

KNOWSLEY SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP LEARNING SUMMARY



CHILD SAM

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of the key learning that has been identified in a multi-agency learning review that was commissioned by Knowsley Safeguarding Children Partnership.



Background

This case concerns a young person known for the purposes of this report, as Sam, who was a victim of serious assault, in which he sustained serious, non-life threatening injuries.

Services in Knowsley have been in contact with Sam and his family from an early age. There exists a history of domestic abuse, some of which he has witnessed.

There are concerns that Sam is associating with those involved in serious and organised crime. He left education at 15 years of age and was undoubtedly at significant risk of exploitation.

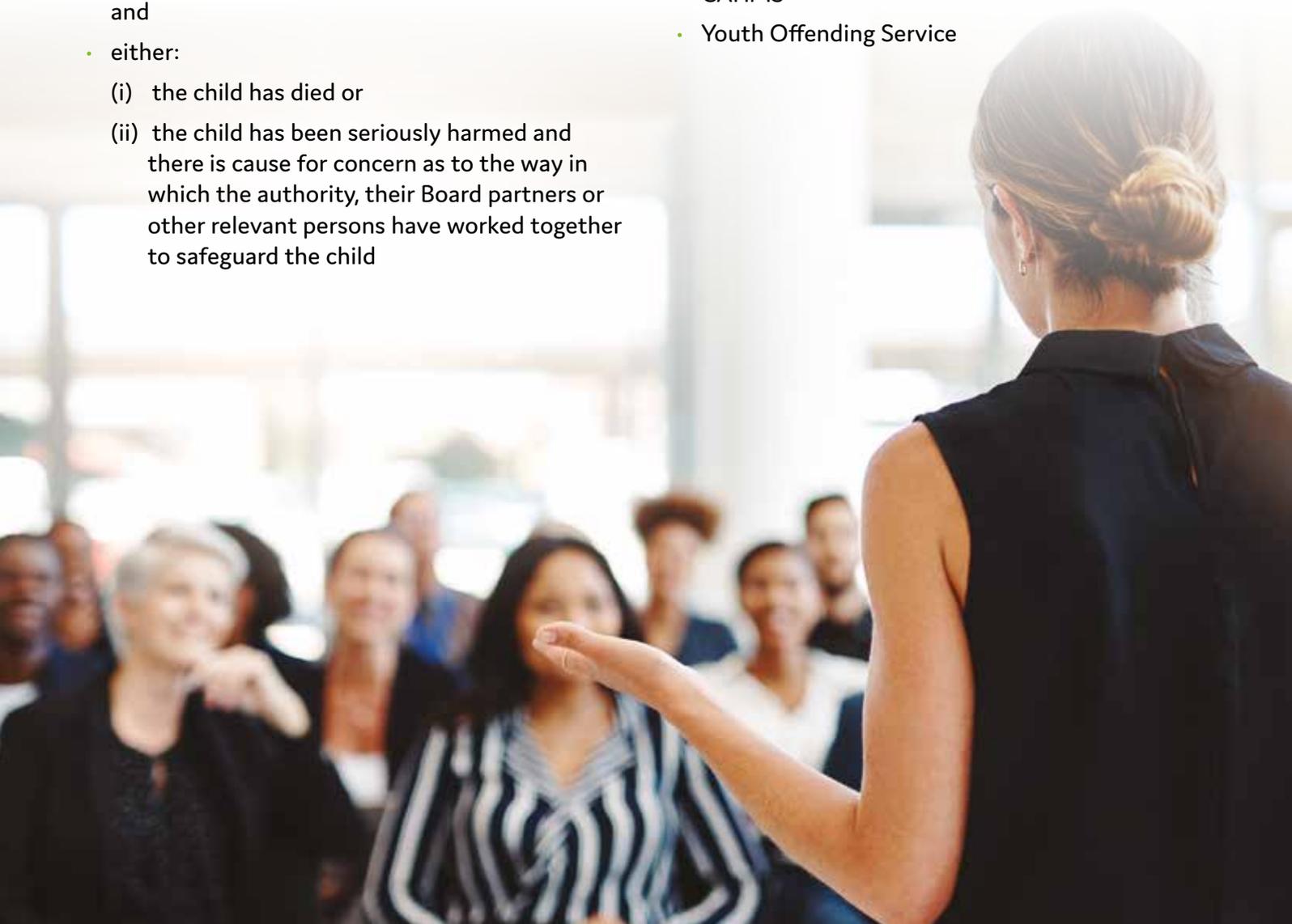
Regulation 5 of **Local Safeguarding Boards Regulations 2006**, requires local safeguarding children boards to undertake a review where:

- abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected and
- either:
 - (i) the child has died or
 - (ii) the child has been seriously harmed and there is cause for concern as to the way in which the authority, their Board partners or other relevant persons have worked together to safeguard the child

Knowsley Safeguarding Children Partnership agreed that the case met the criteria for a multi-agency learning review and that learning could be added in the way in which agencies worked together to safeguard the child.

They commissioned an independent Multi Agency Learning Review to be undertaken by an independent author. Appropriate terms of reference were agreed and the following agencies have contributed to the review:

- Children's Social Care
- Health Services
- Education
- Merseyside Police
- SHIELD
- Early Help/Family First
- CAHMS
- Youth Offending Service



Findings

It is suspected that that Sam is linked to a known organised crime group (OCG) and may have been involved in 'county lines' drug supply outside the Merseyside area.

Merseyside police have processes to manage the response to organised crime, with a nominated Lead Responsible Officer (LRO) responsible for managing a coordinated response.

Although safeguarding is a primary consideration, the Police have tended to focus their operational tactics around disruption.

The review highlighted the importance of developing more long-term multi agency solutions to safeguard vulnerable young people. For example, Knowsley's Multi Agency Risk Threat & Harm (MARTHA) is designed to challenge people and locations most relevant to the exploitation of young and vulnerable people.

The review found that these processes were not integrated with each other and has made recommendations to address that area of concern.

The concerns raised concerning Sam's links to organised crime groups appear to have been the catalyst for agencies to intervene and attempt to provide appropriate support to Sam's child and his family.

A single assessment was completed, and level 3 support was ultimately agreed. Attempts were made for him to work with 'Catch 22' to help rebuild family relationships, reduce offending and engage him in education and training.

'Family First' attempted to provide support, however engagement remained problematic and little progress was made. However the case manager from 'Family First' maintained a positive relationship with Sam.



Sadly, a breakdown in Sam's domestic circumstances prompted discussions between professionals to 'step up' the support to level 4, however this proposal was declined and the child remained at level 3.

The independent author suggested that this was a 'missed opportunity' to safeguard the child.

The review also highlighted concerns that professionals did not identify or respond to 'clear risks' to the younger sibling that were present. It had been alleged that the home address was being used by unknown adult males, causing damage and misusing drugs being an obvious example.

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The review noted the correlation between significant events in Sam's life and his education breaking down, however there is no evidence to support any assertion that not being in school led to him being exploited or becoming involved in crime.

Professionals have claimed that the lack of alternative youth provisions reduce their ability to divert young people from crime and anti-social behaviour and protect them from exploitation.

The review learned that Sam had unidentified needs affecting his learning that were not assessed until he was approaching his fifteenth birthday. The author suggested that he might have benefited from being assessed for ADHD at an earlier age.

Sam officially finished his education at the age of sixteen, although he had not in effect been in receipt of any education provision for the previous 8 months.

During his adolescence, Sam attended a pupil referral unit. There is a perception amongst some professionals that children in pupil referral units are vulnerable to being drawn into organised crime.

Sam has been exposed to significant trauma from a very early age, which adversely effected his mental health and well-being.

There appear to have been significant delays in accessing the services of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

The family cancelled a number of appointments on Sam's behalf. It was almost 19 weeks after initial referral before he attended an appointment.

The author has reflected the inherent risks associated with such a delay and has submitted recommendations to prioritise high-risk cases. The review highlighted the impact that high-profile incidents can have on community tensions and anxieties and recommended the development of a localised 'drop in' service that could be deployed to provide support and guidance

In concluding his review, the independent author acknowledged that Sam has faced many challenges in his life.

He is a young person who has been at significant risk from criminal exploitation however; he does not see himself as a victim.

Sam has presented professionals with many challenges, on occasions being unwilling to engage at all.

The author acknowledged the efforts made by professionals have worked hard to engage with and support Sam. Generally, incidents and risks were identified and responded to appropriately. He is satisfied that decisions were made in the best interests of Sam.

The author has encouraged agencies to continue to develop its approach in respect of children susceptible to all forms of exploitation.

He acknowledged the unique and complex challenges faced by professionals and highlighted the importance of early identification coupled with an effective and coordinated multi-agency response.

Recommendations

The review has made 11 recommendations, which are summarised as follows:

1. Local Police should review their processes for the assessment and dissemination of intelligence to ensure that intelligence relating to the safeguarding of young people and serious organised crime is shared in a timely manner.
2. Undertake a multi-agency audit to establish whether relevant information including contextualised material is effectively shared between agencies and managed appropriately.
3. Raise professional's awareness about intelligence processes. In particular the dissemination, grading and sensitivity of reports.
4. Police to review Organised Crime Group (OCG) management processes to ensure that when appropriate they are fully integrated with local contextual safeguarding.
5. Police should review its 'Released under Investigation Framework' to ensure that investigators and managers conducting reviews take cognisance of a suspects age, vulnerabilities and any safeguarding risks.
6. Undertake a review the 'Step Up & Step Down' procedure to ensure that a multi-agency approach is taken when making decisions relating to levels of need.
7. Review current training delivered to practitioners to ensure that it is relevant for the roles of those attending and has improved outcomes for children.
8. Review processes to ensure that due consideration is given to any risks present for siblings and the wider family. This will ensure these risks are properly mitigated.
9. Consider the feasibility of introducing localised 'drop in' services following high profile incidents in an area. These could provide support and guidance for young people in the area, reduce speculation in the community and increase community intelligence.
10. Undertake a review within PRU's to establish the true extent of children within PRU's being drawn into organised crime. Results from such research can be used to deliver focussed interventions within local PRU's.
11. Local NHS Foundation Trust to undertake a review of CAMHS referral and appointment process. They should seek to develop a 'FastTrack' pathway or escalation process for high-risk cases.

Next steps

Knowsley Safeguarding Children Partnership accepted the findings in the report and has taken steps to address the recommendations set out in it.

An action plan has been prepared and will be managed through existing governance processes.

The partnership seeks your support in embracing the learning identified in the review, which will enable us to work together to safeguard and protect children in Knowsley.

