

Serious Case Review

6 Step Briefing

Children Ae

The Background

These children were subject to a Court application by Safeguarding Children's Services to have them removed from their parents care to a place of safety. This mother has had children removed from her previously and placed for adoption.

Safeguarding Concerns

The children had been known to services for several years and experienced significant neglect, with them being on Child Protection Plans and then stepped down to Child In Need a number of times. Partner agencies did not agree that the children should be stepped down to a Child In Need plan.

The Incident

Concerns regarding neglect for these children became significant and the decision was made to apply to the Court to remove them to the care of the Local Authority. The final decision of the Court was not the expected outcome from health and education agencies and this review has looked at how agencies can learn from this case in supporting court applications in the future.

The Review

Children Ae's case was considered by the SCR Sub Group who recommended a review should be convened to identify multi-agency learning in contributing to a Court application to remove children from the care of their parents. There was very good multi-agency attendance at the workshop with robust discussion about how the existing process can be made more effective.

The Findings

- *Lack of management oversight by health services; supervision was not sought early enough and could have been escalated at an earlier point.
- *Health professionals did not give enough significance to the number of Did Not Attend (DNAs) at the time.
- *Agencies provided Children's Social Care with a wealth of evidence (Neglect Tool / Graded Care Profile / school psychologist reports / speech and language reports, Ages and Stages Questionnaires and reports by the Child Minder were completed) that could have supported Court documents; however, Children's Social Care did not consolidate this rich evidence into one consolidated report to support the Court to come to the most accurate findings / decision.
- *With the benefit of hindsight, more recently, the case should not have originally been allocated to a newly qualified Social Worker; once this was recognised, the case was transferred to a more experienced Social Worker, who then made progress with the case.
- *Chronologies are vital in building up an informed, historic, holistic view of family functioning.
- *The step-down process was not well managed at several stages. Details of the Supervision Order were not shared with partners and this ended with no replacement (Child In Need) CIN Plan in place. The CIN Plan was then closed without discussion with partner agencies.

Good Practice and Evidence as a result of this Review and similar Reviews

The Findings continued

*There was significant drift and delay in this case; the Health Visitor, Children's Centre and School consistently raised their concerns to Children's Social Care, but these were not fully addressed. Agencies felt they were not listened to, but these issues were not sufficiently robustly escalated.

*Agencies did not feel they were asked to or able to contribute to Court processes and were not advised of the progress or outcome.

*Whilst assessments for Court purposes are led by a Social Worker, the best assessments are multi-agency in content; all agencies should be able to contribute and have the right to challenge presented information.

*A Supervision Order is granted to the Local Authority and requires multi-agency delivery of support; however, if the outcome is not shared with contributing agencies, they will not know the detail that forms the CiN plan to support the family and may assume, if they have not heard anything, the children have been removed to a safe environment.

*Parenting Assessments provide crucial evidence for Court and need to be multi-agency; for example, if parenting support / capacity services have been provided to a family and there are no improvements noted in their capacity to care for their children, this can form evidence that the Family Proceedings Court requires in order to come to the right outcome for the child.

*Whilst the Social Worker usually completes a Parenting Assessment, it would be more effective if the assessment process and outcome was 'owned' by a multi-agency Core Group. There needs to be a wider shared understanding and change in language used when recommending completion of assessments - to reflect the multi-agency requirement.

*Partner agencies do not sufficiently understand the Public Law Outline (PLO) process.

Recommendations

1. PLO training to be considered and PLO information packs to be created and provided to multi-agency partners. This will be taken forward by Sean Carter and Helen Rennocks, along with input from health colleagues. Learning from this case will be included as a case study.
2. When a Child Protection Plan progresses to PLO, the subsequent Core Group should be chaired by a Team or Practice Manager who can clearly explain the decision-making process to all multi-agency professionals attending and how the case will progress.
3. The right evidence must be presented to Court including within checklist documents that accompany Court applications to make the process more effective. Reports that agencies present to Conference can be used to support this process and / or individual agencies need to write witness statements that detail their factual experiences of working with specific families.
4. A Supervision Order details how a child's needs should be met by the L.A. This invariably involves the wider children's partnership, with Children's Social Care and the Social Worker as the lead agency / professional in the process. Each Supervision Order has to be managed via a CiN Plan process – detailing the expectations of each agency involved, as well as the children's parents / carers. The content of the Supervision Plan in the Supervision Order needs to be shared at the initial CiN Meeting following the granting of the Order and reviewed at each subsequent CiN Meeting (at least every 3 months).

Good Practice and Evidence as a result of this Review and similar Review

Do Not Attend's (DNA's) have now been rebranded as Was Not Bought - in recognition and to reflect a child is reliant on their parent / carer to bring them to a health appointment.

Social Workers are being supported to undertake training (on-going programme) including creating effective chronologies for each child's record and using the details from these in assessments.

Children's Social Care now have very few cases where children have been on a Child Protection Plan for 2+ years. Focussed decision-making is now more timely and drift has reduced considerably.

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