



Surrey Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB)

Serious Case Review and Learning Review Practice Guidance and Tool Kit

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Introduction

This document is designed to provide guidance to the Surrey Safeguarding Children Boards (SSCB) and professionals in the process of undertaking a Serious Case Review (SCR). Its focus is to support the carrying out of a SCR effectively, through supporting consistency in approach, providing additional guidance on undertaking the process and sharing learning and emerging good practice tools and exemplars. The overall aim is to maximise the learning that comes from the SCR in Surrey.

Regulation 5 of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) Regulations 2006 sets out the functions of LSCBs to undertake Serious Case Reviews, in accordance with the statutory guidance laid out in 'Working Together to safeguard Children 2006 and updated 2015.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 provides clear criteria in Chapter 4 about when LSCBs should conduct a Serious Case Review (SCR).

SSCB should consider whether to conduct a SCR where

- (a) abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected; and
- (b) either
 - (i) the child has died and there is cause for concern as to the way in which the authority, their Board partners or other relevant persons have worked together to safeguard the child
 - (ii) the child has been seriously harmed and there is cause for concern as to the way in which the authority, their Board partners or other relevant persons have worked together to safeguard the child.

The primary purpose of any case review is, including a serious case review is to drive forward improvements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This is done by;

- Establishing whether there are lessons to be learnt from the case about the way in which local professionals and organisations work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children
- Identifying clearly what those lessons are, how they will be acted on, and what is expected to change as a result,
- Highlighting good practice so that there is growing understanding of what works well as well as identifying improvement that need to be made to local service and/or to inter-agency working to better safeguard and promote the welfare of children

This guidance provides professionals in Surrey with a step by step guide of the process to follow when undertaking a SCR. It also outlines responsibilities for key people at every stage of the process and includes relevant documents that are required to be used during a serious case review.

1.0 How to instigate a Serious Case Review

In Surrey, the Strategic Case Review Group (SCRG) considers cases to decide whether or not a recommendation should be made to the Independent Chair of the Surrey Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) for a Serious Case Review to be held.

1.1 How to refer to the Strategic Case Review Group (SCRG)

Any agency can refer a case to the SCRG, requesting that consideration be given to holding a Serious Case Review (SCR). Cases may also be referred via the Rapid Response Team and the Coroner, where they feel the case may meet the requirements for a SCR.

Referrals should be sent to the SSCB Serious Case Review Administrator using the Form 1 - SCR Referral Form (Appendix 1). The SSCB Serious Case Review Administrator, once a referral is received will allocate a reference number to that referral and ensure that all subsequent documentation around that case will have the same reference number.

The SSCB Serious Case Review Administrator will inform the SSCB Chair, the SCRG Chair and the SSCB Partnership Manager that a referral has been received for SCR consideration. All agencies will also be asked to provide a skeleton chronology and a summary of information held in advance of the discussion at the SCRG. This will be recorded in the form in Appendix 2. The form will be disseminated with the child and family member details and agencies will be required to send information on all family members. The additional information from each agency will be submitted with the referral form to the next SCRG for consideration. In the event that a referral needs to be considered before the next scheduled SCRG meeting an additional meeting may be arranged.

Once it is known that a case is being considered for a review, each organisation must take action to ensure all records are available. Action must also be taken to guard against loss or interference of these records.

As meetings are held four to six weekly, if the next Panel is less than 48 hours away, Panel members will be requested to provide information for the subsequent meeting. In these cases consideration will be given to arranging an extra meeting to review the case due to the timing.

1.2 Decision to Undertake a Serious Case Review or Learning Review

The SCRG will consider the referral and the additional information received from each agency using the criteria set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015.

The SCRG will then make a recommendation to the SSCB independent Chair using the referral form (Appendix 1), clearly recording each group member's recommendation within one month from the date the referral was received.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 clearly states that the final decision to undertake a Serious Case Review rests with SSCB independent Chair who may seek peer challenge from another LSCB Chair when considering this decision.

If the SCR criteria are not met, the recommendation from the SCRG to the chair may still be to commission an SCR or to commission an alternative learning review. It must be clearly documented on the referral that consideration for an alternative review has taken place and an explanation of the outcome of that consideration recorded. It is likely that Ofsted and the National Panel will ask SSCB Chair to account for this decision. This information must be sent to Ofsted.

Once the SSCB Chair has considered the recommendation from the SCRG and has made a final decision, the chair will record the outcome on the referral form and return to the SCRG chair, SSCB Partnership Manager and Serious Case Review Administrator.

The SSCB must inform Ofsted, Department of Education and the National Panel of independent experts of their decision within five working days of the Chair decision. The SSCB Serious Case Review Administrator will coordinate a written response from the SSCB Chair, to the referrer and all Named professionals that provided the additional information (Appendix 2). This response will ensure that the reason for undertaking a SCR or not undertaking a SCR is clearly stated.

1.3 Decision for Alternative review

When a Case has been referred to the SCRG for SCR consideration and it is the decision of the SCRG that it does not meet the criteria for SCR an alternative review must be considered. The process of informing the SSCB chair of an alternative review and informing the agencies of the outcome of that decision does not change. Alternative learning reviews include;

- Partnership review
- Single Agency review
- Audit single and multi-agency

In certain cases, there will also be criminal proceedings. Those undertaking an SCR should have cognisance of any such proceedings and liaise with the relevant criminal justice agencies. However, the completion of a Review should not be delayed due to outstanding criminal matters. (See "A guide for the Police, the Crown Prosecution and Local Safeguarding Boards to assist with liaison and exchange of information, when there are simultaneous SCRs and Criminal proceedings 2011)

Partnership Review is a review that looks at the multi-agency working in an identified case when the case does not meet the criteria for a SCR but there are clearly some multi-agency learning needs identified.

The SCRG will identify a lead reviewer for this review who can be someone from within SSCB or an independent person. The SCRG and the lead reviewer will determine the terms of reference, timescales and the methodology to be adopted.

The lead reviewer will determine the format and /or content of information the agency must provide using the templates in the tool kit appended to this guidance or other formats/ resources more fitting to the review determined by the facilitator.

Single-Agency Review is a review of a case that is carried out by an individual agency. When a single agency review is recommended by the SCRG and SSCB Chair, the SSCB chair will write to the Lead for safeguarding within the agency identified requesting for that review to be undertaken. Agencies can choose the method they use to conduct the single agency review. Examples of methods include Root Cause Analysis reports or Internal Management Reports. The agency must inform the SSCB Chair and the SCRG of the method and timescales for the review. The findings and learning from a single agency review is shared with the SSCB Chair and SCR sub-group.

Audit

Multi-agency

SSCB Quality Assurance (QA) sub-group will be asked by the SSCB Chair as recommended by the SCRG to conduct an audit of practice in the agencies involved in a particular case. Audits will follow a signs of safety approach to identify what was working well with the case, what agencies were worried about, and what needs to happen now. Audits will include the voice of the child, and the voice of the practitioners involved in the case.

Single-agency

An agency will be asked to conduct an audit of a particular area of practice and report their findings to the SSCB QA sub-group. Audits will include the voice of the child, and the voice of the practitioners involved in the case, where appropriate.

Other Review

Other alternative learning reviews could include Domestic Homicide Review (DHR), Safeguarding Adults Review, MAPPA review. In all alternative case reviews all correspondence will be managed through the SSCB Support Team.

1.4 SCR Methodologies

There are various methodologies that the SCRG can follow. These include:

- Traditional SCR process
- A Significant Incident Learning Process (SILP)
- SCIE
- Root Cause Analysis

1.5 Timescales for SCR

As soon as the Chair approves the recommendation for an SCR to take place (which must be within one month of the case being referred to the SCRG), the Serious Case Review must be completed within six months of initiating it.

SSCB Partnership Manager will manage the process with the support from SSCB Serious Case Review Administrator ensuring there is a clear timeline in place and agreed at the first Scoping meeting.

Sometimes the complexity of the case does not become apparent until the review is in progress. As soon as it emerges that a review cannot be completed for example, because of potential prejudice to related court proceedings, the SSCB Independent Chair should write to Ofsted and the National Panel outlining the progress made to date and the proposed new extension date. This letter must demonstrate that the extension is required to complete an effective SCR that ends in good outcomes for children.

The remaining sections of this guidance outline a traditional SCR process

2.0 Initiating the Serious Case Review

2.1 Actions for SCRG

- To identify and appoint an appropriate overview writer.
- Inform the National Panel, OFSTED and Department for Education of the names and qualifications of the independent experts appointed.
- Develop the draft scope and terms of reference for the SCR as far as possible in light of the information known in the case at this stage .These will be revisited and finalised on review of the merged chronology if used as part of the chosen methodology
- SCRG may act as SCR Panel group if the group membership is appropriate for the case. If a member of SCRG has had direct involvement with the case they will not participate in the panel.

2.1 Letter to agencies confirming decision

Once a decision to undertake an SCR has been taken and the overview writer has been commissioned; the SSCB SCR Administrator sends a formal notification and request for completion of a chronology (If appropriate to selected methodology), to the CEO's or designated senior managers of the identified agencies.

It is expected that organisations have robust systems and processes in place in order to fully co-operate with this request, taking all necessary steps to quality assure and govern contributions to the SCR.

This initial letter will provide timescales and guidance, together with notes for completion for the provision of an agency chronology and individual management review (IMR) report (if appropriate to selected methodology). The chronology will need to be returned first. This will enable the merged chronology to be created as soon as possible in the process.

Compliance with timescales for submission for the chronology and the IMR reports is important to ensure the review meets the National set timescales. Agencies failing to meet the agreed timescale may cause delays to the completion of the review; these delays will be included in the SCR Report.

Copies of this initial letter will be sent to the Legal Advisor to the SSCB. Where the case involves criminal proceedings or death, a letter will also be sent to the Coroner.

2.2 Individual Management Review (IMR)

The IMR (if part of the selected methodology) is required from every agency who has been involved with the child or their family. The purpose of the IMR is to look openly and critically at individual organisational practice to see whether the case indicates that changes could and should be made, and if so, to identify how those changes will be brought about. As part of the process of writing the report the report writer is expected to meet with practitioners who were involved with the case to ensure all aspects of involvement are considered.

Once the CEO or Designated Senior Manager has received the letter and template (Appendix 5) for the IMR, s/he must ensure the following;

- That files are secured as soon as possible to guard against loss or interference.
- To identify an author for IMR, who has no direct involvement with the case, and who is independent of services involved to undertake the IMR and ensure that they have the capacity to carry it out within timescales.
- Arrange suitable supervision support for the report authors in undertaking the review.
- Monitor progress regularly and ensure that any predicted delays in completing phases of the work to the timescales requested are immediately reported to the SCR Panel Group.
- Attempt to resolve any difficulties in completing the work to timescales, e.g. through provision of additional help / workload relief
- Ensure that the report is written using the template and that the terms of reference are answered within the report.
- Quality assure the report against required standards and accept its contents on behalf of the agency, before its submission, ensuring that the report is appropriately thorough, analytical and challenging
- Identify any urgent action needed to address issues of concern arising as the IMR progresses
- Provide feedback and debrief for any staff involved in the process

2.3 Producing the chronology and Individual Management Review (IMR) – role of the agency report author

Once informed by the CEO/Designated Senior Manager within the agency, the report author must produce a comprehensive and well-structured review of their agency's involvement with the child and their family.

Where IMR are deemed not to be of sufficient quality, the SCR Panel Group has the right to return these to the authors for revision.

As outlined in OFSTED descriptors, the review must take full account of the individual needs of the child and family and be sensitive to their racial, cultural, linguistic and religious identity. Practice at individual and organisational levels must be openly and critically analysed against national and local statutory requirements, professional standards and current procedural guidance. Good practice must also be highlighted and areas for change in practice clearly identified and supported with measurable and specific recommendations for improvement.

Other key points to note for the completion of the reports are;

- CEO/Designated Senior Managers and Authors must be aware of the timescales for completing and submitting the chronology and IMR, allowing adequate time for these to be quality assured and signed off by the CEO/Designated Senior Manager. Any difficulties in meeting timescales must be raised as early as possible with their CEO/Designated Senior Manager as delays in submission are critical to the overall process and will have an impact on Serious Case Review timescales, and ultimately the Ofsted judgement of the review. Each agency will be monitored on this and this will be reported on in the Report.
- The chronology must be completed on the pro forma provided. The chronology is not designed to be an accurate chronology of the family history, but of the agency knowledge and action (e.g. where a family moved house in April but the Health Visitor found out in June the chronology should record the date the Health Visitor was informed, not the date the family moved). Where there is no agency contact for periods during the timescale of the review, this should be made clear in the chronology and the narrative of the IMR.
- The analysis element of the IMR is critical, Please refer to the SSCB template of IMR (Appendix 5) for more information. The analysis MUST link to the time period and terms of reference of the review. Key things to include in the report are:
 - This is what has happened
 - This is why
 - This is what we learned
 - This is what we need to change
 - This is how we are going to change it
- All those involved in and contributing to a review should be aware that the information contributed may be used during an inquest.
- Once the chronology is complete it will be necessary for the report author to decide which practitioners, who have been involved in the case need to be contacted and a meeting to discuss the case arranged with them and the report author . This process

is important to ensure that the author understands and gets a true reflection of what happened and to be able to clarify context where things were identified as not happening that may be should have. The discussion with the practitioners involved should be recorded and the records agreed by both the staff member and the report author.

Where staff are no longer in post, or are unable to be interviewed, this should also be recorded as part of the report, explaining the reasons for this. This information could also be used to inform the context for the report.

Note: Discussions with staff as part of this process is as a means of clarifying the agency involvement, and reflecting on and learning from the case. While they should not be used as a disciplinary interview, they inevitably can be stressful for staff and staff may wish to bring someone to the interview with them for support.

- The IMR should be written using the SSCB template (Appendix 5)

2.4 Informing and involving the Family

The Chair of the SCR panel and the SSCB Partnership Manager will ensure that a plan is agreed at the initial Scoping meeting. This will include how the family are informed that the review is taking place and why and inviting the family to contribute to the review. The SCR panel members need to ensure that all significant family members have the opportunity to be involved in the SCR, especially those who have had a caring role or significant relationship with the child or young person.

This will be done by the SSCB Partnership Manager contacting the family to explain the process of the review and why it is being undertaken. Once initial contact have been made with the family a letter will be sent to family members confirming that a review is taking place and the reasons for that review and confirming the date ,time and who will visit the family.

Families should be clear that the SCR is a review of agency functioning through which staff are encouraged, as part of a learning process, to reflect critically on their practice. It is not its purpose to inquire into how the child died or who is culpable.

The family may need a worker to be identified to support them during the process, and will need further contact as appropriate. This will include informing them of the outcomes from the SCR and sharing the Executive Report (to ensure no surprises if the Coroner is making use of the Report at inquest).

3.0 The Serious Case Review

3.1 Role of the Serious Case Review Panel Group

The SCRG will act as an SCR panel group which will hold the initial scoping meeting.

The draft Terms of reference completed by the SCRG and approved by the Chair and the overview author on behalf of the Panel in the initial scoping meeting are only changed in exceptional circumstances.

It is expected, if a chronology is required as part of the selected methodology, that all agencies will have completed this using the template (Appendix 2) and that a merged Chronology will be available at the initial meeting.

The SCRG will consider the first draft of the Report to offer expert professional knowledge and advice on local practices and procedures to ensure that the recommendations are appropriate to local ways to working.

The Chair and overview writer with the support from the SSCB Partnership manager will ensure that an Authors briefing, practitioner event and recall event takes place.

The roles of the SCR Panel Group include:

- Review the merged chronology, identifying key issues, decision points, inconsistencies between agencies and good practice
- Review each agency's individual Agency report, and invite the report writers and their managers to attend the meeting to discuss the report, ensuring practice issues and recommendations have been identified. The group must also identify any further work needed from any agency to provide clarification.
- Identify lessons and recommendations emerging from the SCR process either for individual agencies (additional to those identified in their own report), or for the SSCB to improve the multi-agency process. Whilst agencies may have identified single agency recommendations themselves, the Group should consider whether they wish to adopt them as formal recommendations to form part of the Report. Only recommendations agreed on by the SCRG as a whole will be included in the Report. Additional recommendations or actions will be the responsibility of the single agency and will not form part of the SSCB SCR monitoring process.
- In all SCRs irrespective of the method used consideration must be given to commissioning multi-agency reviews separate to the SCR where there are wider issues apparent that may relate to the case that fall outside the terms of reference for the SCR.

3.2 Role of SSCB

The SSCB Partnership Manager who is a member of the SCRG is to take a lead role in the coordination and support of the SCR process. The Partnership manager will arrange the commissioning of the Independent author agreed by SCRG.

Agencies need to ensure that, when an IMR is required as part of the selected methodology, they plan for tight timescales to include quality assurance of the IMR and signing off by CEO/senior manager.

There is an opportunity for SSCB members to champion SCR's within their agencies, ensure that IMR writers have sufficient workload capacity to complete the task, and to feedback lessons learned for the agency. Serious Case Reviews will receive full administrative support from the SSCB Administrator who will coordinate meetings, and take detailed minutes including action points and ensure these are circulated. The Administrator will also produce the combined agency chronology, and it is vitally important the SSCB template is used to assist this process. Any future changes to the chronology by agencies should be kept to a minimum, but if there needs to be additions, these need to be highlighted to the administrator for insertion. In cases that involve families where there are complexities around who is who and who is related to who the administrator will also produce a genogram for the case from the information provided by agencies.

Consideration to how the child and family members are to be referred to throughout the review must be given at the start of the review and the Terms of Reference must be explicit on this.

All agencies involved with the SCR must ensure that confidentiality is of up most importance through the review process.

3.3 Producing the Report

This will be written by an Independent Author commissioned by the SSCB. The Report will reflect a rigorous examination of the facts, providing convincing explanations for how and why events occurred and actions or decisions taken by agencies were or were not taken. The report will;

- Be written in plain English and in a way that can be easily understood by professionals and the public
- Be child focused
- Be suitable for publication without the needing to be amended or redacted
- Include a good overview and introduction of the case using the terms of reference.
- Provide a sound analysis of what happened in the case using a comprehensive chronology, why and what needs to happen in order to reduce the risk of recurrence.
- Bring together the findings of all individual identify agency reviews and other relevant investigations, reviews or enquiries, considering all aspects of service provision over the course of the review period, identifying missed opportunities by individual agencies and identify areas where practice needs to be improved by identifying key themes.
- Ensure evidence of good practice is shared so that a growing understanding of what worked well can inform agency's learning through recommendations.
- Clearly evidence that consideration has been given to the ethnicity, religion and culture of the child and family.

- Be clear about what information was known to the agencies and professionals concerned about the parents , child and significant others, the family history and the home circumstances of the child, making it clear which agencies were involved in the process
- Using the benefit of hindsight or evidence from research to consider whether different actions or decision by agencies may have led to an alternative course of events.
- Include lessons to be learned nationally and locally brought together in a summary, supported by clear, logical, specific and achievable recommendations for improvement and a comprehensive action plan for implementation. These action plans will be fully completed on the agreed pro forma and agreed by the Serious Case Review Panel/Reference Group before the Review is completed. This report should also include details of how the implementation of recommendations will be monitored and evidenced.
- Clearly explain the involvement or non-involvement of parents and other significant carers in the process
- Make reference to any parallel procedures that took place in relation to the case and explain how any learning from these were taken into account

Before the report is presented to SSCB it is sent by the SCRG administrator, to the CEO of each contributing organisation to confirm that their organisations contribution has been accurately reflected. It is the responsibility of each SCRG members to ensure that their Designated Senior Manager is fully informed of the progress of the Serious Case Review. The member must ensure that the Designated Senior Office has sight of the Report, Executive Summary, single and multi-agency recommendations and completed action plans.

3.4 SSCB approval of the Report and associated documents

The SSCB will approve the SCR Report including agreed recommendations and completed action plans once these have been signed off by the Report author and SCRG.

The SSCB will then ensure the following:

- That the Report, IMRs and completed action plans are submitted to Ofsted and the National Panel.
- That the Report is shared with the child and/or their family in advance of this information being placed in the public domain. The SSCB need to ensure that this is done by the most appropriate method, a staff member with continuing involvement with the family, for example.
- That there is discussion and agreement as to who should be the key recipients (other than SSCB members who will receive this automatically) of a copy of the Report.
- That any media or public relations issues arising from the case have been identified and a clear way forward agreed. This is particularly important where there is an ongoing criminal case.
- That the Independent author of the Report holds a multi-agency debrief or recall event, supported by the Panel group. This is specifically aimed at staff who worked with the family during the period covered by the review.

3.6 Dissemination of learning

Once the SCR has been completed and received by the SSCB, all SCRG members will receive a copy of the Report. SSCB representatives will be directly accountable for the dissemination of learning from each Serious Case Review within their own agency.

It is important to note that the report remains the property of the Surrey Safeguarding Children Board and contains highly sensitive and confidential information.

Upon completion of the report, the SCR administrator will produce a Learning Leaflet which outlines the learning from the case. This is published in the SSCB website and widely disseminated to all partners.

The SSCB Partnership Manager will ensure that the SSCB Training Officer and learning and development group receives a copy of the Learning Leaflet in order to ensure that any lessons learnt and recommendations are incorporated into SSCB training where appropriate.

The SSCB through the SCRG are responsible for monitoring the evidenced implementation of both single and multi-agency action plans.

4.0 Action Planning and Review

All action plans will be passed to the SSCB Partnership Manager for the coordination of monitoring and implementation through the SCRG. The SSCB Support Team will expect to receive regular feedback from single agencies and leads for multi-agency recommendation evidencing progress against agreed actions. This will then be monitored and signed off through the SSCB SCRG.

SSCB member representatives are accountable for the implementation of single agency recommendations relating to their own agency and multi-agency recommendations.

Progress against agreed Multi Agency actions will be reported every six months at SCRG meeting using a RAG rating system.

5.0 Contributing to SCRs Out of Area

Requests for information from other LSCBs where a SCR has been commissioned and has identified that the child involved was resident in Surrey during the period of the scope for the review must be coordinated through the SSCB support team.

Requests for individual agency reviews will be sent to agencies identified from SSCB support team. Agencies must complete the report and ensure it is signed off by their agency before submitting it to the SSCB SCRG for final quality assurance check before SSCB support team sends on to the LSCB who has commissioned the review.

Progress of SCR from other areas will be monitored through SSCB SCRG. The SSCB Partnership manager will take a lead role in liaising with the requesting LSCB to ensure that SSCB are informed of any recommendations specific for Surrey Agencies. SSCB also need to ensure that the robust monitoring of the implementation of those recommendations is in place.

Appendix 1: SCR Inter-agency Referral Form

Appendix 2: Chronology Template

Appendix 3: Letters to agencies and families

Appendix 4: SCR Additional Information Request

Appendix 5: Individual Management Report Template

Appendix 6: Action Plan

Appendix 7: Flow charts

Appendix 8: Criteria to appoint a reviewer