



WOLVERHAMPTON  
SAFEGUARDING  
TOGETHER

## **LEARNING LESSONS BRIEFING FAMILY Q**

### **Background**

Family Q have been known to Wolverhampton Children's Services since 2010 and have spent most of this time at either Child in Need or Child Protection for neglect. The family is comprised of parents and seven children, the youngest of whom was born after the siblings had been removed into foster care.

A referral for consideration of a Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) was made by Wolverhampton Homes after they had accessed the house and found the home conditions to be unfit for habitation and police removed the children immediately. The referral highlighted concerns that the family were living in a squalid state despite many professionals having had involvement over a long period of time.

A Rapid Review meeting was held where it was agreed that the criteria for a CSPR were not met, but that there was learning for both individual agencies and for multi-agency practice that could be gained from the discussions.

This briefing outlines the key themes identified by the review. Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together ask that it is shared widely and discussed at team meetings to help professionals understand how to apply the learning in the context of their daily work.

### **LEARNING THEMES AND WHAT THEY MEAN FOR YOUR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE**

- 1. The cumulative impact of neglect was not considered**  
While neglect had been a concern for all the children throughout professional involvement with the family, it was always looked at as a "snapshot" at that particular moment in time and the harm from the cumulative impact of neglect was not considered within each child's timeframe.

#### **What does this mean for your practice?**

Using the WeCan tool over time will provide evidence for the cumulative impact of harm for each child within a family. If there are concerns about neglect, the tool should be used to measure and document an increased or a decreased risk of harm over time which will be helpful in cases at all levels of the thresholds ranging from Early Help to Care proceedings.

## **2. Professionals understanding of thresholds, particularly for being removed into care, could be improved**

Professionals felt they had run out of options with the family to keep the children protected from the risk of harm. They had been on a child protection plan for a number of years which family were not always compliant with. Requests to the court team were made on a number of occasions to consider care proceedings (and an application to court to remove the children had been refused on one occasion) as there was no clear reduction in the risk of significant harm seen as a result of child protection.

### **What does this mean for your practice?**

Child protection is covered by Section 47 of the Children Act (1989), while care proceedings are covered under Section 31, with different thresholds required to meet these different levels of intervention.

Professionals should make themselves aware of the criteria for care proceedings to be initiated and document their concerns in line with the thresholds. Apparent failure of a child protection plan alone is not appropriate justification to remove a child into Local Authority Care.

## **3. Building relationships with families who are harder to engage**

Most of the communication from professionals was through mother as father was not living at home throughout the timeframe of professional involvement, however, she was not always available when contacts were pre-arranged and often refused entry into her house when professionals visited or cut visits short. Sometimes extended family members were present who tended to speak on Mum's behalf. Establishing a positive relationship and therefore supporting progress was a challenge.

### **What does this mean for your practice?**

Families can be "difficult to engage" for a number of reasons including family breakdown, homelessness, domestic abuse, social stigma, lack of education, substance misuse, language, culture, changes in professionals and more. Most research indicates that it is the quality of the relationship between the worker and the family that makes the most significant impact on the effectiveness of the engagement and support offered to the family and the lasting change it can bring. Professionals from all agencies may need to explore a variety of strategies to build relationships and increase engagement of families with services to achieve a positive outcome.

#### **4. Using the powers of other agencies to work together to support families**

Despite it being a requirement of the child protection plan that agencies were to be able to access the family home, when professionals were granted access, they were allowed no further than the downstairs family area and did not see the kitchen, bathroom or sleeping conditions.

##### **What does this mean for your practice?**

If access to a house is required, other agencies may have additional powers.

Landlords will be able to access properties as part of their rental agreement, and Wolverhampton Homes and other agencies could be approached to support in Safeguarding cases.

Police may also be able to accompany professionals on a home visit if access to the property is likely to be denied, and if there are serious safeguarding concerns, police have powers of entry that do not require permission from the tenant/homeowner.