



Classification	Official		
Meeting	Service Leadership Team	Agenda no.	6g
	Performance and Resources Board		14
Meeting Date	17th September 2024		
	24th September 2024		
Report Authors	Donna Bentley, AD Culture, Inclusion & Wellbeing/Head of Safeguarding		
Presented By	Colette Black, Director of People Services		
Subject	Safer Together Update		
Type of Report	Information		
Action Point No.		For Publication	Yes

RECOMMENDATION(S)

None. This report is for information only.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Safer Together consists of six initial recommendations which arose from two external reports 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). 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. In addition, Safer Together supports the Safeguarding Standards, which places emphasis on the need to encourage safeguarding cultures for both the internal and external communities.

Following the recent HMICFRS inspection, the following observations were made by the inspectorate: -

“We were pleased to find that the service had improved the way that staff can speak up. It has developed a ‘safe share’ scheme for staff to confidentially and anonymously report concerns or seek support, which we have identified as promising practice.”

Furthermore, NFCC Managing Allegations Guidance notes that the ECFRS Safe Share is “an example of good practice.”

This paper provides an update on the key themes within Safer Together.

BACKGROUND

Our Service seeks to embed a sense of trust and confidence in the organisation by having a positive listening culture that results in action. We have a number of existing routes for colleagues to express concerns and to seek support – line manager, advice from HR People Business Partner, Safeguarding Team, Occupational Health and Dignity & Inclusion Advocates.

Safe Share was launched on 12th January 2023, the concept being to provide a 24/7 confidential facility, which enables all colleagues to feel safe to speak up and to discuss concerns relating to self and/or others. Safe Share principles are based on intelligence for early identification and intervention using a person-centred approach. The service is available to all colleagues as well as those who represent the service (volunteers). The principles of the scheme are heavily reliant on building trust and confidence.

Safe Share further endorses that safeguarding and wellbeing must be considered as a whole organisation approach. By using a person-centred approach that holds the wishes and feelings of our people as the guiding principle, colleagues are able to feel in control of the advice and guidance received and agreed next steps. Such an approach acts as a further enabler of the services drive for our positive culture plans.



How the service works: Colleagues can contact a dedicated mailbox or telephone line. Safe Share is a central hub that offers support and guidance 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 Assistant Director of Culture, Inclusion & Wellbeing/Head of Safeguarding & the Safeguarding Manager. The telephone line is available 24/7 and is managed by the Safeguarding team.

The service provides the following: -

- 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 be that face to face or virtual
- 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 and the previous Safer Together paper that was submitted in March 2024, where fifty-four instances were reported upon, the confidential telephone number, in-person drop ins and emails continued to be well utilised with a further seventeen contacts made in the past six months. It is anticipated that the utilisation rate will remain on par with the previous data sets, particularly when we consider that the winter/festive periods are likely to see higher numbers of referrals, in particular for those concerns relating to Domestic Abuse and Financia matters.

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

A significant majority of the 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: From launch of Safe Share

Category	Number
Domestic abuse (victim or perpetrator of the individual or concerns for a colleague)	10
Allegations of misconduct	9
Financial Concern (that have an impact on anxiety)	10
Mental Health (of the individual, colleague, or family member)	8
Concerns about a line manager	4
Bullying in the workplace	7
Substance Misuse	3
Promotion Process	2
Concerns linked to Industrial Action	2
Gambling	2
Matrimonial	4
Misogyny	1
Homophobia	1

Other *	8
Total	71

*e.g. loneliness, or a subject that has left the individual feeling irritated or frustrated – offloading.

The utilisation of the telephone number and or unannounced face to face drop in facility demonstrates that service users are fully understanding that the service is managed and facilitated by the Safeguarding team. The allocated mailbox is rarely used.

A common theme of early interactions with Safe Share is talking of the “third person.” Safe Share facilitators will not question this approach as it can be used for a variety of reasons, for example, distancing themselves from the trauma or impact, or simply providing confidence in being more expressive and open with their thoughts and feelings. Evidence does suggest that the “third person” approach detaches after the first interaction which suggests that confidence in the service has been established.

Colleagues raising concerns about their colleague's wellbeing (as opposed to referring to themselves as the “third person”), 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 and evidence of continued use from Safe Share users state that the service is considered, trusted, efficient and effective and that they would recommend the service to other colleagues. Users have reported feeling safe and supported and trusted that the matter will remain confidential where possible. This is further evidenced by returning callers for separate issues or concerns. Some users have shared feedback that they would have taken time off work or sought counselling but now they feel they do not need to. A key theme of the feedback is that Safe Share did what it said it would do.

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 long term sickness absence. This demonstrates efficiency and savings 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 weekend. The call took 1 hr and 48 mins at a call out cost of £21.98 per hour plus on-costs. The caller stated that matters in the family home had deteriorated significantly and domestic abuse was now a reoccurring theme. The caller stated that they felt a feeling of impending doom and things were only going to get worse. This was significantly impacting on the mental health and anxiety of the caller.

Safe share noted all concerns and spent time talking and reassuring the caller. Advice was given around what to do in the event of further escalation between now and the next planned conversation with the Safe Share team. Further conversations took place during the working week which eliminated the need for additional costs. The conversation ensured that a plan was drafted for next steps and mitigation of further harm/greater harm, the plan was based solely on the wishes and feelings of the individual concerned.

Jointly agreed key aspects of the plan included: -

- Referral to Safer Places. Safer Places is a Charity established to relieve distress and suffering amongst people living with or fleeing from, or at risk of, Domestic Abuse
- Referral to a third sector counselling service specific to DA
- A plan as to how to share the information with the line manager, ensuring a greater supportive network within the workplace
- Agreement to meet and report to GP for further support and guidance

Conclusion:

For the initial call to safe share which incurred a cost of £39.56 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 long term 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 £480 of counselling services funded by the service.

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

The above case study and savings represents one of the seventy-one cases managed by Safe Share.

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

FUTURE PLANS

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

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AND APPENDICES