

How to compare safeguarding consultancy proposals

Compare scope, methodology, evidence, deliverables, timetable and total cost.



Commission with clarity

Choosing a safeguarding consultant is an important decision. The right consultancy can provide independent challenge, strengthen practice, identify risks and leave an organisation with clearer systems, stronger confidence and sustainable improvements.

But proposals can be difficult to compare. One consultant may provide a detailed methodology, another may emphasise their experience, while another may offer the lowest price. A consistent evaluation process helps you look beyond presentation and assess what each proposal is actually offering.

This guide provides a practical framework for comparing safeguarding consultancy proposals against six areas:

- Scope
- Methodology
- Evidence and expertise
- Deliverables
- Timetable
- Total cost

The aim is not simply to identify the cheapest proposal. It is to identify the proposal that offers the strongest overall fit, quality and value for your organisation.



The commissioning principle

Use the same criteria for every proposal and select for overall fit, quality and value.

1 Start with the same questions for every proposal

Before reviewing proposals, agree your evaluation criteria and scoring approach.

This is particularly important where several people are involved in the decision. Evaluating each proposal against the same criteria reduces the risk that different reviewers give disproportionate weight to factors such as writing style, familiarity with a consultant or headline day rate.

For each criterion, ask:

- What did we ask the consultant to provide?
- What has the consultant actually proposed?
- What evidence do they provide that their approach will work?
- What will we receive at the end?
- What assumptions or exclusions have they made?
- What will the proposal require from us?
- What will the full cost be?

Where possible, agree the scoring criteria before reading the proposals.

A simple 0-5 scoring scale can work well:

Score	Meaning
0	No response or unacceptable
1	Very limited / significant concerns
2	Partially meets requirement
3	Meets requirement
4	Strong response / exceeds requirement in relevant areas
5	Excellent response / clearly exceeds requirement with strong evidence

You can then apply weightings according to what matters most for your commission.

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Scope: Are they solving the problem you actually have?

Start by checking whether the consultant has understood your requirement.

A strong proposal should demonstrate a clear understanding of your organisation, the safeguarding context and the purpose of the commission. It should distinguish between what is in scope, what is out of scope, and any assumptions that need to be tested.

Look for:

- A clear understanding of the brief.
- Recognition of the specific safeguarding context.
- A clear definition of the work to be undertaken.
- Identification of key stakeholders who need to be involved.
- Appropriate consideration of organisational size, structure and complexity.
- Clear boundaries around what the consultancy will and will not cover.
- Identification of dependencies or information required from the commissioner.
- A willingness to clarify or refine the scope where necessary.

Questions to ask

Does the proposal answer our actual question?

A polished proposal can still be unsuitable if it offers a standard package that does not address your organisation's particular needs.

Has the consultant identified the important safeguarding interfaces?

For example, depending on the commission, this might include leadership and governance, safer recruitment, allegations management, safeguarding policies, training, recording and reporting, multi-agency working, quality assurance or organisational culture.

Are there hidden assumptions?

Check whether the proposal assumes that you will provide extensive documents, arrange large numbers of interviews, provide administrative support or complete substantial work yourself.

Red flag

Be cautious where the proposal appears to have been written largely from a template and could apply equally to almost any organisation.

3 Methodology: How will they do the work?

The methodology explains how the consultant intends to move from the current position to the required outcome.

Do not award high marks simply because a proposal contains lots of methodology. Look for an approach that is logical, proportionate and capable of producing useful findings.

A strong methodology should explain:

What will happen?

For example, document review, interviews, observation, case-file sampling, focus groups, surveys, workshops or benchmarking.

Why will it happen?

The consultant should explain why each method is appropriate to the commission.

Who will be involved?

Consider whether the proposed engagement includes the people whose perspectives are important.

How will information be analysed?

Look for a credible approach to identifying themes, strengths, gaps, risks and priorities.

How will findings be validated?

For example, will there be an opportunity to test factual accuracy before the final report?

How will the work lead to improvement?

The methodology should connect assessment to practical recommendations and outcomes.

Questions to ask

- Is the methodology proportionate to the size and complexity of the commission?
- Does it combine appropriate sources of evidence?
- Does it include meaningful engagement with relevant staff, leaders, trustees or service users where appropriate?
- Does it allow enough time to understand context rather than relying solely on document review?
- How will the consultant distinguish between policy compliance and safeguarding effectiveness in practice?
- How will urgent safeguarding concerns identified during the work be handled?
- Does the approach take account of confidentiality, information governance and safeguarding responsibilities?

Red flag

Be cautious about methodologies that promise a definitive assessment after very limited evidence collection.

A safeguarding review based solely on policies, for example, may tell you whether documents exist but may provide much less insight into how safeguarding operates in practice.

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Evidence and expertise: Can they demonstrate that they can do the work?

Experience matters, but relevant evidence matters more than impressive claims.

Look for evidence that the proposed team has undertaken work comparable to yours.

Consider:

- Relevant safeguarding qualifications and professional experience.
- Experience in the particular safeguarding setting.
- Experience of similar reviews, audits, investigations, evaluations or consultancy assignments.
- Knowledge of relevant legislation, statutory guidance and professional standards.
- Understanding of the realities of safeguarding practice, not just policy requirements.
- Examples of previous work or client references where appropriate.
- The experience of the individuals who will actually undertake the work, rather than only the wider consultancy.
- Evidence of appropriate professional development and quality assurance.

Ask yourself:

**Key point**

What evidence does this proposal give us that this particular team can deliver this particular piece of work?

A consultant may have extensive general safeguarding experience but limited experience of your specific context. That does not automatically rule them out, but the difference should be recognised and considered.

Look beyond credentials

A long list of qualifications is not a substitute for demonstrating how expertise will be applied.

The strongest proposals connect experience to your commission:

**Key point**

"We have undertaken comparable safeguarding reviews and will apply this experience to..."

rather than simply:

**Key point**

"Our consultants have extensive safeguarding experience."

Red flag

Be cautious where the proposal relies heavily on testimonials, logos or general claims of expertise but provides little evidence of the proposed team's direct experience.

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Deliverables: What exactly will you receive?

A proposal should make it clear what you are buying.

Avoid accepting vague descriptions such as “a comprehensive report” or “strategic recommendations” without further detail.

Look for specific outputs, such as:

- Inception meeting and agreed work plan.
- Evidence-gathering framework.
- Audit or review findings.
- Risk or gap analysis.
- Written report.
- Prioritised recommendations.
- Action plan.
- Presentation or feedback session.
- Leadership or board briefing.
- Staff workshop.
- Follow-up review.
- Supporting resources or templates.

For each deliverable, ask:

- What will it contain?
- Who is it intended for?
- When will it be provided?
- What format will it take?
- How detailed will it be?
- Will recommendations be prioritised?
- Will recommendations identify responsibility and timescales?
- Is follow-up support included?
- Are revisions included in the price?

Focus on usability

A useful safeguarding report should not simply identify weaknesses. It should help the organisation understand:

- What is working well?
- What needs to improve?
- Why does it matter?
- What should happen next?
- How urgent is it?
- Who should take responsibility?

- How will improvement be demonstrated?

Red flag

Be cautious where the final output is described in broad terms but there is no indication of its structure, content, level of detail or intended use.

6 Timetable: Is the delivery plan realistic?

A proposal can look excellent on paper but fail if the timetable is unrealistic.

Check whether the proposed timetable allows sufficient time for:

- Preparation and document review.
- Interviews or consultation.
- Evidence analysis.
- Follow-up questions.
- Drafting.
- Quality assurance.
- Commissioner feedback.
- Finalisation.
- Presentation or implementation support, if required.

Also consider your organisation's capacity.

A consultancy that requires 25 interviews in one week may technically have a fast timetable, but it may place an unrealistic burden on staff and reduce the quality of engagement.

Questions to ask

- What are the key milestones?
- What does the consultant need from us and by when?
- Who needs to be available?
- What happens if information is delayed?
- How much time is allocated to analysis and reporting?
- Is there time to clarify emerging issues?
- Does the timetable account for holidays, term dates or other operational constraints?
- When will we receive the final report?

Red flag

Be cautious about a timetable that is substantially shorter than the other proposals unless the consultant can explain why their approach can achieve the same quality within that timeframe.

7

Total cost: What will the commission actually cost?

Price comparison is rarely as simple as comparing day rates.

A proposal with a lower daily rate may ultimately cost more if it requires additional days, expenses, VAT or follow-up work.

Calculate the total expected cost.

Check:

- Consultant day/hourly rates.
- Number of days included.
- Number of consultants involved.
- Preparation and analysis time.
- Report-writing time.
- Meetings and presentations.
- Travel and accommodation.
- Expenses.
- VAT.
- Additional meetings.
- Additional report revisions.
- Follow-up support.
- Any optional elements.
- Any assumptions that could result in additional charges.

Compare like with like

For example:

Proposal	Days	Fees	Expenses	VAT	Additional/optional costs	Estimated total
A						
B						
C						

The objective is not necessarily to select the lowest cost.

The better question is:

**Key point**

What will we receive for the total cost, and how well does it meet our safeguarding need?

Government commissioning guidance emphasises value for money rather than simply selecting on price, alongside transparent and fair evaluation processes.

Red flag

Be cautious where a very low price appears to depend on an unusually small amount of consultancy time or where important activities appear to be excluded from the headline fee.

8 Use a weighted evaluation matrix

A weighted matrix makes the decision more transparent and helps prevent one particularly persuasive proposal from dominating the discussion.

For example:

Criterion	Suggested weighting
Scope and understanding of requirement	15%
Methodology and approach	25%
Evidence and relevant expertise	20%
Deliverables and usefulness of outputs	15%
Timetable and capacity	10%
Total cost and value for money	15%
Total	100%

These weightings are examples only. Adjust them to reflect the priorities and risks of your particular commission.

Example scoring

If a proposal scores 4 out of 5 for methodology and methodology is weighted at 25%:

$$4 \div 5 \times 25 = 20 \text{ points}$$

Repeat the calculation for each criterion and add the results.

Importantly, record the reasons for each score.

A score without an explanation makes it much harder to understand or defend the final decision.

9

Consider quality and risk alongside the score

The highest numerical score should not automatically end the process.

Before appointing a consultant, consider whether there are any issues that require clarification or due diligence.

For example:

- Are there conflicts of interest?
- Are references available where appropriate?
- Is professional indemnity insurance appropriate?
- Are confidentiality and information governance arrangements clear?
- How will personal or sensitive safeguarding information be handled?
- What happens if a serious safeguarding concern emerges during the commission?
- Is there appropriate professional supervision or quality assurance?
- Are subcontractors or associates involved?
- Who is accountable for the final work?
- Are there any important exclusions or dependencies?

For public-sector commissioning, current government guidance also highlights the importance of robust due diligence, including consideration of safeguarding policies and other organisational controls.

10 Look for value, not just volume

A longer proposal is not necessarily a better proposal.

Equally, a short proposal is not necessarily inadequate.

The strongest submission should give you enough information to understand:

Need > Approach > Evidence > Outputs > Outcomes > Cost

Ask whether there is a coherent line between each of these.

For example:

**Key point**

Need: We need to understand whether safeguarding governance is effective.

**Key point**

Approach: The consultant will review governance arrangements, sample relevant records, interview key leaders and test findings with staff.

**Key point**

Evidence: Findings will be triangulated across documents, interviews and practice evidence.

**Key point**

Output: A report will identify strengths, gaps and prioritised recommendations.

**Key point**

Outcome: Leaders will have a clear evidence base and practical improvement plan.

**Key point**

Cost: The fee covers the complete process, including analysis, reporting and presentation.

That is easier to evaluate than a proposal containing impressive language but little connection between activity and outcome.

11

Common comparison mistakes**Choosing the cheapest proposal**

Lowest price does not necessarily represent best value.

Choosing the most impressive CV

Relevant expertise matters, but the quality of the proposed approach matters too.

Being persuaded by presentation

A professionally designed proposal can be useful, but design should not substitute for evidence.

Comparing day rates instead of total cost

Always establish the expected total cost of the commission.

Giving everyone the same score

If every proposal receives broadly the same score, the evaluation criteria may not be sufficiently discriminating.

Changing the criteria after seeing proposals

Agree the evaluation framework before assessment wherever possible.

Ignoring what the organisation has to contribute

Consultancy time is only part of the resource involved. Consider staff time, leadership time, access to records and administrative support.

Failing to clarify ambiguity

If an important element of a proposal is unclear, ask the same clarification question through the agreed process rather than making assumptions.

12 A simple decision process

Before making the appointment, work through these questions:

- Does the proposal clearly meet the scope?
- Is the methodology credible and proportionate?
- Does the team have relevant safeguarding expertise?
- Is there sufficient evidence to support the consultant's claims?
- Are the deliverables specific and useful?
- Is the timetable realistic?
- Is the total cost clear?
- Have we compared costs on a like-for-like basis?
- Have we considered the organisation's own resource requirements?
- Have we completed appropriate due diligence?
- Have we identified any conflicts of interest?
- Can we explain why the selected proposal represents the best overall value?

If the answer to all of these is yes, you should have a much stronger basis for appointment.

T

A final test: would you be confident explaining the decision?

A good commissioning process should leave a clear audit trail.

If someone asked:

**Key point**

"Why did you appoint this consultant rather than the others?"

you should be able to explain the decision using the agreed criteria, evidence and scores.

The answer should not be:

**Key point**

"They seemed the best."

It should be something more like:

**Key point**

"Their proposal demonstrated the strongest understanding of our requirements, provided the most appropriate methodology for our safeguarding context, demonstrated relevant experience, offered clear and practical deliverables, provided a realistic timetable and represented good overall value for money."

That is the difference between choosing a proposal and making a defensible commissioning decision.

Q

Quick comparison framework

When comparing safeguarding consultancy proposals, assess:

Area	Key question
Scope	Have they understood what we actually need?
Methodology	Is their approach credible, proportionate and evidence-informed?
Evidence	Can they demonstrate relevant expertise and experience?
Deliverables	What exactly will we receive and how useful will it be?
Timetable	Can the work be delivered to the required standard and timescale?
Total cost	What will the commission really cost, and what value will we receive?

The best proposal is not necessarily the cheapest or the longest. It is the one that provides the strongest, clearest and most credible route from your safeguarding need to meaningful improvement.

Important information

SafeguardingLink helps organisations identify and compare safeguarding professional services. This guide is intended to support commissioning decisions; it is not advice about an individual safeguarding concern or a substitute for your organisation's procurement, legal or safeguarding procedures.

SafeguardingLink helps organisations define professional service requirements and compare independent safeguarding providers. Independent providers supply their own information; a listing is not accreditation, approval, endorsement or a suitability guarantee.

More commissioning resources: www.safeguardinglink.co.uk/resources