



# executive summary **the impact of safeguarding children peer reviews**

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The Local Government Association (LGA) and Children's Improvement Board (CIB) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out an evaluation of the Safeguarding Children Peer Reviews. The evaluation built on a previous study carried out by NFER which explored the Safeguarding Children Peer Review process (Martin and Jeffes, 2011). Given the increase in number of LAs experiencing difficulties and/or in intervention and requesting a peer review, the CIB and the LGA wished to focus this new study on exploring the impact of the peer review process on authorities with a Notice to Improve.



## Key findings

The safeguarding peer reviews met the global aims and objectives of the five local authorities participating in this study, providing the necessary external scrutiny they required. The evaluation shows that, typically, LAs in intervention engage in a safeguarding children peer review in order to: obtain an external perspective on the quality of safeguarding services; assess progress made in improving safeguarding services, and; identify and confirm areas for development to support future progression planning and prepare for forthcoming inspections. Peer reviews were conducted in a formal and professional manner and the review findings were typically in line with what was anticipated by LAs involved. Reviews provided staff with the necessary validation and reassurance to support their improvement journey.

It was common for partners including the police, health and the voluntary sector, to engage in some aspect of the safeguarding peer review process. Furthermore, the peer review process is seen as a valuable mechanism for bringing partners together and helping to facilitate future partnership working.

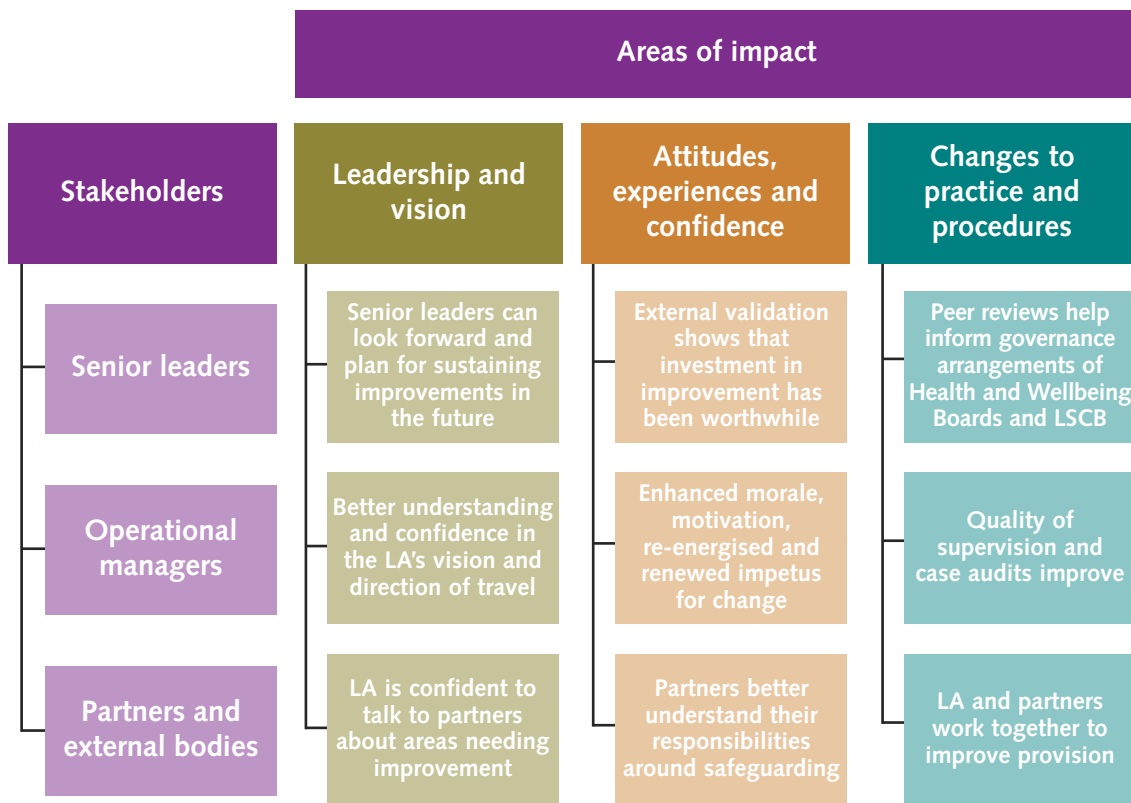
Interviewees reported that the safeguarding peer review methodology works well and can be tailored sufficiently to the needs of a LA in intervention. The key features considered to be of particular importance in shaping the success of the reviews include the flexible format and nature of the review methodology; the experience and approach of the peer review team and the organisational commitment, openness and transparency of the host local authority.

By contrast, very few interviewees identified aspects of the safeguarding peer review programme that meant its success was limited. Features perceived to work less well, however, included whether the timeframe of the safeguarding peer reviews allowed sufficient time for the review team to delve into the level of detail the host required and to reflect on the emerging findings; ensuring an appropriate match of peers and review teams to individual authorities' structure and settings and the timing and format of the feedback process to ensure findings can be shared with staff and partners, reflected and acted upon.

While it can be difficult to attribute change directly to one intervention, the reported areas of impact and the stakeholders that benefited from the peer review are summarised in the diagram overleaf.

The findings from this research corroborate those from the previous safeguarding peer review study (Martin and Jeffes, 2011). The safeguarding peer review approach appears to be suitably flexible to allow authorities in intervention and those who are not, to achieve a successful outcome. For both types of authorities, the peer review is shown to increase commitment and drive to improve; inform, support and legitimise the development of plans, actions, policies and systems; promote learning and reflective practice; improve staff morale and relations; affirm and enhance the quality of partnership working; help LA, council and partner seniors leaders understand safeguarding children issues and how to overcome areas of weakness, and; provide the opportunity to develop longer term relationships between the peer review team and the LA receiving the review.

For authorities contemplating involvement in a peer review, the following areas are identified for their consideration: embrace the peer review process and adopt an open approach; ensure buy-in from corporate leaders, partners, senior leaders and independent boards; establish a key focus; ensure the peer review takes place at an appropriate point in time and compliments the timeframes of formal inspection processes; ensure an appropriate peer review team; allow for sufficient preparation; manage the message to staff and partners before the review and when feeding back the findings, and; action the findings.



## Methods

Telephone interviews were carried out with 25 staff from across five LAs who were at different stages of intervention. The LAs comprise three counties, a metropolitan and a unitary. Interviews took place with a range of LA officers, councillors and staff from partner organisations. Interviews took place during January and February 2012.

## Further information

For more information about this report visit [www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGIS01](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGIS01) or email Claire Easton [c.easton@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:c.easton@nfer.ac.uk)



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