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MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE **Wednesday 2 July 2025 at 6.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Ketan Sheth (Chair), and Councillors Afzal, Clinton, Ethapemi, Mistry, and T. Smith, and co-opted members Ms Rachelle Goldberg and Mr Alloysius Frederick

In attendance: Councillor Gwen Grahl, Councillor Neil Neva

1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

- Councillor Chohan
- Councillor Aden
- Archdeacon Catherine Pickford
- Nigel Chapman
- Rachel Crossley

2. Declarations of interests

Personal interests were declared as follows:

- Councillor Ketan Sheth – Lead Governor of Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust and governor at a number of educational settings.
- Councillor Ethapemi – governor for Brentfield Primary School
- Alloysius Frederick – Chair of governors for All Saints Trust, consisting of a number of Brent schools

3. Deputations (if any)

There were no deputations received.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2025 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. Matters arising (if any)

There were no matters arising.

6. Brent Safeguarding Adults Board (Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements) Annual Report April 2024 - March 2025

Nicola Brownjohn (Independent Chair of the Brent Safeguarding Adults Board) introduced the Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report which covered the reporting period from April 2024 to March 2025. She advised the Committee that this had been her first full year as Independent Chair, and her role was to support the Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) in gaining assurance about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements for adults in Brent. She added this was done through various subgroups, focused on 3 strategic

priorities agreed by the SAB in January 2024 which would continue until 2026. These priorities were; self-neglect; substance misuse and housing; and learning from Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs).

In outlining the activity for 2024-25, Nicola Brownjohn advised that the report demonstrated the work done to strengthen the governance of the Board through the development of additional subgroups such as a Performance and Audit Subgroup to look at data focusing on specific areas to inform the work of the Board. Outstanding SARs had now been completed, where there had been a backlog before she had joined, and partner agencies had come together to complete a self-assessment, as detailed in the report.

The Committee was advised that Nicola Brownjohn used appreciative enquiry to assure herself of arrangements, working with the three strategic partners – Integrated Care Board, Police and Adult Social Care – to look at what was working well and what needed improvement. Her reflections over the past year, as detailed in the report, were that the Board was working well together with good attendance at meetings, stronger governance, and more impactful learning from SARs with a better quality of reports coming through. For example, learning from Adult G's SAR identified the need to utilise the High-Risk Panel more, which featured in some other SARs, and now there was evidence that the High-Risk Panel was being used well from a multi-agency perspective.

The last year, the SAB had begun development of a Community Engagement Project, looking at how to improve community voice on the Board, and Nicola Brownjohn expressed appreciation to Healthwatch for the work they had done to help that project progress. The past year, the SAB had also improved its focus on transitional safeguarding and identified 3 cohorts to focus on; those with additional needs, care leavers, and those at risk of exploitation. There was an aim to establish and embed transitional safeguarding into the work of the SAB the following year.

Claudia Brown (Director of Adult Social Care, Brent Council) agreed that the SAB was working well, with an increased number of subgroups, which was resulting in an improvement in learning from SARs. She assured the Committee that there were structures in place to deliver learning and feedback from various stakeholders outlining what they had done as a result of learning from SARs. Both Sue Sheldon (Assistant Director for Safeguarding, NWL ICB) and Will Lexton-Jones (Detective Superintendent – NW BCU Met Police) agreed and emphasised the improved learning from SARs.

In concluding the introduction, Councillor Neil Nerva (as Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Leisure) thanked Nicola Brownjohn for the work she had done as Chair of SAB, highlighting the difficult task of managing a complex partnership with a range of organisations. He highlighted the value of the partnership at a place-based level.

The Chair thanked presenters for their introduction and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following issues raised:

The Committee recognised the positives in the report and introduction, noting the comments about improved learning, and asked what lessons had been learned over the past year. Nicola Brownjohn highlighted that learning had helped confirm that mental health and housing were the right priorities for the SAB, particularly the importance of housing that was appropriate for individuals with drug or alcohol misuse, who were self-neglecting, or developing long-term chronic illnesses and unable to live independently. As a result of that learning, more thorough work with Housing was taking place, and the SAB was receiving regular reports relating to adults with substance misuse and their housing. Work was also being done with Public Health around housing need and substance misuse.

As a supplementary, the Committee asked where the police had a role in safeguarding those with substance misuse and how the partnership came together in these cases. Nicola Brownjohn explained that, for the particular SAR that was commissioned in relation to substance misuse, the police had not been involved in that. However, the SAB had worked with the Safer Brent Partnership where further work with the police was being undertaken around cuckooing, which linked closely with this theme.

In terms of learning from SARs, Claudia Brown added that a lot of themes that came out of SARs were around communication, partnership working, and ensuring there were processes and pathways for communication. She felt the SAB was now bringing organisations together well through Lunch and Learn sessions, 7-minute briefings, and feedback collected from partner organisations to highlight what had changed as a result of a particular SAR which was then fed back to the SAB and monitored over a period of time.

The Committee highlighted the need to see a more detailed assessment of the improvements made over the last year, and trends over time across a three year period, so that they could track improvements and monitor KPIs. Nicola Brownjohn advised that a subgroup had been established to look at performance, feeding specific data into the SAB, such as around self-neglect. Alongside the performance data that was now being fed in, she also got her assurance of improvements through talking with communities and practitioners and testing out whether the learning was being taken forward. Sue Sheldon added that the Integrated Care Board (ICB) worked closely with all health providers in Brent and saw the learning embedded when undertaking supervision and training. In relation to self-neglect, there was evidence of an increased awareness of and identification of self-neglect, and the Safeguarding Health Outcome Framework showed an increase in referrals for self-neglect which had previously been low, showing an increased awareness of the signs of self-neglect as a result of learning.

In terms of working as a partnership, the Committee asked how partners could evidence the multi-agency ethos having been embedded in the arrangements and organisations' understanding of the value of working collectively as a partnership. Will Lexton-Jones advised that attendance at statutory meetings and contributions to them was evidence that partners were committed to a multi-agency ethos with strong representation at all levels. Darren Jones (Director of Nursing, NWL ICB) added that the ICB had established a quality group where all partners across NWL came together to talk about quality and what work should be taken forward as a system, such as through 7-minute learnings which were shared across NWL, including Brent. He felt that Brent and NWL had a very open learning environment, and partners were honest where things had not gone well and took learning on board. Claudia Brown provided another example of multi-agency learning through the High-Risk Panel, which was now seeing appropriate referrals from all agencies whereas before it was not.

In response to what partners would want to see from each other to make the partnership more effective, Will Lexton-Jones advised that he would want to see closer working with neighbourhood colleagues to take localism and expertise into neighbourhoods, and with Detective Superintendent Tony Bellis now leading on neighbourhoods he felt that there was potential to develop some greater investment through working closer with Neighbourhood Teams. In addition, he saw co-location as preferable where affordable. Many of these changes were dependent on a Met-wide position.

Regarding sections 3.2.8 and 3.2.9 of the report, which detailed the joint work between children's and adult safeguarding looking at transitional safeguarding, the Committee asked what the current relationship between the Chair of SAB and Independent Scrutineer of the Safeguarding Children Partnership Arrangements was. Nicola Brownjohn highlighted that transitional safeguarding was a joint project between children's and adults safeguarding, and

she met regularly with the Independent Scrutineer for Safeguarding Children. Recently a seminar had been held for practitioners and managers to analyse transitional safeguarding arrangements. She was also leading a joint case review looking at the 3 particular cohorts of focus in more detail. Keith Makin (Brent Safeguarding Children Partnership Independent Scrutineer) echoed the points, emphasising the importance of transitional safeguarding, particularly for care experienced young people, where national experience demonstrated that many young people got lost in the system when transitioning to adulthood.

The Committee asked whether there were any common themes being identified for children and adults in the transitional safeguarding workstream. Nicola Brownjohn advised that, of the 3 cohorts being focused on (care leavers, young people with additional needs, and young people at risk of exploitation), it was likely that some of those children and young adults would feature across all 3 cohorts. When more information and analysis was available on that, it would be presented to the joint executive, who would then agree what needed to be embedded for 2026. Claudia Brown added that Adult Social Care now had a process where particularly vulnerable individuals were supported through the transitional pathway once they reached 18. The original focus of that had been on those with SEND, but this was now being expanded to children who were looked after where it was evident they would need additional support, such as those at risk of radicalisation.

The Committee noted the increase in self-neglect high risk cases, and asked how confident the Chair was that all partners were working together to ensure individuals were not falling through the net. Nicola Brownjohn explained that a previous SAR from several years ago, INDIRA, had identified that different agencies had been involved with the person and self-neglect had been normalised. The impact of that SAR had been to enhance the High-Risk Panel and focus on escalation guidance. She added that the SAB would not know about the gaps but expected awareness raising by everyone, to be assured that if someone identified self-neglect then it would be taken to the appropriate agency.

The Committee highlighted that there had been several high-profile national incidents related to safeguarding in the media over the past 12 months, and asked for assurance that the learning from those national cases was fed into the partnership boards. Nicola Brownjohn assured the Committee that learning from national cases did feed through the partnership. She advised that a ministerial letter about rough sleeping deaths now required Boards to consider this a safeguarding issue, and she had been impressed by how Brent's partnership had come together to build a process around that with a Lead on rough sleeping deaths now sitting on the Board.

The Committee also asked how the SAB learned from other boroughs and whether the SAB actively worked with other boroughs around this. Nicola Brownjohn advised that Brent's Annual Report was created much earlier than other Boards, so currently there was no benchmarking data that Brent could compare with other areas, but she confirmed there was learning from other Boards.

In terms of how the SAB and Chair was engaging with the community voice, the Committee heard that a project with Healthwatch was ongoing, looking at how community voice could be represented at SAB. Healthwatch had helped identify some cohorts to reach out to, and as a result the Chair had visited a Dementia Café, Autism Café and a group of Somali women. She hoped more work would be done with Brent Health Matters and Healthwatch to identify other groups and identify any gaps. Nicola Brownjohn explained that, initially, those groups had been reticent to talk about safeguarding, but by the end of the sessions they were more open and feeding back in a helpful way.

The Chair asked Katherine Shaw (CEO, Healthwatch Brent) to reflect on the experiences of service users in relation to safeguarding. She advised that Healthwatch had seen

improvements this year in the strength of the partnership. One area of improvement from service users was around feedback, ensuring that when service users provided feedback they then heard about what had changed as a result. Nicola Brownjohn advised that the current community engagement project was underway but not yet completed, and confirmed that future work would include feedback to those communities. The project was due to finish in November, and she hoped an event would take place where the local community could be invited and that feedback could be shared.

In drawing the discussion to close, the Chair asked what the key emerging priorities for the SAB for the next 12 months were. Nicola Brownjohn explained that the current strategic plan would continue until 2026 and after that the priorities would be shaped through themes coming from SARs and the national picture.

As no further issues were raised the Chair thanked officers for their time and responses and invited members to make recommendations, with the following RESOLVED:

- i) To co-produce a SAB priority with those with lived experience.
- ii) To commission a multi-agency safeguarding awareness campaign.
- iii) For future reports to list learnings and how they have been addressed.
- iv) For future reports to reflect on national reviews and how they impact locally.

7. Brent Safeguarding Children Partnership (Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements) Annual Report April 2024 - March 2025

Keith Makin (Brent Safeguarding Children Partnership Independent Scrutineer) introduced the Brent Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report which covered the reporting period from April 2024 to March 2025. He recognised from the discussion on the Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report that the Committee would want more data and statistics included in future, which had been echoed by an LGA representative, and he would take that forward for future Annual Reports.

In introducing the report, Keith Makin advised that children's safeguarding arrangements were made up of a 3-way partnership between health, the police, and the local authority, which was legislated in statutory guidance. The role of the partnership was to seek assurance on safeguarding, learning from local and national events through various means. To do that, a new data dashboard had been developed which was available to the various groups the partnership oversaw, aided by an audit software system called PHEW.

Over the past year as Independent Scrutineer, Keith Makin had been developing plans to work more closely with children and young people and bring their voices into the partnership. He hoped to develop a system of young scrutineers working alongside him to scrutinise the whole children's partnership, and he had helped to introduce this arrangement in three other boroughs he worked with that Brent could learn from. The partnership was also working more closely with Community Safety, who were represented at the Safeguarding Children Forum and Case Review Group (CRG). The past year had also focused on ensuring Brent was compliant with Working Together 2023 guidance which partners were now assured of. This had resulted in some changes in governance to include Lead Safeguarding Partners who met twice yearly with high level representation from Brent Council's Chief Executive, NWL Integrated Care Board's Chief Executive, and the Borough Commander of NW BCU. Delegated Safeguarding Partners met more regularly as an Executive Group. The guidance had also recommended that partnerships treated education as a fourth partner, which the Delegated Safeguarding Partners were working to

introduce, and education was well represented at the Safeguarding Children Forum. He advised members of the recent Online Safety Task and Finish Group that the Forum had established, which would be a priority for the next year, as well as developing data and analysis further, hearing the voice of children and young people, neurodiversity, particularly masking behaviours amongst young girls, and transitional safeguarding.

In concluding the introduction, Councillor Gwen Grahl (as Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools) highlighted the recent restructure of children's social care in response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, which she felt evidenced how the Council and partners had responded to the recommendations of that. She felt there were strong professional relationships amongst the partnership with good professional curiosity, accountability and healthy challenge.

The Chair thanked the presenters for their introductions and invited the Committee to ask questions of the officers, with the following points raised:

The Committee asked how learning and behaviour change was embedded so that it led to positive outcomes. Keith Makin advised that the partnership learned from a number of different sources. For the reporting period, there had been no Rapid Reviews, but the partnership had reviewed its thresholds and how they compared with other boroughs and was satisfied that this was not a cause for concern. The partnership looked at other cases, for example had recently learned from a case where a child fell from a height and a 7-minute briefing was circulated, and another case which resulted in training for staff across health and social care. The partnership's multi-agency audit group had looked at cases surrounding mental health which had identified a need to focus on girls with autism who may be displaying masking behaviours which had resulted in services changing certain practices. Palvinder Kudhail (Director of Early Help and Social Care, Brent Council) added that partnership would always do the learning regardless of the level of risk or injury of a case. She advised that, when all relevant agencies involved in a family's life had been pulled together and presented information regarding the case, if the issue related to a single agency then the partners were specific about what the recommendation was and what would be done, including who would follow up and when. Where it was more than one agency or widespread, a follow up plan would be implemented alongside a further audit to test the learning. This could involve talking to frontline practitioners about what they had learned and built into their practice. For example, in relation to children falling from heights, the partnership knew through the Child Death Overview Panels of 5 London local authorities that there was a pattern emerging, so work was done on a pan-London level to review that and raise awareness, which was done through all possible outlets including Family Wellbeing Centres (FWCs). Where there were national issues, the partnership also considered and explored those to reassure themselves that a similar incident would not happen within Brent.

The Committee asked what specific learning had taken place from the Child Q Safeguarding Practice Review both at a national and local level. Will Lexton-Jones (Detective Superintendent, NW BCU, Met Police) advised that substantial learning had taken place on a Met-wide level. Firstly, learning was done around the specific case and the strengthening of the STIP process as a result of that, which had then been disseminated at an organisational level to ensure everyone knew the process. Secondly, learning had been done for the broader Child First Strategy that the Met was introducing to ensure a child-centric approach to how officers interacted with young people. This had involved a whole Met training programme for frontline delivery units. Palvinder Kudhail added that specific training on adultification had been offered to all agencies. A stop and search audit had also been done, looking at how partners worked together and ensured young people were dealt with appropriately, taking on board some of the lessons from the Child Q case.

The Committee raised Awaab's Law, which had been implemented following the death of a child due to poor housing conditions, and asked whether the partnership worked with housing colleagues, including from Housing Associations, in relation to safeguarding. Keith Makin advised that some discussions had taken place, but he felt that needed to be extended in order to be assured that the partnership was sited on what was happening within the whole housing sector, including private landlords and independent providers. Councillor Grahl felt that it was an important point regarding Housing Associations and she was working with Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) to set up a Forum for Housing Associations so that they could have a relationship with the Council.

The Committee asked how effective multi-agency working was in terms of prevention, specifically around issues such as county lines, grooming gangs and knife crime. Councillor Grahl acknowledged that these were legitimate problems within children's safeguarding that everybody needed to be aware of, and without multi-agency arrangements it would not be possible to respond to those issues. She reassured members that there was activity locally and nationally on all of those areas. For example, Baroness Casey had audited group-based child sexual exploitation recently, which Councillor Grahl had raised with officers and tabled a discussion to respond to the recommendations of that audit. Will Lexton-Jones added that there would be a Met-wide response to Baroness Casey's findings following a public enquiry.

In relation to online safety, Keith Makin advised that this was an emerging issue for children and young people, which was being recognised through audits and other mechanisms. It was also something that young people had told the partnership they wanted to focus on. As a Forum, a Task and Finish Group had been established to look into this, who were working with schools and designing a survey regarding mobile phone use in schools in order to establish a borough-wide approach to mobile phones in schools.

The Committee asked how well the partnership worked with other organisations such as Healthwatch and community sector organisations. Keith Makin advised that this was currently done through the Safeguarding Children Forum which included a lay member, which helped bring the partnership closer to the community. He acknowledged that having one person represent the whole of Brent was difficult, but the Forum was well engaged with schools and community organisations and was looking at bringing in more lay members. He had not yet worked with Healthwatch but intended to engage going forward. The Committee emphasised the importance of knowing the borough and community well, and highlighted other non-statutory partners the Chair could engage with such as football clubs and youth groups.

The Chair then invited representatives from Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) to contribute, who asked why all schools in the borough were not represented on the Brent Safeguarding Children Forum. Keith Makin acknowledged that he would want to have all schools across the borough represented at the Forum but it was not always possible to have that at one time. He felt that having young scrutineers would help with that as they would be able to directly engage with children and young people in schools. Palvinder Kudhail added that Brent had a very active Designated Safeguarding Lead Network, where issues and learning were shared, which was then fed back into the Forum.

As a supplementary, BYP representatives asked what the role of young scrutineers would be, what their impact would be and how they would be recruited. Keith Makin explained that the recruitment process had not yet been established but he had experience from other local partnerships of ways that had worked. He understood the need for representation across the borough and suggested co-designing the recruitment and role of the scrutineers with BYP and other young people. He envisaged that their role would be to sit on and contribute to partnership meetings to bring the voice of young people in and

ensure it was always in the room. He also foresaw young scrutineers influencing the annual report and how that was written. There was ambition to start this process in the current financial year.

The Chair drew the item to a close and invited members to make recommendations with the following RESOLVED:

- i) To recommend that the Committee have sight of the work being done around online safety.
- ii) To receive a future report looking at how services are supporting young people from a transitional safeguarding perspective who are vulnerable but do not meet the threshold for Adult Social Care.
- iii) To recommend an improvement in safeguarding support for youth organisations.
- iv) For the Independent Scrutineer to contact Healthwatch to see how they can support the work of the partnership.
- v) For future reports to include more data and KPIs.
- vi) Brent Youth Parliament recommended that the partnership reach out to different youth and community groups alongside schools.

8. Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Recommendations Tracker

The Committee noted the recommendations tracker.

9. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 8:15pm
Councillor Ketan Sheth, Chair