities, not least if the economy struggles to revive and takes a long time to enter sustained recovery – a situation which could place some families' lives under severe challenge. The issues discussed below will undoubtedly present challenges to every agency and statutory partner. Once the pandemic subsides and especially in light of the success of the vaccination programme, the period of "Afterwards" is likely to present circumstances that will not be what we remember as "normal" pre-Covid 19. Deciding as a Partnership what to do then, is accepted by NYSCP members as unlikely to be simple, quick, or cheap. Some of the issues being discussed as this report is completed include the following:

- Schools have returned to as near "normal" as possible from the Spring of 2021, but educational professionals are aware that circumstances across much of their practice are not as they were prior to March 2020. Exam and testing regimes are under continued critical scrutiny, placing pupils and teachers into extended periods of uncertainty and stress. Schools are acutely aware children from some vulnerable families have been slow to return or may not do so at all, and that both sporadic attendance and elective home education are on the rise. This is an ongoing issue that partners are aware will need to be addressed vigorously, potentially over the long haul. These issues are national as well as local. The same is true of the "stop-start" and poorly funded nature of what government continues to call "catch-up" activities in school which have been through their own difficulties in 2021, and which school leaders prefer to think of in more rounded and social terms than simply offering more formal lessons in longer school days. As this report is written, the uncertainty around these issues is still not entirely ironed out.
- There are, as national analyses also indicate, children and young people with special educational needs with or without disabilities, who need support beyond the resources available and whose situation may have been exacerbated by restrictions during the Covid 19 pandemic. There will be some whose planned appointments with medical staff were stood down whilst health services dealt with the pandemic, who will not recover as they might had services continued to be as available as they were pre-pandemic. It will take time for the picture to clarify and resource are not easy to increase to deal with the challenges concerned, but these matters are already on the agenda of schools, and the county's SEN/D and inclusion services. The potential for necessary expenditure to seriously outstrip even carefully managed resources is a real and ongoing risk, as is the continued pressure on health and social care services as well as educational ones to work with the child or young person and the family at the centre of both their concerns and their practice in SEN/D work.
- Rates of referrals into some higher-level services were initially lower during 2020 than in pre-pandemic times, across all agencies. This manifested in lower levels of children seen or reported as caught up in County Lines and other Criminal Exploitation, lower referral and self-referral in mental health services, and lower reported cases of domestic abuse and violence. All of these indicators of extreme vulnerability have resurfaced and are rising in frequency and complexity, and partners are experiencing this increase, and noting that in many cases there is a greater than usual prevalence of higher end, crisis level safeguarding, criminal justice, and mental health services activity, for all of which increase there is little or no corresponding rise in resources. There has also been the beginning of a rise in the need

for intervention in a minority of families which either struggled behind their own closed doors and did not ask for help during lockdown periods, or turned help away using Covid 19 in the home as an excuse for doing so.

- Reductions in some areas of work are now matched by rises in others, including a clear trend of some families coming to services' notice and needing help or intervention when they were not "on the radar" pre-pandemic. These include families where a child has developed an eating disorder which has worsened beyond the reach of earlier or lower-level support and requires serious clinical intervention; and a noted rise, echoed nationally, in very young children who are pre-mobile being affected by non-accidental injuries, inflicted by adults responsible for their care.
- The increase in family poverty caused by adults' job uncertainty and leading to a need for more access to free school meals or other practical support, added to some families dealing with state benefit difficulties or housing problems and in worsening poverty, all affect some children's lives far more than others. Partners are all acutely aware that these issues require an all-agency response, and the Executive and its subgroups are furnished with data analysis and trends that help their discussions about developing the appropriate responses countywide.
- If referrals discussed in previous sections continue to rise but financial resources to fund services stay at pre-pandemic levels, there will be ever harder decisions to make in localities, and potentially a growth in children's and young people's unmet needs – itself a predictor of safeguarding difficulties in some families. Decision makers, policy and service shapers, and all of the Partnership's many agencies, will need to be kept aware both of these externally driven but locally felt circumstances, and the need to shape services so that inter-agency and multi-disciplinary learning is built on. This will require sustained commitment and may not be easy to maintain once the post-pandemic period is properly underway. Resources to deal with new challenges are likely to have been depleted during 2020-2021. This includes in voluntary sector bodies, whose losses in funding may mean their ability to be delivery partners is severely curtailed, as NYSCP Executive has already discussed in some detail.
- What will need to happen to address these many issues could be complex, and will require the input of leaders, staff, children and young people themselves, and the county's adult citizens. It is clear detailed planning, and a readiness to act as swiftly and in as close a partnership as has become the hallmark of Covid 19's ways of working, will be needed.
- There is an additional layer of risk of which all partners are aware, broadly categorised as continued organisational change that could destabilise progress, the key ones of which are summed up below. Together and taken cumulatively they must be recorded as presenting present considerable challenges to an already-busy and sometimes stretched system in all public services and their partner bodies. All of them should therefore be noted as potential risks to the smooth, efficient and effective operation of safeguarding and other services for children and young people, though the will to get them all right and keep things safe and on track is impressive and determined across North Yorkshire.

- The Assistant Chief Constable who has been a fundamental part of and determined leader in the Police Service's contributions to NYSCP, retires as this report is finalised. The interim replacement to the ACC role is known to partners and is warmly welcomed by them, but there will be period of continued uncertainty regarding the likely arrival of a substantive post holder. This could be at least a year away from publication of this report, or perhaps even longer.
- A new PFCC was elected in May 2021 and needs both to learn the intricacies, requirements and boundaries of the role, and what partnership working will require of him and his team going forward into 2021-2022 and beyond. The OFPCC is a significant commissioner of a range of services, some of which directly impact on the lives and life chances of groups of vulnerable children and young people, and NYSCP will need to ensure communication is effective and clear so that the work of services across the county is enhanced by what the OFPCC's commissioning budget can fund.
- The potential for local government reorganisation creating periods of uncertainty cannot be underestimated, however carefully managed any changes may be. Such change again is unlikely to happen at speed and planning will need to take into account what it will mean once all concerned are clearer about what is or is not going to happen during 2022-2023.
- What might broadly be termed the Health economy is undergoing a great deal of what some experts in it are calling seismic change as CCGs are stood down, far bigger sub-regional Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) take their place at commissioning levels, and locality-based or place-shaping health alliances and providers' collaboratives step in to configure and deliver services, tailored to evidenced community and locality needs rather than heavily centrally driven. The current situation in the midst of this change process remains at least in part unknown, both because NHS England is saying less than localities need to know and act on about the balance of relationships between centre and localities, and because all partners will need to step in alongside Health service professionals and governance bodies to make the new health landscape work. The change is being handled, managed, led and delivered by senior professionals already more than fully occupied with the jobs they were already doing. The pace of required planning and readiness is fast, but relatively unsupported from the centre. These factors taken together mean, as health economy leaders have been clear, that risks abound in trying to land what North Yorkshire needs in physical and mental health services for people of all ages and for NYSCP, particularly children and young people.

MY WORK IN 2021-2022

A pattern of meetings was established in diaries beginning in September 2019 and has worked well to date. In 2021-2022 I will continue to chair the Executive and to attend, observe at, and note the contents of and decisions made at meetings of every subgroup, on a cycle matched to busy diaries.

It is important, given my opening remarks on the "missing pieces of the jigsaw" at present, that together we ensure my scrutiny encompasses more than the current NYSCP subgroups if the picture I then present on 2021-2022 is as full as it can be in the first year of "Being Young in North Yorkshire 2021-2024." This may mean adjustments to diaries and potentially an increase in days

per year assigned to my work. Given savings are currently made by my not having to travel or add other out of pocket expenses, this should not be beyond possibilities but will need to be agreed.

For as long as NYSCP's work goes on being done largely on a virtual basis, there are limits on what else can be done with the remainder of days on which the Executive or subgroups meet. Were visits and scrutineer days once again face to face, there would be greater potential to undertake additional meetings in the other halves of days. Such meetings could usefully take place with:

- Those at Chief Executive or equivalent decision-making levels in Statutory Partner bodies, as envisaged in Sir Alan Wood's Spring 2021 review of the new Partnership arrangements and as Working Together 2018 also envisages. *To note; I already meet on a regular Keeping in Touch basis with the DCS and the County Council's CEO. 2021-2022 should expand these KiT arrangements to embrace the CCGs and the OFPCC.*
- Relevant Agencies' leaders, governance, and managerial staff: principals and head teachers, governors, leaders in community or faith organisations, those working in programme, service or team manager roles in services, and so on.
- Representatives of children and young people, particularly when they are involved in decision making
- Others as partners and agencies deem fit

I will continue to facilitate full NYSCP Partnership Days. These will be virtual events for the duration of Covid 19 regulations, and for however long afterwards partners see fit, given returns to face to face event-based or large group meetings will take time. The Partnership days will, as they do now, consist of all-participant co-appraisals of progress, and Partnership members' reflections on it, plus opportunities for all attendees to be part of learning and information exchanges. There is also a planned Safeguarding Week, reaching across the County, the City of York, and their widest possible LSCPs' footprints, in late June 2021. This will include my participation and contributions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER'S ASSURANCE STATEMENT

As both Executive Chair and Independent Scrutineer, I present this end of year report as a snapshot in time, not as a definitive document. I have attended, virtually through Microsoft Teams, both the Executive and every subgroup as an active participant observer. All are running well, and the commitment to ensure they continue to do so has not broken stride, despite the pressures under which every service and staff team are working. I have also kept track of the NYSCP's website materials and its offers of support and guidance to all who may need it.

I conclude that the Partnership and the agencies and services which belong and account to it are compliant with Working Together 2018. All concerned are aware that communications both within and between partner bodies need to go on being a focus for concentration and continuous improvement, to avoid duplication and to ensure that all the key safeguarding themes with which NYSCP engages are in the consciousness, and influence the work, of all services and agencies in the county.

I conclude by being able to give assurance that the Partnership is running as it should, and that people across all agencies remain committed to making it work successfully. I look forward to continuing to work with, chair the Executive of and independently scrutinise the Partnership, and I express my hope that at some point in 2021-2022, on whatever limited a basis, at least some of the work can take place face to face given the limitations of the virtual environment. Partnership members have expressed a similar wish, given that although online working is proving efficient and productive, there is a great deal missing when the human factor of being in the same space to tackle the same issues is lost.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Atkinson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Maggie Atkinson

**Chair of the Executive and Independent Scrutineer,
North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP)**

APPENDIX 1

MY WORK, SET AGAINST NATIONAL REQUIREMENTS ON THE NYSCP

Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASAs) such as NYSCP are bound by statutory guidance in “Working Together the Safeguard Children” (2018, updated but not radically changed in 2020.) This is clear the MASA does not work in isolation but is part of any locality’s broader, all-agency means of ensuring citizens’ wellbeing. The central tenets are below.

“Working Together” 2018, Chapter 3 states:

The purpose of local arrangements is to support and enable local organisations and agencies to work together in a system where:

- children are safeguarded and their welfare is promoted
- partner organisations and agencies collaborate, share and co-own the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children
- organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively
- there is early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats
- learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice
- information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families.

In order to work together effectively, the safeguarding statutory partners, with other local organisations and agencies, should develop processes that:

- facilitate and drive action beyond usual institutional and agency constraints and boundaries
- ensure the effective protection of children is founded on practitioners developing lasting and trusting relationships with children and their families

Effective arrangements link to other strategic partnership work locally that supports children and families, including other public boards: Health and Wellbeing Boards, PFCCs’ boards and panels, Adult Safeguarding Boards, Channel Panels, Improvement Boards, Community Safety Partnerships, the Local Family Justice Board and MAPPAs. (This list is not exhaustive.)

Strong leadership is critical for arrangements to be effective in bringing together organisations and agencies. It is important that the lead representative from each of the three safeguarding partners plays an active role. The lead representatives for safeguarding partners are: the local authority chief executive, the accountable officer of a clinical commissioning group, and a chief officer of police.¹

All three safeguarding partners have equal and joint responsibility for local safeguarding arrangements. In situations that require a clear, single point of leadership, all three safeguarding partners should decide who would take the lead on issues that arise.

¹ Sir Alan Wood in his recently published report remains of the opinion that Chief Executives of LAs, Chief Constables and Accountable Officers of CCGs should sit on Partnership Executives in person. It is my view that this is untenable, given the breadth, depth and coverage of their respective roles; and that the levels of delegation to very senior Officers who lead the actual work is appropriate, so long as they can assure each other and me that their Chief Executive level post-holders are regularly and clearly informed of the NYSCP’s work.

Should the lead representatives delegate their functions they remain accountable for any actions or decisions taken on behalf of their agency. If delegated, it is the responsibility of the lead representative to identify and nominate a senior officer in their agency to have responsibility and authority for ensuring full participation with these arrangements.

The representatives, or those they delegate authority to, should be able to:

- speak with authority for the safeguarding partner they represent
- take decisions on behalf of their organisation or agency and commit them on policy, resourcing and practice matters
- hold their own organisation or agency to account on how effectively they participate and implement the local arrangements