



The collective safeguarding responsibility model: The 12Cs: Development, evidence base and potential application

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ABSTRACT

Multi-agency (also referred to as inter-professional/inter-agency) collaboration is viewed as an imperative way of working to prevent and protect people from harm. The operationalization of multi-agency safeguarding, including the implementation of legislation and guidance, varies widely and there remain areas of ongoing learning in multi-agency safeguarding enactment. In addition to understanding the facilitators of collaborative safeguarding, we must also have tools to evaluate and scrutinize these arrangements, to maximize our effectiveness. This article follows on from a previous article (Ball et al., 2024a) and introduces the collective safeguarding responsibility model: the 12Cs. The 12Cs provides a unique, evidence-based, holistic framework that can demonstrate how safeguarding arrangements are working strategically and operationally, across and within organizations. The framework focuses on the role of practitioners and agencies in responding to safeguarding concerns, and crucially, the framework incorporates understanding the perspectives of those with lived experiences of receiving safeguarding support. The 12Cs can provide both a local and national understanding of what we have in place regarding multi-agency safeguarding. It also explores how this works, whether it is effective and what action is required to improve responses going forward. The multi-agency safeguarding landscape is a dynamic space, and as such, we must be able to continually assess and be assured of our safeguarding effectiveness to provide a robust evidence base to inform future practice.

Key Words Multi-agency; safeguarding; collective; collaboration; multi-sector inter-professional; inter-agency; effectiveness; 12Cs.

INTRODUCTION

Safeguarding has been defined as “protecting people’s health, well-being and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect” (Care Quality Commission, 2022). There is an assertion that safeguarding is a multi-agency endeavour and cannot be achieved in silo. However, despite a plethora of legislation for multi-agency safeguarding, understanding its impact upon keeping people safe remains unclear, challenging and highly variable (McGuire et al., 2021; Stanley, 2018). Ball et al. (2024a) argue that while there is much research surrounding multi-agency safeguarding, less is understood about the *effectiveness* of the multi-agency approach. In their previous article, Ball et al. (2024a) note that multi-agency safeguarding should progress from being everyone’s responsibility toward establishing a collective responsibility, thus ensuring that all partners engage in a meaningful, active and

accountable role to fulfill their safeguarding responsibilities. The collective safeguarding responsibility model: the 12Cs, aims to provide understanding into how multi-agency safeguarding is consistently implemented across organizations. Importantly, it also provides a platform for evidencing how this activity can be assessed for effectiveness. This current article provides evidence base for the development of the model, introduces the core principles of the model itself and details its potential application and impact, using testimonials from practitioners and policy makers.

MULTI-AGENCY COLLECTIVE SAFEGUARDING: EVIDENCE BASE

The 12Cs theoretical model is based upon an array of accumulative research projects relating to multi-agency safeguarding. This has included over 500 interviews with key stakeholders

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such as safeguarding practitioners, managers, policy makers and those with lived experience of the safeguarding system. The specific research focus across projects centred on different thematic areas of interest such as domestic abuse, serious youth violence, child exploitation and county lines. In addition, a thematic analysis was undertaken in relation to 33 child practice reviews in Wales, which included analyzing risk factors and multi-agency practice learning (McManus et al., 2023). The collective findings of these research projects have also displayed synergy with wider findings relating to multi-agency safeguarding, such as a lack of information sharing and barriers to joint working (Child Safeguarding Review Panel, 2024; Home Office, 2014; Shorrocks et al., 2019). In addition, the authors highlighted good practice examples when implementing multi-agency safeguarding policy into practice, such as ensuring safeguarding partnerships instill strategic to operational congruence (Ball et al., 2024b). The creation of the 12Cs model itself was initially developed during a research project commissioned by National Independent Safeguarding Board (NISB, 2024). This entailed a national evaluation of safeguarding arrangements in Wales, which aimed to identify what “good” looks like. The study encompasses three workstreams:

- Workstream One: Interviews with 138 practitioners across seven local authorities, involved in both strategic and operational roles, across a wide range of sectors.
- Workstream Two: Interviews and focus groups were undertaken with 10 experts by experience who had lived experience of accessing support from services.
- Workstream Three: Interviews were conducted with 20 individuals with responsibility for data/performance metrics, and a review of safeguarding metrics collected by the local authorities was undertaken.

All interview transcripts were anonymized and coded on Nvivo software (Lumivero, formerly called QSR International, USA, Canada, Singapore and Europe) to identify reoccurring themes and patterns within the dataset, both inductively from the data itself and deductively in consideration to themes identified within the literature. A summary of key themes which were derived across the workstreams is listed in Table I.

Each of the themes were underpinned by evidential quotes, informing the analysis of thematic findings

(McManus et al., 2022). The themes identified challenges and barriers to enacting effective safeguarding but also examples of good practice were demonstrated, whereby safeguarding arrangements were demonstrated to be working well. Similar thematic findings echoed previous studies which have explored implementation of multi-agency safeguarding (Ball et al., 2024b; McManus & Boulton, 2020). Discussions and analysis of collective findings across these projects contributed to the creation and development of the collective safeguarding responsibility model: the 12Cs, a model which maps out the key structural processes and practice elements that can effectively facilitate the enactment of multi-agency safeguarding.

THE COLLECTIVE SAFEGUARDING RESPONSIBILITY MODEL: THE 12Cs

Where safeguarding arrangements were noted to be working well, key safeguarding partners had a dedicated and focused workforce who were supported by a resourced and comprehensive system (Ball et al., 2024b; McManus et al., 2022). While practitioners and managers are working tirelessly, often having a significant positive impact upon the lives of those they support, there remain ongoing challenges in consistently working effectively in partnerships. Key learning from previous research has highlighted that there are challenges in working collaboratively within child protection, when a threshold of significant harm has been reacted (Child Safeguarding Review Panel, 2024), but also at the level of sharing routine information between agencies regarding safeguarding concerns (McManus et al., 2023). This can inhibit ascertaining a holistic understanding of what a person potentially at risk may be experiencing. Practitioners and agencies require the appropriate skills and underpinning organizational structures in place to respond to safeguarding concerns, and this must be across the whole system. Crucially, these arrangements must be comprehensively understood and their application must be transparent. The 12Cs model captures safeguarding responses and assesses the effectiveness of these responses. The theoretical model entails 12 components, 4 of which relate to practitioners and agencies and 8 relate to structures and processes, see Figure 1.

A summary of the 12 components is defined below. Full definitions alongside further examples of good practice for each of the components can be found at Ball and McManus (2023).

TABLE I Key themes and subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
1. Governance and guidance	Strategy – legislation, policies, leadership
2. Joined-up safeguarding processes	Structures, systems and procedures
3. Partnership working and collaboration	Practitioner relationships
4. Staff investment, recruitment, retention	Workforce information, resources, employee development, support, well-being
5. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic	Impact on society, services, staff and those who access service support
6. Data, audit, performance management	Purpose, utilization, logistics, challenges. Safeguarding metrics
7. Lived experience voice and participation	Opportunity to have voice heard, meaningful and accessible opportunities for effective support and feedback into service design

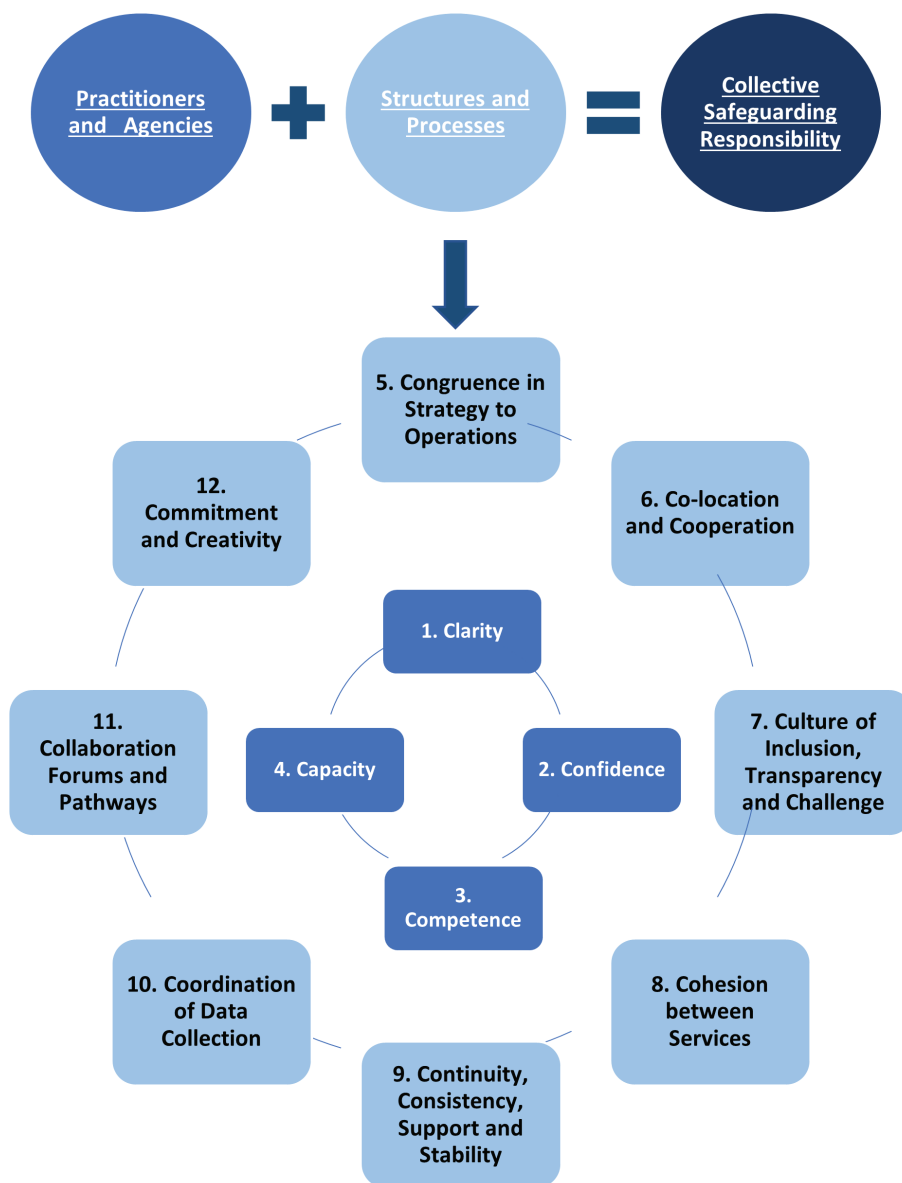


FIGURE 1 Collective responsibility model: the 12Cs

Practitioners and Agencies

It is recognized that practitioners are at the heart of delivering the safeguarding response and that their dedication, tenacious efforts and skilled expertise are vital to ensure that multi-agency safeguarding policy is enacted. Therefore, they should be supported to fulfill this role by ensuring the following components are addressed.

1. **Clarity** of expectations regarding the safeguarding process, responsibilities within own role and partner agencies' remits and timeframes.
 - Practice Example: A regional threshold document was utilized for different sector agencies to clarify safeguarding referral expectations. This enabled clarity, while being cognisant of agency thresholds and processes, to be able to respond appropriately according to their own agency remit.
2. **Confidence:** Practitioners must have belief in their ability to fulfill safeguarding responsibilities and opportunities to develop knowledge and gain confidence.
 - Practice Example: Informal consultations with multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) allowed for clarification on safeguarding concerns by offering advice at the point in which it was required. It also facilitated discussions and built confidence regarding what information was necessary from referring agencies, to ensure that a referral had the appropriate level of detail to direct action by the appropriate person/agency.

3. **Competence:** Practitioners must have investment into developing skills, experience and knowledge. Practitioners need the opportunity and space to reflect and make sense of this.
 - Practice Example: Multi-agency training facilitates bringing together practitioners from different sectors and remits to learn about specific safeguarding issues in a collaborative environment, allowing for shared learning, holistic understandings and collective responsibility. This can develop understanding, knowledge and skills.
4. **Capacity:** Practitioners must be provided with adequate and appropriate time and resource to effectively fulfill their safeguarding duties.

Structures and Processes

Practitioners and agencies are governed and reliant upon the systems and processes which underpin their practice. Such factors can help facilitate or inhibit safeguarding responses; therefore, the following components should be addressed.

5. **Congruence in Strategy to Operations:** Congruence and common understanding between the senior leadership level and the frontline workforce is key to policy implementation and should include a fluid exchange of communication between the two.
 - Practice Example: Proactive managers and leaders who are prepared to “roll their sleeves up” and get involved with frontline activities ensure that they have up-to-date knowledge in responding to current safeguarding challenges.
6. **Co-location and Cooperation:** Partner relationships should be established, developed and sustained. Relationships must be continually and actively invested in and not an assumed by-product of “everyone’s responsibility.”
 - Practice Example: Including domestic abuse practitioners within MASH ensures that appropriate and timely advice and expertise is utilized in decision-making. It also generated shared knowledge and understanding and facilitates relationship development.
7. **Culture of Inclusion, Transparent and Challenge:** All relevant agencies should be meaningfully included. Ongoing, open dialogue should be facilitated, and professional challenge should be promoted and encouraged.
 - Practice Example: Inclusion and representation meetings: Having an inclusive approach, involving both statutory, and voluntary and charity sector agencies, at both operational level and strategy level for multi-agency meetings ensures that unique perspectives and knowledge are meaningfully shared at all stages in the safeguarding process.
8. **Cohesion Between Services:** Alignment in safeguarding processes to enable seamless transitions between services.
 - Practice Example: Aligned forms and protocols can reduce the risk of duplication, fragmentation and ambiguity, such as children’s/adults’ services and police joint referral forms within safeguarding hubs.
9. **Continuity, Consistency, Stability and Support:** Service delivery should have consistency. There must be investment into recruitment and retention of staff, including appropriate support and supervision.
 - Practice Example: Staff well-being investment should include formal opportunities to participate in therapeutic support and access to specialist support when required. A culture of approachability should be developed, whereby practitioners can access informal support and comfortably approach peers, managers and leaders to discuss concerns or worries.
10. **Coordination of Data Collection:** Practice should be accurately reflected in data and data should meaningfully inform practice. Multi-agency data should be coordinated, collated, analyzed and disseminated.
 - Practice Example: Shared databases allow different sectors to view how different agencies are working with individuals and families. For example, domestic abuse practitioners having access to certain aspects of the statutory system allows them to understand immediately if there is children’s services involvement.
11. **Collaboration Forums and Pathways:** Understanding the experiences of individuals and families being supported by services is paramount. Individual, family and carer feedback must be facilitated through accessible pathways.
 - Practice Example: Within youth justice, there are examples of interactive apps being utilized to understand the experiences that young people have working with youth justice practitioners, how they were listened to, how they had helped, in what way and how this could be improved.
12. **Commitment and Creativity:** Creativity, innovation and a progressive approach are integral to collective safeguarding responsibility.
 - Practice Example: Promotion of innovative working through proactive encouragement and the facilitation of new ways of working requires a change from the working norm.

To accompany the 12Cs model, an accompanying self-assessment tool (SAT) has been co-created with stakeholders. The SAT supports the application of the 12Cs to assess safeguarding arrangements across each of the 12 components. Figure 2 provides an example of 1 of the 12 components (component 8: strategy to operations), to highlight the types of information required to undertake the 12Cs SAT. There are various versions of the SAT, Figure 2 is an example aligned to the inspection criteria of the UK His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

APPLICATION POTENTIAL OF THE 12Cs MODEL

The National Independent Safeguarding Board (NISB) Wales has a duty to report on the adequacy and effectiveness of

C8: Congruence in Strategy to Operations					
	1	2	3	4	5
HMICFRS Gradings	Inadequate	Requires Improvement	Adequate	Good	Outstanding
	There are causes for concern and recommendations must be made and addressed	Intervention has demonstrated few, if any, of the characteristics of good performance, and substantial number of areas require improvement	Intervention demonstrated some of the characteristics of good performance, areas for improvement identified	Intervention substantially demonstrated all the characteristics of good performance	Intervention substantially exceeded the characteristics of good performance
12Cs Progress	Practice/ Intervention/ Policy identified but not progressed	Practice/ Intervention/ Policy identified and agreed by key partners. Implementation plan finalized, start date agreed	Practice/ Intervention/ Policy initiated, implemented and undergoing review and refinement	Practice/ Intervention/ Policy fully implemented, embedded and functioning well	Practice/ Intervention/ Policy embedded, functioning optimally, sustainably and exceeding expectations
Self-assessment Score			x		
Evidence for Self-assessment Score	Narrative explaining the evidence for self-assessment score reached? Examples should specifically identify any Policy or Practice interventions/support				
Accountability, Ownership and Governance	Who is the lead person/people/agency responsible for coordinating/driving action on this?				
Stakeholder Partners	Which stakeholders/partners are part of the delivery/achievement of this component and what is their role?				
Specific Action Plan	What is required to implement, improve or sustain work on this component				
Implementation Timeframe	What are the timeframes and review points: Strategic Longer-term/ Operational Shorter-term,				

FIGURE 2 Self-assessment tool (SAT): the 12Cs. HMICFRS, His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

arrangements to safeguard children and adults in Wales (NISB, 2024). In their annual work plan for 2023–2024 (NISB, 2024) in achieving their aim to evaluate the performance and approaches to safeguarding and protection, it states that the 12Cs model will be promoted to regional safeguarding boards.

“The 12C’s model has been widely welcomed by several key agencies in Wales. In refreshing a critical element of safeguarding policy leadership and thinking, this model adds real value to the way we think about what it means when we say that ‘safeguarding is everybody’s business’. For those with responsibility for ensuring safeguarding effectiveness, the 12Cs offers a new and well-aimed tool for evidencing collective effort and alerting us all to when ‘Working Together’ may be at risk of drifting or lacking grip.” (Tony Young, Chair of Independent Safeguarding Board, Wales)

Regarding UK inspection of safeguarding arrangements, the 12Cs featured in a development session for HM Inspectorate of Probation for their inspectors, in August 2024. Additionally, the model alignments to probation have been discussed in a HM Inspectorate Academic Insights article (Ball & McManus, 2024)

“The 12 C’s framework usefully highlights the key features of effective collaborative multi-agency operational safeguarding arrangements and how practitioners, agencies, structures and processes must all work together” (Dr. Robin Moore, Head of Research, HMI Probation)

Furthermore, the Care Inspectorate Wales has noted the relevance of the 12Cs in assisting in their duties.

“We think the 12C’s model has potential to be applied across a wide range of multi-agency working, not only safe-

guarding, and are considering how we can build it in our performance review work with local authorities and their partners. We can see the development of a self-assessment based on the 12Cs could also be a really helpful tool for safeguarding boards and many other partnerships” (Vicky Poole, Deputy Chief Inspector, Care Inspectorate Wales)

Within the United Kingdom, traction and potential application of the model have been evident across the police sector, within Public Protection. Force Detective Chief Inspector, Andy Horne, has recognized the value of the 12Cs model and notes parallels within safeguarding objectives and procedures within the police.

“In my role I am experienced at working with partners to safeguard vulnerable people. The Collective Safeguarding Responsibility Model: 12Cs helped me visualise and map out complex internal and external processes, and helped me better understand how to work together to address gaps, and identify opportunities to share good practice” (DCI Horne)

The police are a key statutory partner organization in response to safeguarding. DCI Horne has highlighted that the 12Cs model has helped translate strategic objectives into tactical plans and help provide a communications plan to explain key operational priorities to the frontline workforce. It has also helped develop a better understanding on how a flexible problem-solving approach, focused on collaboration and co-production, could ensure excellent partnership progress. Specifically, DCI Horne has identified its potential for alignment with integrated offender management (IOM), which aims to provide a cross-agency response regarding crime and reoffending threats within local communities. The key principals include:

1. All partners manage offenders together
2. A local response to local problems
3. All offenders can potentially be included
4. Offenders face up to their responsibility or face the consequences
5. Best use is made of existing programs and governance arrangements
6. Achieving long-term desistance from crime

While there is direct alignment to the first three principles, the remaining three principles would likely require a multi-agency response to support application. The components of the 12Cs could support activity involving key partners of the IOM programme, instilling and enacting a collective responsibility. Crucially, the model can evaluate and scrutinize how we understand the effectiveness of our multi-agency strategic and operational activity, both from a process level and by understanding the experiences of those receiving support. DCI Horne is incorporating the 12Cs within the syllabus for the IOM and form part of their Continuous Professional Development.

“I intend to build the 12Cs into our Continuous Professional Development agenda in Lancashire, to drive “safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility” and to highlight the benefits of a collective, collaborative culture, I have shared it across my partnership network and have received excellent feedback from local authorities, prisons and probation, and community safety practitioners” (DCI Horne)

CONCLUSIONS

“To avoid silo working in this area we would need a single accountability tool/model which can be used to review internal decision-making/challenges but also address collective/systemic challenges such as failures around information sharing” (DCI Horne)

Multi-agency safeguarding requires identifying, understanding and utilizing the individual contributions from partners and ensuring that they are meaningfully included with the safeguarding process, to collectively respond. As Firmin et al. (2022) note, rather than blurring the distinct contributions from different agencies, the aim is “to create a single, mutually agreed set of aims, values, pathways and procedures” (Firmin et al., 2022, p45), and this requires clarity. Everyone has a responsibility to share information and contribute their expertise but there must be appropriate infrastructure to facilitate this. We need consistency in how we ensure accountability, how we establish a collective safeguarding responsibility and how we determine effectiveness. This collective responsibility lies not only across individual practitioner decisions and actions, but it is also embedded within strategic governance and structures, and imperatively, the two must align. If we are to improve safeguarding practice by applying the repeated learning and recommendations from the many safeguarding practice reviews and inquiries undertaken over the last 50 years, then we need a comprehensive system-based approach. This approach must ensure consistency, while also enabling the nuanced variability across localized landscapes. We must build on good practice,

evidencing what works well and scrutinizing this evidence, so that we are assured that we are effective at multi-agency safeguarding. The collective safeguarding responsibility model: the 12Cs serves as a versatile tool, which identifies and captures evidence across the components of the complex multi-agency system. It identifies how we enact a variety of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, providing reassurance and challenge. Ultimately, it ensures coherent oversight and understanding of what effective safeguarding looks like and how to achieve it.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

DETAILS OF POSSIBLE PREVIOUS OR DUPLICATE PUBLICATION

Some of this work summarizes reports completed by the author and is available from the National Independent Safeguarding Board Wales: Shaping the Future of Safeguarding in Wales project: Findings from Liverpool John Moores University – Safeguarding Board Wales and HM Inspectorate of Probation: The “12Cs” collective safeguarding responsibility model (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk).

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