

Appropriate Adults: Protecting the rights and welfare of vulnerable adults in custody

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About the research

The police have a duty to secure an Appropriate Adult (AA) to safeguard the rights and welfare of vulnerable people in custody. This includes any young person aged 10-17 and adults who are 'mentally vulnerable'. Unlike for young people, there is no duty on any agency to provide AAs for adults with vulnerabilities (for example, people with mental health problems or a learning disability).

Local authority adult social services do have key responsibilities for people with mental health needs and learning disabilities in this role, and they have historically supported AA provision. However there is some evidence that funding may be being cut back.

Government-commissioned reviews and inspections have highlighted concern over poor provision of AAs. The rights and welfare of vulnerable adults in custody are not being adequately safeguarded.

This briefing reports on research which aimed to understand the role for adult social services in the provision of AAs across England, map different models of provision, and identify what an 'effective' AA service would look like. The researchers used online surveys, and undertook four case studies in local authorities where stakeholders from adult social services, AA services, and police were interviewed. Two focus groups were also held with service users.

Policy implications

- Local authority adult social services are well placed to work with partners to fill gaps in Appropriate Adult provision nationally.
- Commissioners should review the different funding and commissioning models available to choose which ones would be best suited to their local situation.
- Commissioners and funders should monitor whether the rights and welfare of adults in custody are protected, as well as whether the AA provision facilitates early intervention and effective referral pathways into relevant health and social care services, a key duty under the Care Act 2014.
- Commissioners should ensure that service user involvement is central to the commissioning, delivery and monitoring cycle of AA services.

There is no standard model of funding for Appropriate Adult services for vulnerable adults and provision is often inadequate. Local authorities can fund provision as part of their wider safeguarding responsibilities.

Key findings

Despite their safeguarding responsibilities, many local authority adult social services do not fund, commission, or otherwise provide an AA service for vulnerable adults.

This can lead to increased demands on social care professionals to undertake this role (even though they may not be adequately trained to do so), or worse, a lack of availability of trained AAs for vulnerable adults.

Where adult social services do fund AA provision for adults, this is often in partnership with other agencies including neighbouring authorities, clinical commissioning groups, and children's services. AA provision is often commissioned through the third sector, though some local authorities do deliver the service directly.

Service effectiveness is typically measured by the availability and response times of trained Appropriate Adults. The effectiveness of Appropriate Adults in protecting the rights and welfare, and ensuring effective participation in the criminal justice system, of adults in custody is given little regard.

There is little evidence of service user involvement in Appropriate Adult provision.

Further information

Jessiman, T & Cameron, A (2017) ['The role of the appropriate adult in supporting vulnerable adults in custody: Comparing the perspectives of service users and service providers'](#). British Journal of Learning Disabilities.

Bath, C, Bhardwa, B, Jacobson, J, May, T & Webster, R (2015) ['There to help: Ensuring provision of appropriate adults for mentally vulnerable adults detained or interviewed by police'](#). National Appropriate Adult Network.

Jessiman T and Cameron A (2017) ['Vulnerable adults in policy custody: the role of local authorities in the provision of Appropriate Adults \(AA\)'](#). London: School for Social Care Research.

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