Cheshire East and Cheshire West Safeguarding Adult Boards Quality Assurance Framework July 2025
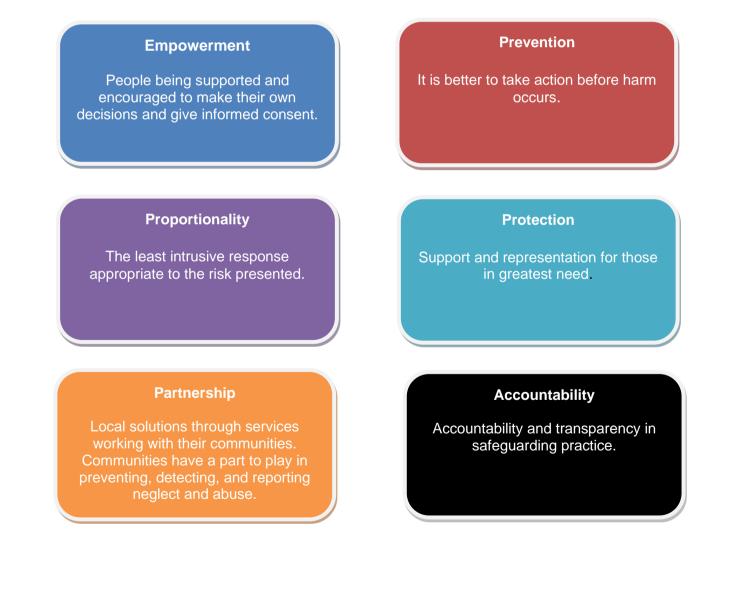
The Quality Assurance sub groups of the Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Safeguarding Adult Boards (S A B s) h ave developed this Quality Assurance Framework to give assurance that both SABs and their constituent partner agencies have effective systems, structures, processes, and practices in place to improve outcomes and experiences in the context of safeguarding adults at risk.

This Quality Assurance Framework is also a key mechanism by which the SABs hold local agencies to account for their safeguarding work, including prevention and risk management.

Introduction

Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Safeguarding Adults Boards have a duty to ensure the effectiveness of what organisations and agencies do in order to safeguard and promote the safety and wellbeing of adults at risk. Effective work in this area will contribute towards achieving better outcomes for adults at risk and protect from significant harm.

This framework has been developed taking account of the Care Act 2014 and is underpinned by the six safeguarding principles:

Empowerment	**Prevention**
People being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and give informed consent.	It is better to take action before harm occurs.

Proportionality	**Protection**
The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.	Support and representation for those in greatest need.

Partnership	**Accountability**
Local solutions through services working with their communities. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting, and reporting neglect and abuse.	Accountability and transparency in safeguarding practice.

National context

The Care Act 2014 has provided a statutory framework for adult safeguarding, setting out the responsibilities of local authorities, their partners and those with whom they work, to protect adults with care and support needs from abuse and neglect.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) offers the following guidance to SABs in relation to quality assurance:

The SABS should seek assurance of the effectiveness of safeguarding activity and that safeguarding practice is continuously improving and enhancing the quality of life for adults with care and support needs and carers in its area, in line with Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP). This should address issues of quality as well as quantity, particularly from the perspective of those who have experienced safeguarding services.

Association of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and the Local Government Association (LGA)

This framework reflects the ***Standards for Adult Safeguarding*** (ADASS; LGA, Dec 2012) and also reflects messages in relation to Safeguarding Adults Boards set out in the ADASS paper ***Safeguarding Adults: Advice and Guidance to Directors of Adult Social Services*** (ADASS; LGA, March 2013).

In June 2013 ADASS published ***Making effective use of data and information to improve safety and quality in adult safeguarding*** which provides ten tips in relation to Safeguarding Adults Boards effectively using data and information to improve safety and quality in safeguarding adults:

1. Spend time on making sure data and information supplied is useful
2. Interrogate the data and information presented
3. Beware of overwhelming people with data and information
4. Use and develop the mechanisms you have
5. Have sound protocols in place to share data and information
6. Establish a method to share concerns about regulated health and social care services
7. Use community safety data and information
8. Route concerns to the right place
9. Find ways to support staff that may need it
10. Make data and information, like safeguarding, everybody's business

NHS

NHS England produced a ***Safeguarding Accountability and Assurance Framework 2022,*** states that NHS organisations – whether as commissioners or providers of NHS funded care – must demonstrate strong local leadership, work as committed partners, and invest in

effective co-ordination and robust quality assurance of safeguarding arrangements.

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)

The guidance identified the following mechanisms for QA:

- data recording, analysis and reporting, case audits and SABs and agencies' self-audits and peer review
- safeguarding adult reviews
- practitioners' forums to share lessons from case audits and local good practice, from research and from safeguarding adult reviews
- holding member and partner agencies to account
- the management of large-scale investigations, serious incidents, complaints, grievances, disciplinary proceedings, whistleblowing and allegations of professional malpractice or unfitness to practice
- the implementation of 'Making safeguarding personal' at a local level and its impact on engagement and outcomes.
- SCIE advised SABs need a range of approaches to quality assurance to monitor the effectiveness both of their own work and that of their partner agencies. These should include:
- use of data collection analysis for a quantitative perspective
- self-audit tools
- qualitative reviews and audits.

Local Context

The Cheshire East and Cheshire West Safeguarding Adult Boards are a group of statutory, private, voluntary, and independent organisations across Cheshire East and Cheshire West who work together to empower and protect some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

The SAB'S provides the strategic leadership for safeguarding work and is committed to partnership working. The Board needs to assure itself that:

- local safeguarding arrangements are in place as defined by the Care Act 2014 and statutory guidance,
- safeguarding practice is person-centred and outcome-focused,
- agencies are working collaboratively to prevent abuse and neglect,
- agencies and individuals are providing a timely and proportionate response when abuse or neglect have occurred, and
- safeguarding practice is continuously improving and enhancing the quality of life of adults

in the area.

The remit of the Boards is not operational but one of co-ordination, planning and commissioning and contributes to the wider goals of improving the well-being of adults.

All partner organisations in Cheshire East and Cheshire West prioritise safeguarding with an approach based on promoting dignity, rights, respect, helping all people to feel safe and making sure safeguarding is everyone's business.

What is Quality Assurance?

Quality assurance is about assessing the quality of the work we undertake to safeguard adults at risk and understanding the impact of this work in terms of its effectiveness in helping to keep adults at risk safe. Effective quality assurance will contribute to a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

The primary role of quality assurance is to improve the quality of practice and safeguarding outcomes for adults at risk.

What is the QA Framework?

The framework is for strategic partnerships and individual organisations with safeguarding adults' responsibilities in Cheshire East and Cheshire West.

The framework is based on an 'Outcomes Based Accountability' (OBA) approach which will help those with leadership, senior management, or scrutiny responsibility for safeguarding adults to gain a better understanding of how safe adults at risk are in their services and communities by considering:

- What we do
- How well we do it – are partners working well to respond to safeguarding concerns?
- What impact we have made/is anyone better off? - do our safeguarding arrangements improve outcome for adults at risk and make a positive impact?

Types of data:

Quantitative – How much?

Qualitative – How well?

Outcomes – Have we made a positive impact?

There are three types of performance information and associated measures:

Quantitative information

This will help to inform *What we do.* It answers the questions: 'How much/how many?'

Qualitative information

This will tell us more about *How well we do it.* It is concerned with the functioning of the organisation, the quality of what was done

Outcome information

This tells us *What difference, or impact we have made* (through our services, strategies, and interventions) to the lives of safeguarding adults at risk.

Traditionally, quality assurance information in safeguarding has focused on quantitative information, with some qualitative information and little outcome information. The challenge is, over time, to increase the proportion and importance of outcome information as this constitutes what really matters, supported by qualitative information and then quantitative information.

The Quality Assurance Framework is also underpinned by the following principles:

- **Openness and transparency:** each agency within the SABs are likely to know where good practice, areas for development and risk lies in its own organisation. The SAB needs to be assured agencies have identified and acted upon risk and areas of development, or to be enabled to do so as a multi-agency Board. All partners must bring good practice, areas for development and risks to the table so that the Board can agree how they can be mitigated. Some will be single agency actions, and some will require multi-agency action.

- **Outcomes:** safeguarding arrangements should be person-centred, defined by the individual, outcomes-based and making a difference, in line with ***Making Safeguarding Personal*** – i.e., to what degree do our safeguarding arrangements deliver what is important to adults at risk and the outcomes they want to achieve.

- **Triangulation:** that different qualitative and quantitative information sources need to be compared and contrasted to cross-verify the data and validate any conclusions being drawn. This will enable the Board more confidently to understand whether arrangements are effective and making a positive difference.

- **Learning and Improvement:** What we do with the information collated is as important as the quality of information we collect. Therefore, the learning from quality assurance will

be shared with partners and used meaningfully to change practice and improve outcomes for clients and carers.

Sources of information

Information will come from the following sources

- Organisational performance / activity data
- Case Records
- Experiences of Practitioners
- Experiences of our people wo we support

Organisational performance / activity data and case records have been the two main sources of information used in safeguarding quality assurance. Whilst it is recognised that these are important and valuable sources, to get a full picture of what is really happening, it is important to capture the experience of client /carer/s, and the experience of frontline staff and managers.

All partner organisations will need to consider how they collate quantitative, qualitative and outcome- based information from the four sources to inform improvement activity in respect of their safeguarding practice.

Organisational performance / activity data

Clear, comprehensive range of performance information supports an understanding of effective safeguarding practice. It is at the heart of the drive to secure continuous improvement and delivery of high-quality services.

Case records

The case records held by an organisation, in whatever format, will be a rich source of information. Case record 'auditing' involves the systematic analysis of records by staff with relevant professional expertise, in order to glean the required information from a sufficient sample of cases to provide a picture of what is going on through gathering the case findings.

Peoples experiences

It is important to know how people feel they are treated by the professionals and agencies they interact with. If their experience of such interactions is negative, this is likely to have an adverse impact on outcomes. Understanding what matters in terms of engagement and interaction, and whether this is something they experience in reality (and therefore identifying what professionals and agencies need to get right) is something only adults at risk, families and carers can tell us.

The audit programme has Making Safeguarding Personal embedded into our thematic audits. The Boards Safeguarding Adult Review Panels has ensured adults at risk, or their family members have been given every opportunity to participate in our safeguarding adult reviews. Both Boards currently have a service user group which is a group of adults with care and support needs who share their experiences and advice in order that we can improve safeguarding practice.

In addition, we will seek to better establish links with existing, established groups and forums where adults with care and support needs can have their say, share their views, challenge and support the work of the SABs.

Practitioner experience and feedback

Practitioners will often know about the quality and impact of their own services, and those of partner agencies they work with. Safeguarding Adult Reviews have highlighted gaps between what is meant to happen in terms of policy and procedure, and what actually happens in practice. It is important to have a constant feedback loop from frontline practitioners to keep senior management and those with governance responsibilities 'reality-based;' not just in terms of what is or is not working, but to assist with ideas for improvement so that changes can be made systematically.

To gain assurance that policies and procedures are fit for purpose from the perspective of operational staff, the SAB's gains feedback via several methods:

- Practitioner interviews within the scope of a thematic audit
- Contribution and engagement of operational practitioners at appropriate SAB
- task and finish groups
- Review of relevant sections of multi and individual agency annual reports
- Review of relevant section of individual agency and the SABs annual reports

Audit

The SAB's have a vital role in quality assuring safeguarding practice in Cheshire East and

Cheshire West. To achieve this, we will regularly review or audit safeguarding cases involving multi-agency working to ensure that practice is effective, improving outcomes, focused on adults at risk and that any learning is identified and acted upon to improve service delivery and the outcomes for our local adults.

As part of the multi-agency audit process, the Board has to monitor and enable sharing of personal information between different agencies working with adults at risk. This information will only be shared with agency representatives nominated and accredited by Partners and kept secure at all times, including by using electronic information systems.

Using the SAB overarching Information Sharing Agreements, the following applies:

- Statutory provisions will often provide a legal gateway that will permit the sharing of personal information; however, the specific circumstances of each particular case should be taken into account when considering whether to share personal data.
- The sharing of personal information is not justified if the legal responsibilities could be met by the provision of anonymised information.
- Any information shared and the processes used to share such information will be compliant with the relevant Human Rights legislation.

Where it is deemed to be appropriate, achievable, and timely, consideration will be given to conducting joint thematic audits between Cheshire East and Cheshire West SABS or with other local multi-agency boards in each area such as the Children's Safeguarding Partnerships, Domestic Abuse Boards and Community Safety Partnerships.

Establishing an area of practice to be considered for audit

Audits may be identified through partner practice findings, Safeguarding Adult Review process; other subgroups; and/or other areas as identified by the partnership and through our Boards Business Plans. Findings from joint or single agency inspectorate reports and recommendations will also inform the area of practice to be audited. The Quality Assurance subgroups will develop an annual calendar of audits, which will be approved by the SABs.

The Quality Assurance Framework

Elements of the framework

1. **SABs Self-assessment** of strategic and organisational arrangements to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of Adults at Risk. This self-assessment tool provides all organisations in Cheshire East and Cheshire West with an annual framework to assess monitor and improve their Safeguarding Adults arrangements.

2. **Data/Performance** – a range of data will be required from partner agencies/organisations on a quarterly basis to inform our Performance Report. The aim is to use this information to enable the SAB to understand the prevalence of abuse/ neglect, highlight themes and trends in safeguarding activity, and identify issues that need addressing in safeguarding arrangements. The information should cover trends in reported abuse, partnership working to respond to safeguarding concerns, and outcomes. As far as data from across the safeguarding partnership that is already collected and used by individual agency management teams to monitor the effectiveness of their individual safeguarding arrangements, will be used.

3. **Memorandum of Understanding / Duty of Candour** – the Boards Quality Assurance Framework places a duty of candour on all partner agency/organisation – this in practice will mean there is an expectation that all partner agencies and organisations will notify their relevant Board of any issues of concern– such as poor regulatory inspection outcome, safeguarding adult reviews, issues that might attract media attention, and any other pertinent information.

4. **User experience** – understanding their journey. All partner agencies should have processes in place to understand the adult at risks experience of their service. Both SABs are interested in adults with care and support needs experiences of our safeguarding adults' processes – therefore this framework places a duty on agencies/ organisations to ascertain people's safeguarding experience and report them to the Boards, via the QA Subgroup, so that their experiences can inform the work of the Boards.

5. **Training/Competency** – ensuring training is sufficient, positively impacts on practice and in turn improves outcomes for adults with care and support needs and early help and prevention in Cheshire East and Cheshire West, and staff working with adults with care and support needs are skilled and competent across all sectors. The SAB Training and Development Hub will lead on this area of work and feed back into the Boards.

6. **Single agency audits** – each partner agency must have in place auditing arrangements to assess the quality of their day-to-day safeguarding adults' work. The QA Subgroups will ask, annually, to review such arrangements or ask partners to share findings.

7. **Multi-agency audits** - each year the QA Subgroups will review and update a Quality Assurance work plan for approval by the SAB'S. Three times a year the QA Subgroups will undertake themed audits, as proposed in the work plan. Wherever possible the experience of adults at risk will be a key factor.

8. **Complaints and compliments**- each partner agency must have in place arrangements for monitoring complaints and compliments to ensure safeguarding issues are identified and responded to early and quickly.

9. **Safeguarding Adult Reviews** - will also assist us to review the effectiveness of procedures and identify lessons learnt and areas for improvement. The QA subgroups will monitor progress against action plans and assurances will be provided to the SAB'S on completion.

10. **Annual Report** – Both SAB'S will publish, an annual report to highlight achievements, objectives, strategies, and priorities throughout the year. It will also include the findings of any Safeguarding Adults Reviews concluded in that year.

11. **Business plans** - the Quality Assurance subgroup will monitor and update the actions in the Board's business plans.

Learning and Improvement

Learning will be linked to the following areas:
- Training
- Impact
- Team Meetings
- Workforce planning and development
- Policy and procedure
- Commissioning
- Supervision
- Partner agency action plans
- SAB'S Business Plan
- Workshops/briefing sessions
- Training and Development Subgroups

Briefings to share learning from multi-agency activity will be distributed across the Board.

Roles and Responsibilities

Individual agencies and organisations include all statutory members of the board are responsible for:

- Their own quality assurance activity in relation to safeguarding
- Supplying information and data as required by this framework
- Ensuring appropriate representation on the QA Subgroups
- Participating the three times per year multi-agency audits as defined by the QA Subgroups
- Notifying the SAB'S on any areas of concern – poor regulatory inspection outcome with regards safeguarding
- Request a Safeguarding Adult Review, as appropriate

Quality Assurance Sub group

On the SABs behalf, these sub groups will be responsible for the co-ordination and management of the quality assurance framework. The Quality Assurance Subgroups will provide quarterly Chair sub group reports to members of the SAB'S.

Other SABs Sub groups

Each of the sub groups has a different remit with the consistent theme of understanding and achieving better outcomes for adults at risk.

Each Sub group is expected to work within this Quality Assurance Framework and:

- Provide data, information and reports as required by this framework.
- Respond to and receive requests.
- Participate in audits as directed by the Quality Assurance group.

12. Both SABs oversee the effectiveness of the arrangements made by individual agencies and the wider partnership to safeguard adults from abuse and is responsible for challenging all relevant organisations on their performance in ensuring that adults at risk are kept safe in Cheshire East and Cheshire West.

The SABs will:

- Receive quarterly reports from the Quality Assurance group.
- Receive and scrutinise agreed performance information.
- Participate in SAB development events with a focus on quality assurance.
- Ensure the SAB Quality Framework informs the Business Plan.