

# Housing & Safeguarding Adults Alliance

## ***Housing engagement with Safeguarding Adults Boards***

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This paper<sup>1</sup> outlines:

- The case for housing engagement in adult safeguarding
- Barriers to housing engagement with Safeguarding Adults Boards (SABs)
- The benefits of housing representation on SABs
- Housing related work by SAB Chairs and Members
- Options for addressing issues of representation by housing on SABs

The intended readership of this paper includes all those involved in the work of SABs and senior staff of housing organisations.

### **The case for housing engagement in adult safeguarding**

Despite increasing evidence of the incidence of abuse in the community, many social housing providers<sup>2</sup> under-report abuse (Spurr, 2013) and are insufficiently engaged in adult safeguarding, largely due to the lack of legal and regulatory incentives and the difficulties of partnership working (Parry, 2013a). Providers of sheltered and supported housing have safeguarding policies, procedures and training in place due to the requirements of 'No Secrets' (Department of Health, 2000) and the Quality Assessment Framework of the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on material researched and written in early 2014 by Imogen Parry at the request of the Chair of the Department of Health Care Act Task and Finish Group on SABs – many thanks to those local authorities and Boards who supplied the examples of good practice. The paper is published on the [Housing and Safeguarding Adults Alliance](#) website to link to the [SCIE](#) Care Act implementation resource: Adult Safeguarding – SABs checklist and resources.

<sup>2</sup> **Social housing providers** include: council housing departments; Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs); Large Scale Voluntary Transfer organisations (LSVTs); housing associations (now technically known as Private Registered Providers, also previously known as Registered Social Landlords).

Supporting People programme (Communities and Local Government and SITRA, 2010). No such statutory guidance, regulatory or contractual requirements has existed in the general needs sector until now. From April 2015 the engagement in adult safeguarding by all housing providers will no longer be an option due to the requirements of the safeguarding aspects of the statutory guidance of the Care Act 2014 (Department of Health, 2014) which requires all housing providers and housing support providers to:

- have clear operational policies and procedures in adult safeguarding
- ensure that all housing staff are:
  - familiar with the six principles underpinning adult safeguarding
  - trained in recognising the symptoms of abuse
  - vigilant and able to respond to adult safeguarding concerns
- have a senior manager taking a lead role in organisational and inter-agency safeguarding arrangements.

These new legal obligations for all housing providers are supported by:

- ADASS advice and guidance (2013)
- Social Care Institute for Excellence guide 'Adult safeguarding for housing staff' (2013)
- Research on lessons for housing providers from Adult Serious Case Reviews (Parry, 2014a)
- The Housing and Safeguarding Adults Alliance (2014)
- The 'Making Safeguarding Personal' approach (SCIE, 2014).

I have argued elsewhere that the most significant improvement to the engagement of housing providers in adult safeguarding is their inclusion as a member of Safeguarding Adults Boards (Parry, 2013a, 2013b, 2014b).

### **Barriers to housing engagement with Safeguarding Adults Boards (SABs)**

In many areas partnerships between social housing providers and SABs are weak or non-existent. Barriers for SABs engagement with housing include the multiplicity of large and small housing providers in local areas and a lack of mechanisms for their involvement in the development of safeguarding strategies and policies. It is striking how few multi-agency adult safeguarding policies, procedures and information sharing protocols include endorsement from social housing providers. In two tier authorities, there can be difficulties in securing one council representative on the SAB from as many as sixteen districts.

Barriers for housing engagement with SABs include differences in culture, language, understanding and priority. Some large housing associations work across dozens of councils with varying safeguarding policies, procedures and practices.

A survey of Independent SAB chairs in early 2013 indicated that at least 24 SABs had housing representation at that time (Morgan and Parry, 2013). The proposal in the Care Act statutory guidance (Department of Health, 2014, para. 14.117) that housing providers and housing support providers could be invited to SAB meetings or to participate in the work of the SAB more generally is likely to increase this number.

### **The benefits of housing representation on SABs**

The survey mentioned above and related workshop (Morgan and Parry, 2013) identified the following benefits of housing representation on SABs:

- encourages greater leadership and involvement by housing staff in adult safeguarding, addressing under-reporting associated with: the lack of a safeguarding culture; inadequate policies, procedures, training, databases
- improves the quality of Serious Case Reviews/Safeguarding Adults Reviews
- contributes to wider agendas including prevention and awareness raising, domestic abuse, crime, hate crime, mate crime, self-neglect, hoarding, anti-social behaviour, poverty, dementia
- assists with reaching into local communities including the 'hard-to-reach'
- addresses professional boundaries
- reinforces that safeguarding is everyone's business
- contributes funding
- involves housing in the development of policy
- improves joint working between housing and adult social care, notably around: information sharing; feedback, threshold and assessment issues. (Morgan and Parry, 2013; Parry, 2013a).

### **Housing related work by SAB Chairs and Members**

The Chair has a responsibility to ensure that the Board is aware of the importance of housing in safeguarding adults and that this is picked up routinely in the business of the Board. There must be housing representation on the Serious Case Review/Safeguarding Adult Review panel for any review that involves a housing provider (Parry, 2014a). The Board should work towards improving the accountability of housing organisations regarding safeguarding, for example by holding them to account on their performance in areas such as alerts and referrals, training compliance and data bases of vulnerabilities (eg Camden Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board). One Board's safeguarding adults competency framework specifically addresses the competencies required by housing officers in relation

to safeguarding. By ensuring they are included in this framework the Board ensures housing officers understand they need to be involved in safeguarding (Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board).

### **Options for addressing issues of representation by housing on SABs**

Unitary authorities can secure effective council housing representation on the Board relatively easily, especially if there is a single Director for Housing and Adult Social Care (eg Camden Safeguarding Adults Board). Two tier authorities with council housing representation on the Board have achieved this through invitations to the Chief Executives of the district councils/boroughs requesting one senior housing representative to speak on their behalf (eg Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board). This representation can only be effective with excellent communication and network systems between councils/boroughs (Morgan and Parry, 2013).

Housing association representation on the Board can be more problematic due to their diversity and numbers. One approach is to identify one committed senior housing association representative who can 'represent' (in the loosest sense) housing associations across the county, finding this person through existing cross county forums of housing association chief officers. Alternatively, some unitary and two tier authorities restrict Board membership to one council housing representative but ensure that housing associations representatives sit on sub-groups, local groups and other fora (Morgan and Parry, 2013). Birmingham Social Housing Partnership is a partnership of over 30 housing associations and has a safeguarding subgroup that feeds into the Birmingham Safeguarding Adults Board. Similarly, Kirklees Council has a housing forum that has safeguarding as a standing item on the agenda and representation on the Safeguarding Adults Board. This pro-active engagement of housing can be reinforced through the inclusion of safeguarding slots in county wide housing provider forum agendas, multi-agency conferences and joint training (eg Camden Safeguarding Adults Board, Wolverhampton Safeguarding Adults Board, Gloucestershire Safeguarding Adults Board).

Housing representatives can help inform the Board on how best to engage with other housing providers. The Board or sub-groups could contact providers inviting them to display safeguarding posters and leaflets in their blocks and estates or devise a pack of information specifically for housing staff, reinforced by attending local housing fora (Camden Safeguarding Adults Board, Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board, Gloucestershire Safeguarding Adults Board).

## Conclusion

There is a strong case to be made for, at the very least, housing engagement with SABs and, ideally, representation on them. Further examples of how this engagement and representation have been achieved and their benefits are welcomed – please email me at [imogen.parry@btopenworld.com](mailto:imogen.parry@btopenworld.com)

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