

What is a Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB)?

Since the 2014 Care Act, every Local Authority has had a Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB). Their main objective is to assure itself that local adult safeguarding arrangements and partners act to help and protect adults in its area who are

eligible for support under the Care Act. Alongside its two other duties - to publish a strategic plan and annual report – it must also conduct Safeguarding Adults Reviews in accordance with s.44 of the 2014 Care Act

What is a Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR)?

SABs must arrange a Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) when an adult in its area dies because of abuse or neglect, whether known or suspected, and there is concern that partner agencies could have worked more effectively to protect the adult

SABs must also arrange a SAR if an adult in its area has not died, but the SAB knows or suspects that the adult has experienced serious abuse or neglect

Something can be considered serious abuse or neglect where, for example the individual would have been likely to have died but for an intervention, or has suffered permanent harm or has reduced capacity or quality of life (whether because of physical or psychological effects) because of the abuse or neglect

SABs are also free to arrange for a SAR in any other situations involving an adult in its area with needs for care and support

SARs should seek to determine what the relevant agencies and individuals involved in the case might have done differently that could have prevented harm or death. This is so that lessons can be learned from the case and those lessons applied to future cases to prevent similar harm occurring again.

Its purpose is not to hold any individual or organisation to account. Other processes exist for that, including criminal and disciplinary procedures, employment law and professional regulatory bodies such as the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the Nursing and Midwifery Council and Social Work England for example. SARs can also highlight effective practice.

SARs are completely separate from other investigations that may be occurring, for example, by the police, CQC or Coroner, although they can take account of the findings of those investigations

Who is involved in a SAR and what happens?

Whilst Safeguarding Adults Boards lead SARs, they often bring in external, impartial people with experience of working within criminal, health and social care organisations at senior levels to undertake the review itself. These commissioned consultants are often called 'independent authors', and must have no connection with any of the organisations or personnel involved in the review

The organisations involved in the care and treatment of the person under review must co-operate with the SAR. Typically, these include agencies who are already SAB members, such as adult social care, the police, health services (including clinical commissioning groups and hospitals), probation, the DWP and local fire and

rescue and ambulance services. However, other agencies who are not, such as care homes, home care providers and housing associations, may also be involved

Once a SAR has been agreed, an independent author is commissioned and terms of reference and key lines of enquiry established. Next, requests for information, including chronologies of events and documentation are made to the agencies involved. Sometimes, interviews or learning events are conducted where all the key individuals involved gather together to discuss what happened in detail. Finally, the independent author begins writing their report, consulting on and sharing drafts until a final version is agreed

Types of review and the involvement of family, victims & others

The SAB should be primarily concerned with weighing up what type of review process will promote effective learning and improvement to prevent future deaths or serious harm occurring again. There are several different types of review possible: appreciative enquiries, thematic reviews and SCIE's 'Learning Together' reviews being just three examples

It is common to seek the involvement of the person who has been abused and / or their families in SARs. Whilst they can expect to be consulted as part of the process, they should be supported to understand the limits of their contribution. However, a good SAR report should provide answers for families and friends of adults who have died or been seriously abused or neglected

How long do Safeguarding Adults Reviews take?

A SAR should be completed within a reasonable period of time and in any event within 6 months of initiating it, unless there are good reasons for a longer period being required; for example

because of potential prejudice to court related proceedings. In these cases, the report typically will not be published until court proceedings have concluded

What happens when the SAR is completed?

Once the independent author has finished their report, it is usually published on the SAB's website. However, where there is sensitive information that could adversely affect others (for example, if children are involved), a redacted summary may be published, or the decision made not to publish a report at all. In these circumstances, focus is placed upon producing learning materials, such as briefings, to ensure that agencies and professionals can still learn from what happened

Once the report is published, SABs draw up an action plan - a document listing everything that

all agencies, not just those involved, should do to ensure that the lessons learnt are implemented – and monitor the progress of these action plans to completion. Sometimes, large organisational changes are necessary, which can take months to complete. Some recommendations involve requests to make changes at a national level, which are not always possible

Whilst SAR reports are legal requirements, their recommendations are not and agencies do not have to agree to implement all of the changes listed

Links with other statutory reviews

In setting up a SAR, the SAB should also consider how the process could dovetail with any other investigations that are running in parallel, such as a child SCR or DHR, a criminal investigation or an inquest. It may be helpful

when running a SAR and DHR or child SCR in parallel to establish at the outset all the relevant areas that need to be addressed, to reduce the potential for duplication for families and staff

How to make a SAR referral?

It is vital, if individuals and organisations are to learn lessons from the past, that reviews are trusted and safe experiences that encourage honesty, transparency and sharing of information to obtain maximum benefit from them. If individuals and their organisations are fearful of SARs, their response will be defensive and their participation guarded and partial

Any agency can make a SAR referral, about either their own agency's practice or a partner organisation. Simply complete the referral form – available on the Board's website - and send it to the Safeguarding Board manager. This will begin the process described in the SAR policy

