

National review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings

Local Authority FAQs

Introduction

The independent Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) has concluded that a national child safeguarding practice review should be undertaken into the allegations of abuse at Fullerton House, Wheatley House and Wilsic Hall independent specialist residential facilities for disabled children.

Allegations of harm to children living in these three privately run residential facilities, operated by the Hesley Group and located in Doncaster, came to light in March 2021. The Panel received a rapid review on 10 September 2021, where Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership requested the Panel undertake a national review.

Dame Christine Lenehan DBE, Director of the [Council for Disabled Children](#) at the National Children's Bureau, is conducting the review on behalf of the Panel.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel lead for this review is Dr Susan Tranter.

FAQs

About the review

Why has the Panel decided to undertake a national review?

The Panel has initiated this national review because of concerns and allegations that children with disabilities and complex health needs have suffered harm in three independent residential facilities in Doncaster. The Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership requested that the Panel undertake a national review because of the wider, national implications posed by the allegations.

What is the outline of the review?

This review will look in detail at what happened to children placed in the three independent residential facilities in the Doncaster area. It will ask some important questions about how children with disabilities and complex health needs are safeguarded and how agencies worked to ensure that their rights and needs were met and voices heard. Most importantly, it will seek to identify ways in which practice and policy might need to change to protect children with disabilities and complex health needs better in the future.

How will the review be structured?

The review will be conducted in two phases:

1. The first phase will focus on understanding the children affected. These children have all now been moved to safe placements elsewhere, but the review team needs to establish how they came to be placed at the facilities being investigated, and how they were supported while in residence. The review will capture a range of information on all of the children and their individual needs. The first phase of the review will be completed by the summer of 2022.
2. The second phase will seek to understand whether what happened to these children is indicative and typical of practice more generally, and, if this is the case, set out what should be in place to prevent children with disabilities and complex health needs from harm. The second phase of the review will be completed by 31st March 2023.

This two-phased approach will help ensure that the learning about safeguarding practice is shared with the system as quickly as possible.

Why has Dame Christine Lenehan DBE been appointed as the lead reviewer?

The Panel appointed Dame Christine Lenehan DBE as the lead reviewer due to her wealth of expertise in this area.

As Director of the Council for Disabled Children (part of the National Children's Bureau), Christine works tirelessly to bring about a fully inclusive society where all disabled children and young people can achieve their aspirations and do not feel excluded. Christine has overall leadership and responsibility for the Council for Disabled Children and all of its activities.

In 2016, Christine was asked by the Minister for Care and Support to look at the challenges in the health system for children with complex needs, learning disability and autism. The report [‘These are our children’](#) was published in 2017. Christine was then asked to review the needs of children in specialist residential schools and colleges and her report [‘Good intentions, good enough?’](#) was published in late 2017.

What measures are in place to ensure sensitive information about those affected is kept confidential?

The experiences of children and young people are at the heart of this review. Information and case studies about individual children and young people in the review's report will be anonymised to protect the identity of the children in question and to preserve the integrity of the investigation.

All data in regards to the review is being kept securely and a data sharing agreement and media response protocol have been established to ensure effective coordination between the Panel, Doncaster Council, Ofsted, South Yorkshire Police and the National Children's Bureau.

How will the review align with the ongoing criminal investigation?

The review is focussed on safeguarding practice and the safeguarding system. The Panel is in regular communication with the senior investigating officer at South Yorkshire Police and senior officers at Doncaster Council to preserve the integrity of the criminal investigation.

How can I find out more about the review?

The Terms of Reference for the review, and correspondence between the Chair of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and Government Ministers, can be found on the Panel's [website](#).

How will stakeholders be involved in the review?

The review will include a stakeholder focus group including NHS leaders, academic researchers, people with experience of parenting a child with disabilities/complex needs, and key stakeholder groups. The members of the expert focus group will be announced as soon as they are confirmed.

How will the review ensure the voices of children, young people and families are represented in the review?

As the review progresses, we will engage with a range of organisations and individuals with relevant experience of involving children and young people with disabilities in their work. The review will draw on this experience to create 'experts by experience' focus group to reflect the views and experiences of children and young people with disabilities, and parents and carers.

How are we seeking the views and ideas of those that work with children and young people with disabilities?

The review will consider evidence from a wide range of experts, organisations and practitioners working to safeguard children and young people with disabilities, as well as private companies and local government leaders working in this area.

How should local authorities respond to any media inquiries and any requests for information

All media inquiries should be forwarded to the Child Safeguarding Practice Panel. Similarly, if a Local Authority requires any information linked to the review, they should contact the Panel via Mailbox.NationalReviewPanel@education.gov.uk.

How will the local authorities who had children placed at these schools be expected to take part in the review?

Relevant local authorities may be asked to contribute to the review via bilateral conversations or roundtables, and may be asked to provide data and information to the reviewers. The Panel will make direct contact with Local Authorities and relevant bodies where such requests are to be made. The review is seeking to produce its findings and recommendations, in the first phase by the summer of 2022, and therefore it is vital that Local Authorities and relevant bodies respond quickly to any requests made.

How should local authorities communicate about the review with their staff, particularly in regards to the social workers and other agencies involved with individual children?

The Panel will work with the relevant safeguarding partners to help inform their workforces about the review in a coordinated and clear way. The Panel is keen to ensure that any concerns are addressed early in the process.

How should local authorities communicate about the review with families who may be directly affected or may be concerned about children placed at other residential facilities?

Following the announcement of the review, parents may want to confirm the local arrangements for how their child is supported and their safety ensured with their social worker and/or local authority. A factsheet for parents has been included with this document. The Panel is happy to respond to local authorities to help address any concerns from parents.

Dame Christine Lenehan may wish to drill down in more detail into a number of cases and this may involve speaking to parents. The planning and communication around any interaction with parents will be crucial and local areas will be part of the process.

How will the link with education be picked up during the review?

Whilst the review will focus on child safeguarding practice, Dame Christine Lenehan is mindful to look at all aspects of the children and young people's experience, including the education element. Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews are multi-agency in nature and we will of course look at the whole care offered to the children and the interplay between the registration of being a registered school and a registered social care provider.

Please direct any queries, questions or concerns to
Mailbox.NationalReviewPanel@education.gov.uk

Parents' concerns

What has been done to protect the children in these residential facilities?

Children in the residential facilities being investigated were moved to alternative provision following Ofsted's suspension of their registration when allegations of harm came to light in 2021. The safety and wellbeing of all the children and young adults in these settings has been at the heart of all decisions made. The families of the children are receiving ongoing

support as the investigation continues.

How can we know this isn't happening or has happened to other children in other areas?

Phase two of the review's work will seek to understand how widespread the risk to disabled children in similar residential settings is, and whether failings evident in the facilities being investigated are likely to be duplicated elsewhere.

How can the parents of children living in similar residential settings be sure their child is safe and that the setting is following the correct procedures?

All children placed away from home should have links to their home authority, and social workers and other professionals should be working with families to make sure that children are safe and well cared for in their placement. Ofsted regularly inspects schools and residential settings for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

What should parents concerned about the safety of a disabled child in a residential setting do?

Parents may want to confirm the local arrangements for how their child is supported and their safety ensured with their social worker and/or local authority.

How are children who were placed in the three facilities and their parents/carers involved in the review?

Dame Christine Lenehan may wish to drill down in more detail into a number of cases and this may involve speaking to parents and children. The planning and communication around any interaction with parents will be crucial and local areas will be part of the process.

Is the review providing advocacy for the children affected?

The home Local Authority continues to have responsibility to ensure individual needs of children are met including advocacy.

How are children being helped to recover from any harm they have suffered?

As children were reassessed and moved from the residential facilities, consideration was given to any harm they may have experienced. Parents may want to confirm any specific support required with their social worker and/or local authority.

Where can families get support and advice?

- **The National Autistic Society** prides an extensive range of support, guidance and advice for families on its [website](#).
- **The Challenging Behaviour Foundation** also provides detailed guidance on its [website](#) and a dedicated Family Support Helpline on 0300 666 0126.
- **NSPCC's Childline** is available 24/7 on 0800 1111.