

7Minute Briefing

Leadership, Trust, and Accountability

Introduction

This briefing is intended for trustees, board members, senior leaders, and individuals in positions of trust. It also supports those who may have concerns about the behaviour or suitability of individuals in trusted roles. Its purpose is twofold:

- To **support and inform those in positions of trust** by clarifying their heightened safeguarding responsibilities and the level of **scrutiny and accountability** their roles attract; and
- To **raise awareness among organisations and individuals** of the potential **safeguarding risks posed by individuals who may hold false credibility** — where perceived status or influence masks unsafe or harmful behaviours.

An independent review into the [Church of England's handling of abuse allegations involving the late John Smyth QC](#) starkly illustrates the catastrophic consequences of misplaced trust and a lack of organisational challenge. Boards and trustees carry ultimate accountability for ensuring that safeguarding is not only in place — but actively upheld and scrutinised.

Why this matters

In Croydon and nationally, reviews repeatedly show that when leaders fail to act, safeguarding breaks down. It's not just about individuals — it's about the systems that appointed them, failed to question them, or protected reputation over children's safety.

[Safer Recruitment](#) is just the start. Sustained, reflective leadership and proactive accountability are what truly protect people — and the organisations that serve them.

Safeguarding is a fundamental responsibility for all organisations — especially those working closely with children, young people, or vulnerable adults. When appointing or overseeing leaders, such as CEOs, trustees, project leads, or high-profile ambassadors, the bar must be higher.

Key Lessons

Leadership Accountability

Safeguarding is not just the job of frontline staff. Leaders must be accountable for ensuring policies are not only in place but working. Excuses such as “not knowing” are no longer acceptable.

Transparency Builds Trust

When concerns arise, how an organisation responds is as important as the issue itself. Transparent processes and timely reporting can prevent escalation and build trust with the public and regulators.

Independent Oversight Is Vital

Internal investigations alone often fall short. Independent oversight brings credibility, impartiality, and ensures survivors’ voices remain central rather than marginalised.

Culture Over Compliance

A safeguarding policy on paper is not sufficient. Organisations must embed it in everyday practice—fostering an environment where staff and volunteers are empowered to raise concerns and challenge poor practice, regardless of rank or role.

Scrutiny Is Inevitable

If a safeguarding concern arises and is poorly handled, be assured it will attract scrutiny — from funders, the media, local safeguarding partnerships, regulators, and the community. Organisations that demonstrate a proactive, open approach are more likely to maintain trust, even when things go wrong.

Safeguarding Is a Leadership Responsibility

Leadership failures in safeguarding can result in long-term harm, intense scrutiny, reputational damage, and a breakdown in trust.

Safe Recruitment followed by **sustained, reflective leadership** is what keeps children, young people, especially those who are vulnerable safe.

Safer Recruitment Essentials

✓ Clear Role Profiles

Define responsibilities, boundaries, and safeguarding expectations from the outset — whether for staff, trustees, or volunteers.

✓ Interviews for Every Role

All appointed roles must undergo an interview, which must include a safeguarding question to assess understanding and values..

✓ References Matter

Request and check two references, including for volunteers. Follow up on any unclear or concerning information. Gaps in employment history need to be verified.

✓ DBS Checks

Undertake DBS checks appropriate to the role. Understand the thresholds for regulated activity and your duty to report safeguarding concerns to the DBS.

✓ Induction and Probation

Introduce safeguarding policies from day one. Include appropriate training and a probationary period to assess suitability and offer early support.

✓ Ongoing Supervision and Support

Offer regular check-ins, appropriate to the role. Ensure all team members know how to raise concerns and access safeguarding support.

Appointing and Overseeing Leaders

✦ **Safeguarding-Driven Leadership Role Descriptions** Safeguarding should be part of core leadership duties. Leaders are expected to model good practice, ensure compliance, and support a culture of openness.

✦ **Rigorous Vetting and Values-Based Interviewing** Explore candidates’ judgement and accountability in safeguarding contexts. Include safeguarding specialists in the process when possible.

✦ **Safeguarding References for Leadership** Request detailed safeguarding references for any senior appointment — including any past involvement in allegations or concerns.

✦ **Ongoing Scrutiny and Development** Leaders must receive regular safeguarding training and report safeguarding updates at board level. Include safeguarding performance in annual reviews.

✦ **Escalation Pathways and Whistleblowing** Ensure the board has a clear, independent process for addressing concerns about leaders. Promote whistleblowing pathways and protect those who speak up.

Empower Your Workforce, Ensure Compliance

To build and maintain a safeguarding culture, your team must be equipped with the right knowledge, confidence, and accountability. In Croydon, we expect all staff, volunteers, and trustees to have safeguarding training that is relevant to their role — and up to date.

- **Level 1 Safeguarding Children training is mandatory for everyone in your organisation, regardless of their role.** This sets a shared baseline understanding of how to recognise and respond to concerns.
- For those with additional responsibilities — such as DSLs, trustees, or frontline practitioners — further training is available through the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP).

Book and Manage Your Team's Training in One Place. The CSCP Training Portal offers a wide range of courses tailored for the voluntary and community sector. Through the portal you can:

- Book training for individuals or teams
- Track attendance and completion
- Monitor compliance across your workforce
- Access post-event resources and certificates

Visit the CSCP Training Portal:
<https://cscp.event-booking.org.uk>

To enquire about setting your organisation up on the system email:
cscptraining@croydon.gov.uk

To learn more about CSCP visit croydonsafeguarding.org.uk

Worried about someone working in a position of trust?

If you have concerns about the behaviour of someone who works with children — whether in a paid, voluntary, or trustee role, or in their personal life — it's essential that you act without delay. In Croydon, we take a zero-tolerance approach to safeguarding failures in leadership and positions of trust.

You must refer to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) if an individual working with children:

- Has behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child
- May have committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- Has behaved towards a child in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm
- Has behaved — in any context — in a way that raises doubts about their suitability to work with children
- Has demonstrated discriminatory behaviour towards a child based on a protected characteristic

These concerns don't need to occur in the workplace. They may arise in a person's private life, or through their associations with others who pose a risk. For example:

- Arrests for serious offences (e.g. weapon possession or domestic abuse)
- Child protection procedures relating to the person's own children
- Living with or closely associating with someone who may pose a safeguarding risk to children they support in a professional role
- Accessing materials that are deemed as harmful and/or inappropriate

It is important to acknowledge Transferable Risk. The core question is: Is this person still safe to be in a position of trust with children? If you're unsure — always seek advice.

Refer or speak to Croydon's LADO here: [Croydon LADO Information and Referral Process](#)
Or contact Croydon MASH for broader safeguarding concerns: [Croydon MASH Portal](#)

Safeguarding is not just about responding to incidents — it's about identifying patterns, potential risks, and acting in the best interests of children and young people. If you're uncertain, seek advice from the LADO or MASH without delay.

Early advice can prevent harm and ensure your organisation remains compliant, credible, and safe.