



## **Learning Lessons Briefing**

### **Serious Case Review in respect of Child N**

#### **BACKGROUND**

Child N was a 14 year old girl who was originally from Lithuania and had lived with her mother and stepfather in the UK for seven years. Her life was tragically cut short when she was killed in a local park on the night of 11 April 2018. A 16-year-old was subsequently found guilty of her rape and murder and jailed for life on 22 February, 2019.

The Serious Case Review was commissioned by Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board to ascertain the involvement of agencies with Child N and to determine if any lessons could be learned about the way in which professionals work together to safeguard children in Wolverhampton. The full overview report can be accessed at:

[https://www.wolverhamptonsafeguarding.org.uk/images/Serious\\_Case\\_Review\\_for\\_Child\\_N\\_final.pdf](https://www.wolverhamptonsafeguarding.org.uk/images/Serious_Case_Review_for_Child_N_final.pdf)

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

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

##### **Theme 1 – Assessment and Intervention**

The first Social Work assessment took place in June 2017 as Child N had been seen with older males and she was associating with a girl who was known to be at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Information gathered from the school was not consistent with concerns raised in the referral and a CSE screening tool was not completed as it was assessed there were no presenting indications of CSE. There was difficulty contacting the parents due to them working long hours and therefore they were unaware of this referral. Subsequently the case was closed.

In March 2018, a referral was made to the Multiagency Safeguarding Hub by a friend of Mother's. Services involved with Child N contributed to the assessment which resulted in a Child In Need (CIN) Plan being commenced. There was no CIN meeting held following the assessment or during the time the decision was made to escalate to Initial Child Protection Case Conference. Child N died prior to this conference being held.

It was identified that language used in professional documentation when considering CSE was at times inappropriate with too much onus being placed on the child.

The review later considered neglect in this case to include; medical, nutritional, emotional, educational, physical and lack of supervision. It is possible that these factors magnified Child N's vulnerabilities and pushed her away from her family and towards any perceived kindness and attention.

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

- When undertaking an assessment of a child; you should involve all parents and carers to enable a rounded view of risk and need.
- All available and relevant assessment tools should be used according to the presenting concerns and should inform your final decisions. The CSE Screening tool can be found at:  
[https://www.wolverhamptonsafeguarding.org.uk/images/children-documents/CSE\\_screening\\_tool\\_Template\\_13s\\_.doc](https://www.wolverhamptonsafeguarding.org.uk/images/children-documents/CSE_screening_tool_Template_13s_.doc)  
For children under the age of 13years the Petch CSE Screening tool should be used:  
<http://www.wolverhamptonsafeguarding.org.uk/images/safeguarding-children/PetchCSEScreeningToolJanuary2017.pdf>
- The use of instructions and restrictions in working agreements for a child, young person and their family are not helpful in enabling them to make changes unless you actively involve them in the development of these.
- The appropriate use of language to describe CSE should be embedded amongst yourselves as safeguarding partners. Further guidance can be found at:  
<https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Guidance%20App%20Language%20Toolkit.pdf>
- As neglect is a complex form of abuse, you should use the neglect strategy and Wecan tool. Guidance for practitioners available at:  
<https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/wecan> that has a focus on adolescents and consider the impact on their development and associated behaviours.

### **Theme 2 – Response to missing episodes**

Child N was going missing from home much more frequently than that was being reported to the police. In response to the missing episodes there were some delays in police systems.

Child N was arrested because she stole her Stepfather's bank card. She said she stole this as she had wanted to buy clothes and that her Mother had hit her, however it was Child N who was criminalised when wider difficulties in relationships in the family were evident.

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

- A lack of timeliness in responding to missing child reports increases the chances that children are exposed to risk for longer periods therefore you should ensure reports of missing children are acted upon in a timely manner.
- You should consider impact of criminalisation at the earliest stage as this can further damage relationships within the family and be detrimental to the way future actions are understood.
- Whilst using policies that focus on the duration of missing episodes, you should be aware this may not take into account emerging patterns of frequent shorter episodes.

### **Theme 3 – Transfers**

Child N left her school in Wolverhampton at the end of autumn 2017 and went to stay with her Father in Belfast. After her return to Wolverhampton in February 2018, a request was made for a new school placement. The request was incorrectly recorded as a new arrival to the United Kingdom and on this basis no checks were made by School Admissions with her

previous Wolverhampton school. The second Wolverhampton school made significant attempts to engage with parents due to Child N's non-attendance.

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

- If processes for responding to a new school admission requests do not include you asking the right questions about all previous schools there can be a delay in sharing the child's information.
- When school attendance of over 90% is considered good by professionals, the impact on both the child's learning and increased vulnerability can be missed and therefore fully considered.

**Theme 4 – Language**

The family's first language is Lithuanian. There was no consensus with frontline practitioners who came into direct contact with the family about how well Mother or Stepfather understood English. The use of interpreters was not used consistently or effectively.

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

- You need to be aware when working without an interpreter with families for whom English is not their first language this could lead to miscommunication about decision making.