



Safeguarding Board publishes review into death of child

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Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board has today (Friday 17 May) published the findings of a Serious Case Review into the death of a girl who was killed by her great uncle.

The child, who is referred to as Child K in the review, was 11 when she passed away in February 2018.

Her great uncle denied murder on the basis he was "legally insane" at the time of her death. A jury at Wolverhampton Crown Court found him guilty of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility and he was ordered to be detained indefinitely in a secure hospital.

The Serious Case Review was commissioned by Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board to ascertain the involvement of agencies with Child K and her family and determine what lessons could be learned about the way professionals work together to safeguard children in Wolverhampton.

The review describes Child K as a bright, popular girl who was happy at home and dearly loved by those who knew her. She had ambitions to become a doctor and was thriving at school, having completed her practice SATs examinations with a pass rate of 97%.

She lived with her great aunt and would also spend time at the home of her great-great grandmother on the occasions when her great aunt worked shifts. Her great uncle was also staying with the great-great grandmother at the time of death, though this was not his normal place of residence.

The great uncle had no history of mental ill health, though he had epilepsy a brain tumour which was diagnosed around 20 years beforehand. However, in the days leading up to Child K's death, family members became increasingly concerned about his state of mind. They tried to get help, describing him as agitated, confused and hearing voices, but a day later he violently assaulted Child K, killing her.

Linda Sanders, Independent Chair of Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board, said: "This was a tragic case in which a happy, self-assured and confident young girl had her life cruelly and violently taken away from her.

"Members of her family who we spoke to as part of this review clearly loved her very much and have been left completely devastated by what happened.

"Ultimately, there is only one person who is responsible for Child K's death, and he has been detained indefinitely for her manslaughter. However, professionals involved in the care of children always want to know what they can do better and through this Serious Case Review we have looked to see what, if anything, could have been done differently.

"The review highlights a number of areas of good practice, including the excellent care and support given to Child K during her time at school and the ongoing support being provided to her siblings since her tragic death.

"It also identifies a number of learning points for individual agencies, in particular that, when support and advice is sought about an adult's mental health, questions should be asked about the wider situation and family circumstances.

"Recommendations have been made which will ensure that the required actions are taken and a number of changes to procedures have or are being implemented, for example by NHS 111 and the Black Country Partnership Foundation Trust.

"As the Safeguarding Children Board, we will also be seeking assurances from agencies that they disseminate widely the learning from this review and information about the out-of-hours pathway for people not known to mental health services, and are also looking at how professionals can be better encouraged to 'take ownership' and 'dig deeper' into situations they are aware of.

"While none of this will sadly bring this young girl back, it will help reduce the likelihood of such a tragedy ever happening again. I hope this will bring some small comfort to Child K's family and indeed everyone who knew and loved her."

The lead reviewer in this case is Nicki Pettitt, an experienced chair and author of Serious Case Reviews and Safeguarding Adult Reviews. The report has been published on the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board website, www.wolverhamptonsafeguarding.org.uk.

The purpose of a Serious Case Review is to establish what lessons can be learned about the way in which local professionals and organisations work individually and together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, to identify what those lessons are, both within and between agencies, how and within what timescales they will be acted on, and what is expected to change as a result, and, as a consequence, improve intra and inter-agency working and better safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Serious Case Reviews are conducted in a way which recognises the complex circumstances in which professionals work together to safeguard children;

seeks to understand precisely who did what and the underlying reasons that led individuals and organisations to act as they did; seeks to understand practice from the viewpoint of the individuals and organisations involved at the time rather than using hindsight; is transparent about the way data is collected and analysed; and makes use of relevant research and case evidence to inform the findings.

Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board is a partnership of all the main organisations that work in the city to support children, young people and their families.