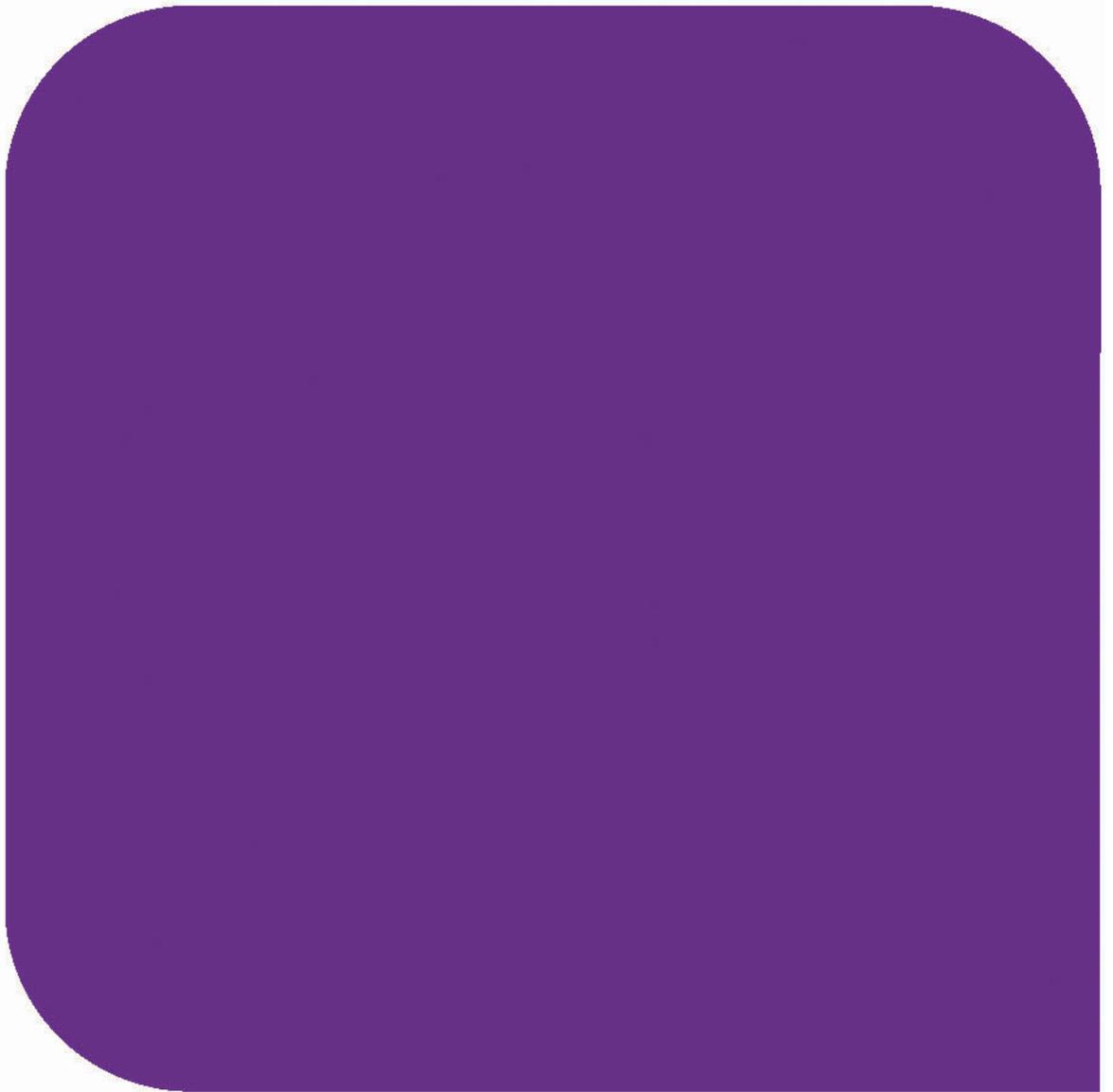


# Reflections from the SCIE Learning Together London pilots – an interim report



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# 1 Introduction

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has been working in collaboration with the London Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to pilot the SCIE Learning Together model for case reviews in seven London Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs). The project began in February and is scheduled to end in the autumn.

Pairs of Lead Reviewers from each participating LSCB have formed a group to receive training and support provided by SCIE. It is a practice-based model of learning whereby the Lead Reviewers proceed with putting the systems approach into practice in a live case review, coming together for training and group supervision at regular intervals throughout the process, with one individual session during the report writing stage.

## A systems approach for case reviews

The SCIE Learning Together model uses a methodology known as a 'systems approach'. This has been specifically designed to shed light on ways that the latent conditions of organisational configurations make good practice either more or less likely. Improvements then focus on redesigning the work environment to make it harder for professionals to safeguard poorly and easier for them to do so well (cf. Institute of Medicine 1999). In this process, a single case provides a 'window' on the workings of the system more generally. It requires getting a close up view of frontline work and understanding the pressures, dilemmas and resources that are brought to bear when staff attempt to do their jobs. To-date it has been used on cases that do not meet Serious Case Review (SCR) criteria.

## Government agree to use of systems methodology for SCRs

The final report of the Munro Review was published at the beginning of May. Professor Munro recommended that Government require LSCBs to use a systems approach in SCRs and work with the sector to provide accredited reviewers and support this change. Government has responded stating that they agree with this recommendation and will be giving further consideration to exactly how this will work. The response states that the SCIE pilots of Learning Together will inform the transition to systems review methodology.

In this context, the LSCBs participating in the London pilots of the SCIE Learning Together model and the London Project Management Group (PMG) agreed that it would be useful to share with non-participating LSCBs something of the experience of taking part, despite the pilots having not yet quite completed.

## Who is taking part?

The London LSCBs taking part in the project are:

- |              |                  |               |               |
|--------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. Barnet    | 2. Hackney       | 3. Haringey   | 4. Hillingdon |
| 5. Southwark | 6. Tower Hamlets | 7. Wandsworth |               |

The pilots are being supported by a project management group chaired by Kay Bell, London Safeguarding Adviser. It is made up of participating LSCB pilot leads, some non-participating LSCBs, and others representing key stakeholder groups.

The training and support programme is being run by Dr. Sheila Fish, SCIE Senior Research Analyst and Learning Together lead, and Sue Bairstow, SCIE Associate.

## What cases are being used?

Use of the SCIE model in a SCR would require a change to statutory guidance. The cases used in these pilots are therefore not SCRs. Some are cases which did meet the statutory criteria requiring LSCBs to consider doing an SCR and on consideration the LSCB chairs decided instead to pursue the learning by other means.

## Being clear about what we are assessing

The London pilots do not test the SCIE Learning Together model in ideal conditions akin to something like a laboratory. Instead, they are 'real world' test sites in which people are using the model for the first time. Necessarily and legitimately, therefore, they produce as much learning about how to train and support people to put the model into practice for the first time, as about the effectiveness of the model itself. The pilots are part of a larger programme of on-going action learning to support the continual refinement of the approach and its application.

This interim report draws primarily on verbal feedback that Lead Reviewers have provided over the course of the training. Direct quotations are provided in blue boxes. Feedback will be formally sought from all participants in the seven sites once the pilots have been completed.

## 2 Headline findings

### Overall assessment - positive

Summarising the experience of undertaking supported case reviews to date, one of trainee lead reviewer stated:

'Across the pilots the general consensus seems to be that the model has vindicated itself; it is working.'

One of the participating LSCBs is already in the process of commissioning a new case review using the SCIE Learning Together model. A paediatrician summed up the stance of the SCR subcommittee members who had been participating in that pilot, stating:

'It would be a real step backward to revert to the old way.'

## 3 Key strengths of the approach

### The nature of the findings

How different are the findings that you get using this approach? Lead Reviewers have reflected on this critical question. Their view is that the same kinds of practice areas are being highlighted as are commonly raised in SCRs but that a systems case review tends to highlight the quality and nature of the issues in a different way. It is not the 'whats' of the findings that seem to be different but the 'whys'.

'It's the same factors but a different description – this is about the qualitative issues, the answers to the 'whys'.'

Participants have noted how the explanations of what lies behind problematic areas often highlight the relationships between different issues. The findings include descriptions of how management and culture impact on direct work with families - issues often absent from other types of review.

‘For me it’s *that* these things get described at all that is the difference – it’s about talking about the dragons that we usually don’t mention.’

For many, it is the input from frontline staff into the findings that marks the difference and adds to their validity.

‘That’s probably been the most powerful difference for me – the engagement of those 20 people. It means that there is a critical mass to the key messages. The findings have more of a resonance, a mandate as it were.’

## Rigour of the analysis

There are four aspects to the analytic framework of the SCIE Learning Together model:

1. timeline
2. the story of how professionals involved saw the case as it unfolded
3. analysis of Key Practice Episodes & their contributory factors
4. identification and prioritisation of generic systems issues (Underlying patterns).

Some Lead Reviewers have noted that this framework is more rigorous than the current approach because it forces you to analyse key practice episodes before going on to a deeper level of analysis or second order hypotheses. They describe how, in the current process, it is common to leap to that second order of hypotheses more quickly and, therefore, on a flimsier basis.

‘In this approach there is more corroboration – it’s more rigorous.’

## Multi-agency review team

In the SCIE model there are no Individual Management Reviews (IMRs). Cross-agency representatives work together from the beginning as a ‘review team’, playing an active role in the conduct of the case review lead by the Lead Reviewers.

London Lead Reviewers have faced some challenges in engaging members of their review teams in the process. For some, the nature of the role of review team members and the time commitment required was not outlined sufficiently clearly at the start. Others have commented that even with a clear explanation it is hard to get a real feel for what is involved before you actually do the work. In other sites the review team have been described as embracing the approach.

The style of delivery of the analysis meetings by Lead Reviewers can influence the process and extent of engagement by review team members. Some Lead Reviewers have reflected that chairing the meeting in a usual 'business like' way can deter from the reflection, analysis and discussion that is really required. They felt they would have got more out of the meeting if they had focused more on the reflective or analytic task of the group.

Some sites, in line with their usual SCR practice, have had the review team together for whole day meetings and found this useful. It allowed for time to focus on the model and the actual case review. Some structured the whole day around the four aspects of analysis.

'It's been very noisy as people thrash this out.'

In contrast to the IMR process, some review team members have noted that working together from the start allows each agency not only to understand their own practice but to understand how other agencies are viewing them. The benefits of having the review team look at the multi-agency or composite chronology have also been noted; it allows for more challenge than if only the overview report author sees it as is commonly the case.

'Through the IMR process health might have themselves in order but have no idea of how other people see them.'

## Engagement of staff

Frontline staff and first line managers who were directly involved with the child or young person whose case is being reviewed, play an active part in a systems case review. They provide valuable data through individual conversations and also contribute to the analysis through commenting on reports and in two discussion meetings (termed 'follow-on meetings'). This aspect of the model has received the most positive comment.

Feedback has also supported the SCIE model guidance, that the creation of a skeleton chronology at the start of the process significantly aids the timely identification of the appropriate staff.

The goal of an interview with staff in the SCIE model is to understand their 'local rationality'. For this reason it is termed a 'conversation'. The aim is to get a good sense of how things looked to the professional at the time and what was influencing them as workers to good or poor effect.

'The issue is about having an open mind and asking open questions. The danger of the hypothesis has become very clear.'

People have commented on the richness of the data that these conversations have provided. In some sites there is a strong view that in the usual process they would not have spoken to all the staff they have done using the SCIE model.

'You can be seduced into thinking that people that stand out are the key players and have the most important

things to say. Yet in our case, the administrators have given fascinating insights. So it's elevated those people in the mix that might not usually have been included.

Working in pairs, review team members lead the conduct of these conversations. Taking part in them has been a powerful experience for many. There is an immediacy to the experience that has been found useful toward understanding.

However, holding conversations with staff from one's own agency can cause problems. Hearing that things are not working in the way that they thought they were has provoked strong feelings in some review team members, making it hard for them to hear what the staff member is describing. On occasion this has run the danger of shutting down valuable lines of enquiry. Feedback suggests that consistent training in this aspect of the model would ensure better quality and consistency of approach.

'Understanding the 'local rationality' – this is things that case group [staff] talk to themselves about all the time, they just usually don't get asked. It's much harder for senior managers who have more pressure to 'toe the party line'. A rare few just can't believe what's being said - probably because it's scary when it's your own organisation.'

A few sites have experienced difficulty in gaining case group engagement. In some cases the view is that this is linked to the timescale of the pilots. Others think it raises questions about agency endorsement and championing of the work.

## Involving children, young people and family members, friends and community

All Lead Reviewers began the London pilots with a firm commitment and determination to involve the children, young people and their family members and carers in the case review process. This is an under-developed area of the SCIE model and ethically, therefore, it was held to be a vital area for further learning through the piloting process. In the majority of cases, however, involving the children or young people themselves and/or their parents/carers has not turned out to be feasible. Detail about the reasons will be captured and reflected on in the final report. Complicating factors have included: the grieving process, new care placements, imprisonment, media interest, on-going engagement with statutory child protection services and on-going criminal proceedings.

## 4 Outstanding implementation issues

Various implementation questions raised during the course of the pilots have been fed back to the London PMG for further discussion. In the main these hinge on the implications of the systems approach being a multi-agency review process from the start.

Using the systems approach, the case review is immediately multi-agency. There is therefore, in this process, no prior, individual ownership by agencies. This raises issues for the following:

## Sign-off and governance (health)

Currently in the NHS, the Chief Executive signs-off the IMR before it goes to the LSCB. There is subsequently monitoring of the actions stipulated in the signed report. Using the SCIE model, the power and authority is given to the LSCB. There is no single agency sign-off opportunity. The multi-agency review team sign-off the final report and then present it to the LSCB as the commissioner of the case review. How might these two governance processes be reconciled?

## Who owns the data

Being a multi-agency process raises questions about how data related to the case review is stored and ownership of 'digital' data.

## Disciplinary or capability issues (police)

How disciplinary or capability issues are handled when using a systems methodology is a common question. The London pilots have generated one example. In this, the concerns about an individual's practice were brought to the attention of the relevant agency to handle in the usual way. The individual did continue to be involved in the case review meetings, with the capability processes handled separately. In discussion Lead Reviewers suggest that whether this would be appropriate in all situations would need to be decided on a case by case basis.

In the IMR process, a single agency will usually have completed a comprehensive chronology before the staff member is interviewed as part of the case review process. This gives the opportunity for potential disciplinary issues to have been identified before the IMR interview. In the SCIE model this is not the case which has raised concerns for police colleagues about the potential blurring of case review and disciplinary processes. However, patient safety representatives on the PMG have stressed that even if the interviewer has read the files beforehand there is always the potential for new information to come to light during an interview.

## Parallel proceedings – criminal prosecution or domestic homicide review

Running a case review in parallel to criminal proceedings or a domestic homicide review raises potential difficulties whatever model is used, e.g. to what extent and in what format do we share information? The active involvement of staff members in the SCIE Learning Together case review process seems to bring some of those issues into sharp relief. The prime concerns that emerged during the London pilots relate to:

- a) 'evidential issues' – concern about contaminating the evidence. This arises because staff come together in 'follow-on meetings' to discuss the emerging analysis. From the perspective of criminal proceedings, potential witnesses are talking together about matters that may be subject of evidence in court. This could be used by the defence to discredit professionals by describing these discussions as a 'stitch up'.
- b) 'disclosure issues' – connected to the issue of evidence above, the content of individual conversations and follow-on meetings could be 'disclosable' to the court. On the one hand, a lack of formal documentation of these could lead to accusations of cover-up. On the other hand, there are ethical concerns about the use of data for reasons other than that for which it was generated.

Three of the cases used in the London pilots have had other proceedings running in parallel. The detail of how this has been handled will be drawn out in the final report. Options that have been considered have included: not making digital recordings of the conversations; sharing write ups of each conversations with the staff member concerned, and carefully

considering whether and how specific people can be involved in individual conversations and in follow-on meetings, including what may and may not be discussed in the conversation.

## 5 Managing the process

The SCIE model is highly collaborative and the associated project management is challenging. Lead Reviewers have been collating ideas about what would facilitate the process. These include:

- constructing a 'skeleton' chronology of each agency's involvement right at the beginning
- setting all meeting dates at the start.
- including review team member roles in the Terms of Reference.

## 6 Developing reviewer expertise

Lead Reviewers have remarked that managing this collaborative process and using the analytic framework for the first time is more difficult than one might expect. All have commented on things they feel they could do better a second time round.

'In retrospect, I didn't clarify expectations enough – like the roles and tasks of the Review Team, especially between meetings.'

'The briefing session for the case group is so crucial and I feel now I could do it much better than I was able to then, when we were at the very start of the process.'

Some have been surprised by how much longer writing up the reports has taken than they would usually, because of the unfamiliarity of the analytic framework.

There has been very positive feedback about the 'learning on the job' approach to training. People have said that they have found the group supervision sessions invaluable. The individual supervision session and critiques of their draft reports are the aspects they suggest should be maintained beyond the pilot.

London pilot participants feel that it would be a lot easier doing a second systems case review if review team membership was the same. For LSCBs who have not been part of the pilots, training for review team members before beginning a systems case review for the first time would ease the process considerably.

## 7 Time/cost requirements

The table below captures key contrasts in time/cost of the SCIE model with the usual SCR process, noting the value added of the SCIE model where significant.

Issue	More time/cost intensive	Less time/cost intensive	Value added
<b>Independent Chair</b>		Only minimally required in SCIE process	
<b>Overview Author</b>	More days required		Working collaboratively with the review team means that the learning is shared locally
<b>IMRs / Review team</b>		No need for external IMR authors to be commissioned	
		Compared to writing IMR reports, SCIE review team commitment is less time intensive but the time required is more visible as it cannot be done at evenings and weekends.	Multi-agency review team working together means that analysis is informed simultaneously by strategic contexts and perspectives of all agencies. Review team members, often at senior management levels, get to see how they view and (mis)understand other agencies and are being seen and (mis)understood by others.
	The process can be more intensive for some agencies e.g. police and peripheral agencies such as housing, who are more centrally involved in the SCIE model.		Being actively involved in a multi-agency team can serve to bolster knowledge, relations and feelings of membership to the safeguarding community for those agencies usually only peripherally involved.
<b>SCR Panel</b>		Only minimally required in SCIE process as separate from Review Team	
<b>Timespan</b>		Period of professional involvement reviewed in detail is shorter than usual process	Learning has higher chance of being relevant to current and future organisational needs
<b>Chronology</b>		There is no requirement for this to be comprehensive	In an effort to make the construction of the chronology more proportionate to its value, judgement is encouraged as to where detail is needed and where a simpler timeline will suffice.
<b>Staff</b>	More time consuming for staff		Bringing people together creates a constructive multi-agency learning environment and training opportunity. The process cultivates a culture of reflective practice.
<b>LSCB</b>	LSCB has a more active role in reflecting on the findings and deciding on the appropriate course of action.		This requires the LSCB take ownership of the follow-up action rather than just struggling to implement Overview Author's recommendations.

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