ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR & MAIDENHEAD
SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP

LEARNING SUMMARY



‘BEN’

AGED 3

Ben is a pseudonym. Ben, aged 3, was found by a neighbour on the ground outside his house, having fallen 12 feet from an upstairs window. He suffered cuts and bruises. His parents were unaware that he had fallen, and it became clear that Ben and his sibling had been locked in their bedroom with the lock on the outside of the bedroom door.

The review looked at the support offered to all of the children in the family.



THE MULTI-AGENCY RESPONSE TO CHILD NEGLECT

WHAT DID THE REVIEW FIND?

There was insufficient identification of the neglect of all of the children by their parents, and despite a routine safeguarding process being in place, the response was superficial and did not address the growing concerns. As time went on, professionals perceived some of the children as having complex needs, which made parenting more difficult, and the focus shifted from parental neglect.

WHAT IMPACT DID THIS HAVE?

Professional focus often shifted to parental needs, housing or episodic crises, rather than the children’s daily experiences and developmental progress. Plans lacked clear objectives, timescales and measures of change, creating false reassurance and allowing drift. The cumulative impact of neglect over time was not sufficiently considered, particularly for babies and young children.

WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE THE REVIEW?

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Children’s Partnership is reviewing its child neglect strategy and this refresh will consider whether the strategy sufficiently supports an evidence-based approach to addressing child neglect .

The Safeguarding Partnership has strengthened its response to the prevention of serious injury and death of babies and young children from falls from windows and balconies by ensuring that risks are consistently identified, analysed and acted upon as safeguarding concerns rather than isolated accidents.

A partnership-wide practice briefing and a simple frontline practice tool have been developed to support practitioners and ensure that risks are consistently identified, analysed and acted upon as safeguarding concerns rather than isolated accidents.



THE IMPORTANCE OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

WHAT DID THE REVIEW FIND?

There was a lack of a trauma-informed approach to understanding the impact of child sexual abuse and child neglect on the eldest child in his middle years, leaving distress in adolescence, being seen as “him being beyond parental control” rather than needing nurturing and caring parenting.

WHAT IMPACT DID THIS HAVE?

Despite a known history of sexual abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, emotional neglect and exposure to domestic abuse, the eldest child’s escalating distress in adolescence was interpreted as defiance, poor behaviour and peer influence rather than a response to trauma.

Assessments focused on managing risk and behaviour, positioning the eldest child as “beyond parental control”, while failing to analyse the impact of past abuse, coercive parenting and fractured attachment relationships. This resulted in missed opportunities to provide nurturing, relational support and to address the underlying causes of harm, reinforcing a narrative of blame rather than understanding “what had happened” to him.

WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE THE REVIEW?

The Partnership is addressing Child Sexual Abuse as a partnership priority. This work is considering how to ensure that children who have experienced sexual abuse are supported through a trauma-informed, long-term approach that recognises the enduring impact on mental health, behaviour, relationships and development, ensures sustained therapeutic support beyond crisis points, and prevents children’s distress from being misinterpreted as behavioural non-compliance rather than a response to trauma.

LEARNING SUMMARY



THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE ON FAMILIES

WHAT DID THE REVIEW FIND?

There was an insufficient focus on domestic abuse and its impact on both adults and children.

WHAT IMPACT DID THIS HAVE?

Domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour, was insufficiently identified, analysed or acted upon. Where concerns were raised, they were often minimised, closed prematurely or treated as separate from children's safeguarding needs. Assessments failed to explore children's lived experiences of domestic abuse, including during pregnancy and post-separation, and responsibility for harm was frequently displaced onto victims rather than perpetrators. This limited practitioners' understanding of the impact on parental mental health, parenting capacity and children's emotional and developmental wellbeing.

WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE THE REVIEW?

The partnership is working to ensure that domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour and post-separation risk, is consistently identified, assessed and addressed, with clear analysis of its impact on parenting capacity and children's safety, and accountability placed with perpetrators.



HEARING CHILDREN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES AND HEARING THEIR VOICES IN DECISION-MAKING

WHAT DID THE REVIEW FIND?

There was insufficient focus on hearing the children's voices and understanding their lived experiences.

WHAT IMPACT DID THIS HAVE?

Children's voices were inconsistently heard and insufficiently influential in assessment and planning. Pre-verbal children, babies and disabled children were particularly overlooked, with limited observation, analysis or articulation of their lived experience. There was an over-reliance on parental self-report, even when this conflicted with professional observations.

WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE THE REVIEW?

The partnership is taking co-ordinated action to address the 'baby blind spot' by strengthening practice to ensure that babies and very young children are consistently recognised as experiencing harm in their own right.

A partnership-wide practice briefing and a simple frontline practice tool have been developed to support practitioners in identifying, analysing, and responding to babies' lived experience, particularly when babies are pre-verbal, disabled, or appear physically well.

A partnership-wide practice briefing has been developed to support practitioners to ensure that Disabled Children's Views and Lived Experience Are Heard.

The partnership needs to consider how to support partner agencies to ensure that all assessments, plans and reviews clearly evidence how children's views, wishes and feelings—both verbal and non-verbal—have informed decision-making, with reduced reliance on parental self-report alone.