



<b>Classification</b>	<b>Official</b>		
<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Service Leadership Team</b>	<b>Agenda no.</b>	<b>7j</b>
	<b>Performance and Resources Board</b>		<b>14</b>
<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>19 March 2024</b>		
	<b>28 March 2024</b>		
<b>Report Authors</b>	<b>Hannah Phipps, Head of Employment Policy and Practice Donna Bentley, Head of Safeguarding</b>		
<b>Presented By</b>	<b>Colette Black, Director of People Services</b>		
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Safer Together Update – ‘Safe Share – 1 year on’</b>		
<b>Type of Report</b>	<b>Information</b>		
<b>Action Point No.</b>		<b>For Publication</b>	<b>Yes</b>

### **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

None. This report is for information only.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Two external reports were published in November 2022; An inspection of vetting, misconduct and misogyny in the Police Service (HMICFRS – 2 November 2022) and the Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade (Nazir Afzal – 28 November 2022). In addition, the NFCC produced the Safeguarding Standards, which placed emphasis on the need to encourage safeguarding cultures for both the internal and external audiences. As part of being a learning organisation, the Service Leadership Team (SLT) approved an initial response to these papers called ‘Safer Together’.

Safer Together consists of six initial recommendations which arose from reading the reports. The recommendations encompass; Safer Recruitment, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), Safe Places (renamed as Safe Share), Cultural Maturity Model, Mapping and Managing Allegations.

This paper provides an update on these Safe Share workstream and is a review of Safe Share 1 year on.

### **BACKGROUND**

Our Service seeks to make colleagues feel confident in the organisation having a positive listening culture and that it will take action. We had a number of existing routes for colleagues to express concerns and to seek support – line manager, advice and

support from HR People Business Partner, Safeguarding Team, Occupational Health and Dignity at Work Advocates.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> January 2023 our Service launched the Safe Share Service for all colleagues to feel safe to speak up and to discuss concerns relating to self and/or others and be confident that cases will be handled objectively and confidently, and where necessary, anonymously. Safe Share aimed to further endorse that safeguarding and wellbeing must be considered as a whole organisation approach and that our colleagues could feel confident that wellbeing and reduction of potential harm concerns will result in positive action. A service that strives to mitigate harm or the potential of harm to our colleagues at the earliest of opportunity, using a person-centred approach, being a true enabler of the services positive culture plans.



This service is an intelligence based early identification and intervention person centred approach that is available to all colleagues as well as those who represent the service (volunteers).

How the service works: Colleagues can contact a dedicated mailbox or telephone line. Safe Share is a central hub that offers support for colleagues or can gather information about concerns relating to others. It puts the wishes and feelings of those seeking support and guidance first. The mailbox is managed by the Head of Safeguarding and the Head of Employment Policy and Practice. The telephone line is available 24/7 and is managed by the Safeguarding team.

Following the call or email, options include:

- A safe space for a person to simply talk through a concern, feel listened to and consider a variety of suggested options in terms of next steps
- Referring the person to another service e.g. counselling, third sector signposting, Safeguarding referral etc.
- Offering coaching
- Offering a facilitated conversation
- Taking their complaint forward for an investigation

## **OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS**

### **USAGE:**

Since its launch in January 2023 the confidential telephone number and email mailbox has received 54 instances. The level of usage has been consistent over the 12 months.

The majority of calls received are out of standard office hours, in total 39 telephone calls have been received out of hours. This suggests that colleagues do not want to have these conversations at work instead choosing a convenient time for them that gives them privacy and an opportunity to have conversations in true confidence.

Most callers wish to remain anonymous which limits the amount of data we hold about the demographics of those making contact with Safe Share, but the gathering of intelligence has provided us with knowledge in terms of themes.

### **THEMES:**

There are emerging themes beginning to show and this intelligence gathering will continue:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number</b>
Domestic abuse (victim or perpetrator of the individual or concerns for a colleague)	10
Allegations of misconduct	9
Financial Concern	7
Mental Health (of the individual, colleague, or family member)	6
Concerns about a line manager	4
Bullying	4
Substance Misuse	3
Promotion Process	2
Concerns linked to Industrial Action	2
Other	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>

The utilisation of the telephone number and mailbox demonstrates that the Safe Share route for raising concerns has built trust. Feedback and growth indicate that colleagues are referring in 1:1 conversation with colleagues.

Colleagues raising concerns about their colleague's wellbeing, demonstrates a kind and caring culture and evidence that safeguarding and wellbeing is no longer considered as an external approach but one that is considered internally. Concerns are raised at all levels within the service and encompasses both uniformed and support staff. Whilst the key themes have highlighted a number of cultural issues with concerns about bullying,

misconduct and behaviours of managers, the early intervention approach has ensured that those raising concerns feel listened to and supported as a person centred approach to next steps is promoted.

## **FEEDBACK**

Feedback received from those who have made calls or contacted the mailbox has been positive. Users have reported feeling safe and supported and trusted that the matter will remain confidential where possible. Some users have shared feedback that they would have taken time off work or sought counselling but now they feel they don't need to. There is some intelligence that suggests that the existing counselling routes have previously been used to provide support and guidance in terms of next steps for work related matters. Significant recent callers in the past 6 months have said they were recommended by a colleague to call Safe Share. A key theme of the feedback is that Safe Share did what it said it would do and as a result of this there has been a growth in the number of referrals.

Safe Share is positively impacting with early intervention. A number of cases offered an early intervention that colleagues later reported had prevented their situation escalating and, in some cases, prevented sickness absence. This demonstrates efficiency in referrals to other departments.

## **RISKS AND MITIGATIONS**

This is a potential control measure for strategic risk, SRR150019.

'There is a risk that the Service fails to provide a safe and inclusive culture which ensures the well-being of staff and contributes to attracting a diverse workforce'

## **LINKS TO FIRE AND RESCUE PLAN**

This work enables a commitment in the Fire and Rescue Plan regarding positive culture.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Whilst the majority of calls are out of hours and are covered by the Safeguarding out of hours cover, the follow up calls and case work take place during normal working hours at no additional cost.

Case Study example:

Caller telephoned Safe Share out of hours one evening. The call took 1 hr and 28 mins at a call out cost of £21.98 per hour plus on-costs. The caller stated that he needed to go to his GP and be signed off work for the next few weeks due to gambling habits that had a significant impact on his finances, he was now heavily in debt.

Safe share noted all concerns and reassured caller that a plan would be put together and suggested caller meets on Monday to go through suggested plan and consider whether he would like to take any steps.

On the Monday morning (normal working hours) a plan was put together and in the afternoon the meeting took place with the colleague (the colleague was off duty for that meeting). We spent a couple of hours going through the plan and the caller agreed next steps. Some of the immediate actions taken: -

- Access to gambling sites (GAMSTOP) were blocked from devices used by the caller. Contact was made with a debt advisor from Citizens Advice
- Support was given to the colleague in completing financial disclosure templates.
- Signposting for the caller to an external support network for gambling.

**Conclusion:**

For the initial call to safe share which incurred a cost of £32.97 plus on-costs, the case work was then picked up within the normal working week. The early intervention prevented the individual from needing to be signed off with stress for a few weeks e.g. cost of a FF salary for one month as an example the potential saving to the service of that time off work would have been their salary £3,018.83, CPD £60.40 plus on-costs and any additional costs to backfill the role. In addition, the counselling and support services received by a third-party agency were free of charge and negated the need for our employee to utilise the services counselling services which would have been utilised.

Savings to the service, taxpayer in terms of preventing the colleague from being signed off. Savings to OH in terms of counselling services.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

None associated with this report.

**STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report.

**EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

The actions being taken will not have a disproportionate impact on individuals with protected characteristics (as defined within the Equality Act 2010), when compared to all other individuals and will not disadvantage people with protected characteristics.

Race	No	Religion or belief	No
Sex	No	Gender reassignment	No
Age	No	Pregnancy & maternity	No
Disability	No	Marriage and Civil Partnership	No
Sexual orientation	No		

The majority of calls are anonymous therefore we are not currently clear on any EDI impact and whether calls are proportionately/disproportionally related to protected characteristics.

The Core Code of Ethics Fire Standard has been fully considered and incorporated into the proposals outlined in this paper.

**HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

None directly associated.

**CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

A Safer Together updated was presented to Managers at the Manager Briefing in January 2023, this included the launch of Safe Share. Further articles were published in The Shout and on the Service intranet [ECFRS News | UKISAR in Turkey and Malawi](#).

[budget and pay, Safer Together: Rick's blog \(essex-fire.gov.uk\)](#). Posters are also at every Service location.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

These workstreams link to ongoing delivery of our People Strategy Action Plan.

## **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AND APPENDICES**

- Performance & Resources Board Paper Meeting Date 23 February 2023.
- SLT and P&R Paper Meeting Date 18 April 2023 and 1 June 2023.