

Multi Agency Case Audit

6 Step Briefing

Domestic Violence II

Theme / Cases

- Themes are based on priorities identified by the NSCB and Quality Assurance Sub Group.
- Quality Assurance Sub Group members nominate cases.
- Cases are currently selected to ensure there is a cross selection of children, their requirements and service intervention.

All cases selected for this audit involved between 3 and 5 children per case and concern for vulnerable mothers who have/are living in abusive relationships. Where the parents have separated, the children remain at risk due to breaches of orders.

The Process

- Completed chronologies and audit tools submitted for 6 pre-selected cases from each agency.
- Multi-agency meeting convened to examine and analyse each case.
- Learning Summary and 6 Step Briefing developed to support practitioner learning.
- Actions identified as part of MACA Composite Action Plan which are monitored and reviewed by the NSCB Business Office.

The Identified Strengths

Case 1

- Both the Health Visitor and School Nurse were proactive in communicating with agencies to understand current status of the children.
- Whilst Youth Offending Service's involvement with this case was minimal, it was managed appropriately.
- Northampton Women's Aid supported VOICE by calling the mother to offer support.
- Early Help colleagues sought support from the School when they were unsuccessful making contact with the mother.

Case 2

- Social Worker continues to robustly challenge Housing colleagues regarding the risk of domestic violence to the family and the safeguarding needs of the children (perpetrator lives very close by). Previous damage sustained to the property by the perpetrator resulted in repair costs which the mother is unable to pay.
- Health professionals recorded good intra-agency working and this is documented well within the children's individual records.
- The Health Visitor has good engagement with mother.
- The School is working closely with the children to engage them in drawing and talking sessions.
- The mother engaged well with the Freedom Programme and voluntarily attends drop in sessions at Women's Aid.

Case 3

- There is evidence of good recording of the eldest child's wishes and feelings.
- Home sessions are being undertaken with the children, which include the Police, to encourage and improve relations with them.

Case 4

- The School Nurse worked well with colleagues out of county to understand the children's needs.
- Acute Trust colleagues undertook a good assessment of the children and recognised the need for ensuring appropriate safeguarding measures were in place.
- The Acute Trust held comprehensive birth plans for the 2 youngest children and appropriately referred the family to MASH.
- The mother engaged very positively with Hospital professionals.
- The School Nurse has seen all the children individually to assess their needs.

Case 5

- The Social Worker worked well with the children who were initially very guarded, but have since opened up and are discussing their wishes and feelings, which are clearly recorded.
- The Social Worker worked well with the maternal grandmother to help her understand the safeguarding risks to her grandchildren by their mother (her daughter). The children are currently living with the grandmother as mother had admitted prioritising taking drugs over the care of her children.
- The School Nurse proactively challenged colleagues to ensure the children were appropriately safeguarded.
- The mother is attending support services for her mental health issues.
- The School are aware that the mother enters relationships with risky males and are using Protective Behaviours training to monitor the children.

Case 6

- The most recent activity undertaken by the Social Work Academy has been done extremely well, with biological parents and step-parents fully involved in the process.
- The Social Worker sensitively arranged for separate CIN meetings to take place due to the Restraining Order being in place on father. This allowed all views to be heard without breaching the Order.
- The School Nurse has undertaken protective behaviours work with the eldest child.

The Findings

Case 1

- There was a missed opportunity by Northamptonshire Police to make a referral regarding the perpetrator.
- The mother missed many health appointments for the children but her lack of engagement and disguised compliance was not challenged.
- If a professional has a working relationship with a family, this should be used pro-actively to introduce the family to other services such as Early Help.
- A robust contingency plan was not in place for this family when they moved out of county, therefore, professionals were not aware they moved back into the county just a few days after leaving.
- Changes in staff led to safety plans not being followed up in a timely manner.
- The voices, wishes and feelings of the children were not appropriately listened to or recorded by agencies.
- The parents have not yet provided a work programme for the eldest child who is Electively Home Educated.
- The two youngest children have low attendance at School and those present at the MACA were worried that the parents may consider electively home educating these children as well.

Case 2

- Lack of father's (perpetrator's) voice recorded by agencies.
- Historically, the children's voices were not heard. However, a newly recorded strength is the work the School is undertaking to record their wishes and feelings.
- Following father's release from prison, there was a lack of understanding of the risk the perpetrator posed to the children; taking into account Christmas was only a few days away, there was a new baby in the family home (not the perpetrator's), and the perpetrator living in very close proximity to the family home.
- There was a focus on family debt rather than considering the risk posed to this family remaining at their current address in respect of safeguarding the children and the threat of domestic violence.
- Mother is vociferous in safeguarding her children and her frustrations can be misinterpreted by professionals who could interpret her as being volatile and difficult to work with.

Case 3

- Mother continues to minimise domestic violence incidents and does not understand the significant risk posed to her and her children and, in this respect, she is not prioritising her children's needs or their safety.
- The children had expressed their fear of the perpetrator, but the Safety Plan had not been updated to reflect this.

- The Independent Reviewing Officer had expressed that the perpetrator be drug-free for five months before he visited the family home following his release from Prison; however, this was not communicated by agencies and, upon release, the perpetrator went to the family home where he perpetrated a serious attack on mother that was witnessed by the children.
- Mother was 16 weeks pregnant when this audit was undertaken and the Pre-Birth Assessment had not been initiated.
- The oldest child is particularly vulnerable and has a Statement of Educational Need.
- Contact for the children with the perpetrator, who is the children's step-father, has been via the perpetrator's mother who lives out of county.
- There appears to be a focus on the needs of the parents, rather than safeguarding measures for the children.
- The mother clearly wants to be with the perpetrator but it is not clear if a contingency plan was in place to safeguard the children from going to the perpetrator's mother's house for Christmas.

Case 4

- Although recorded, the children's voices or wishes do not appear to have been considered.
- The case drifted due to extended sick leave by professionals from two agencies. However, once the case was transferred, it was urgently dealt with.
- Probation Service informed agencies that mother is now in a relationship with a new male who is currently in prison due to firearms offences; however, at the time of the audit, it was not clear if this had been followed up.

Case 5

- In July 2013, the eldest child disclosed that he had been kicked and punched by his father. It appears that there was minimal support to help him come to terms with what had happened.
- Completing this audit raised concerns about some of the decisions made; however, the case is now being actively progressed, with legal advice being taken.
- Whilst services are working well with the children and their mother, there may have previously been an over-reliance on maternal grandmother safeguarding her grandchildren, whilst also supporting her daughter (the children's mother).

Case 6

- The case was closed by Safeguarding Children's Services due to a Non-Molestation Order being in place; however, there were several further domestic violence incidents that should have triggered the re-opening of the case.
- The case was reviewed four times due to breaches of the Non-Molestation Order by both parents, but the outcomes were not shared with partner agencies.
- A request for Early Help was made by the Health Visitor in August 2016, but it does not appear there was any support put in place.
- The mother requested support in November 2016, but it was not clear what support was offered.
- Historically, the children spent the weekend with their father and they stated they did not want to return home to their mother - disclosing that their mother's partner would hit them; but this was not acted on by professionals.
- School attendance by the two youngest children is low and there are occasions where they have been off ill together. This does not appear to have been reviewed by the School.

The Issues Identified Across Multiple Cases

- In almost all cases, all mothers showed disguised compliance with professionals and refused to engage with services.
- In the majority of cases, the mothers prioritised their relationships with violent partners over the needs and safety of their children.
- There is evidence in several cases of mothers not taking their children to health appointments.
- In the majority of cases there are concerns regarding the children's low attendance at school.
- One child is electively home educated and parents have not provided work plans for the children.
- Some of the families have significant debt. Professionals have focussed support on this issue and the safeguarding of the children has become secondary. In one case, this was particularly significant - as there was an increased safeguarding risk to the children when father was released from prison.
- In some cases, professionals focussed on the needs of the parents rather than the safeguarding measures for the children.
- Social Workers were not always made aware of the outcomes of MARAC meetings.
- Core Groups and Child Protection Conferences must include children's feelings and wishes.

Recommendation Outcomes, Good Practice and Evidence as a Result of this Multi-agency Case Audit

- Information on Domestic Violence is available on the NSCB website. Please click [here](#).
- Information on the NSCB website includes the Domestic Abuse Procedure, training for professionals, details on the Domestic Abuse Notification to Schools Scheme and support groups for victims of domestic violence.
- Young Northants is a specific website designed specifically for young people and provides invaluable information regarding domestic violence and a wide range of other topics including staying safe, health, education, work, money and home, 'having your say' and leaving care. The web address is: <http://www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/children-families-education/young-northants/Pages/default.aspx>
- All children with low attendance at School detailed within this audit, have since been reviewed by the School they attend.
- A meeting to review the families' debt has taken place between key partners and Housing colleagues to ensure safeguarding remains a key focus.
- Contingency plans are in place to ensure that, when a family moves out of the county, professionals are made aware when they return.
- Northamptonshire Police contacted colleagues in a different force to inform them a family from Northamptonshire had moved into their area and a flag put against the address.
- In one case, mother is pregnant and she has been allocated to a Vulnerable Mothers' Midwife. The Midwife is a specialist in recognising signs of domestic violence.
- There were concerns that one mother may try to take her children out of the county for Christmas to stay with the perpetrator, but positive interaction by professionals included discussions around the safety for her children which led to mother making the decision to remain at home during the festive period.
- A Health Visitor has been made aware of the oldest child in a family being electively home educated so that, when she is visiting the younger children in the household, she will be mindful of the oldest child's situation.
- There is a process in place to ensure the outcomes of MARAC meetings are shared. This process has been reviewed and shared by Children's Social Care colleagues and Social Workers are attending MARAC meetings to share outcomes.
- Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust now have a professional dedicated to reviewing children's missed health appointments and will alert the allocated Health Visitor to address any issues with families.