



Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review TDS20

Summary of Progress

Introduction

1. Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership commissioned a local child safeguarding practice review into the circumstances surrounding the death of "Theo". The review was completed in February 2024.
2. Agencies involved in the review have provided an update of the progress made since the death of Theo. The progress and practice improvements are summarised as follows and includes reference to the findings from an independent Ofsted inspection of Derbyshire local authority children's services undertaken in November 2023 and published in January 2024.

Assessing the capacity of parents

3. A dedicated Parenting Assessment Team is in place within Derbyshire local authority children's services. The framework for assessing the capacity of parents is in line with a regional model and includes improved ways of making sure that parenting assessments are of good quality. Audit activity undertaken by Derbyshire local authority children's services has shown improvements in the quality of parenting assessments. Derbyshire local authority children's services remains committed to continually improving practice when assessing how able parents are.
4. The Ofsted inspection found that: *"the keeping babies safe partnership strategy, built on learning from practice reviews, has led to the development of positive initiatives with health partners to ensure strong oversight of vulnerable parents during pregnancy and post-birth"*.

Care planning and preparing for family court

5. A toolkit has been developed regionally and implemented within Derbyshire local authority children's services to help with decision making about care planning for children and to make sure that decisions are prompt and appropriate. The Ofsted

inspection found that: *"early permanence planning for children is strong. Effective, authoritative social work in pre-proceedings and care proceedings is resulting in timely permanence plans for children"*.

6. Derbyshire local authority children's services has worked with legal services to strengthen practitioner's understanding of the legal framework and there is continual assessment of the impact of this on outcomes for children and families.
7. Scrutiny panels have been created in local children's services teams. These include advice given by senior solicitors who oversee children's care plans to make sure that appropriate responses are made to child protection concerns and that planning for children's futures is swift and robust.
8. Quality assurance activity undertaken by Derbyshire local authority children's services shows that planning for unborn babies is prompt. The Ofsted inspection found that: *"partnership working with health colleagues and the quality of pre-birth assessments and plans are ensuring that babies' needs are well understood, and appropriate and timely responses made when risks are identified."*
9. Derbyshire local authority children's services has created legal planning meetings which take place during care proceedings in the family court. These meetings are attended by the local authority and legal advisors to ensure that assessment, planning, decision making and recommendations are appropriate for children before the final evidence is submitted to the family court. The local authority has received feedback from the family court which comments on an improvement in quality of evidence received during care proceedings.
10. Derbyshire local authority children's services has engaged with the Local Family Justice Board to develop the confidence of practitioners who work within the family court, especially when there is a need to challenge decision making and achieve the right outcomes for children.
11. Derbyshire local authority children's services has confirmed that all children in care have an independent reviewing officer who ensures that children's care plans meet their needs and that agencies are working together to support children and their families.
12. The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) have created practice standards which make sure that assessment and planning for children within family court proceedings is of good quality.

Multi-agency involvement with family court processes

13. Derbyshire local authority children's services has shown that there has been an improvement in engagement from agencies, especially from substance misuse services, when children are involved in care proceedings. The Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust has developed guidance to support the practice of their staff in the family court.
14. Cafcass has improved their focus on the expectations of partnership working and on their engagement with Derbyshire local authority children's services and children's independent reviewing officers. Procedures have been strengthened to make sure that there is prompt communication between a child's independent reviewing officer and their guardian.
15. Cafcass are focusing on their contribution to care planning for all children and their electronic systems have been improved to allow children's guardians to thoroughly record their decision making and planning as a case progresses through the family court. The purpose of this is to improve curiosity and reflection when supporting children and families.
16. Cafcass practitioners have received further training in family court practice. This has provided an opportunity for reflection and learning when considering whether a child should return to live with their parents.
17. Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust have reviewed their pathway to support practitioners with the completion of reports that are required by the family court.

Management oversight

18. Derbyshire local authority children's services has reviewed the way that children's casework is overseen and there is now an improved line of sight, particularly into visiting schedules for children. The Ofsted inspection found that: *"management oversight and supervision are routinely happening..."*.
19. Reflective casework is high priority within Derbyshire local authority children's services. The framework for this has been strengthened to include more scrutiny and challenge to practice. Outcomes show that management oversight overall has improved and feedback from the family court shows that this is evident in assessments that are provided for children's care proceedings. The Ofsted inspection found that: *"social workers and managers act swiftly when there is significant concern or risks to children increase."*

20. Cafcass have revised their national audit framework and there is a specific focus on examining practice, on the quality of information sharing between children's guardians and Derbyshire local authority children's services and on the quality of risk assessments when consideration is being given to whether a child should return to the care of their parents.
21. The Ofsted inspection found that: *"In the main, regular independent reviewing officer scrutiny and oversight of the progress of review decisions reduces delays through challenge and escalation when required."*

Returning children to the care of their parents and dealing with non-engagement

22. Outcomes from Derbyshire local authority children's services show that children who return to the care of their parents are properly supported to do so and that the process for this includes good assessment and planning arrangements. The Ofsted inspection showed that: *"children are safely placed with their parents when it is appropriate"* and that: *"careful, phased planning ensures that most children who return home to their parents do so successfully and sustainably"*.
23. Derbyshire local authority children's services further advise that the frequency of contact with children is appropriate and in line with their care plans. The Ofsted inspection found that: *"children are visited regularly by their social workers in accordance with their individual needs"*.
24. The Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust has developed a protocol to respond when parents are not engaging.
25. Practitioners within Derbyshire local authority children's services have been supported to reflect on the factors that may cause parents to avoid contact so that they can alter their approach to help parents to engage with services.
26. Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust audit health records to ensure that record keeping and contact with children and families is in line with best practice. Practitioners have access to up to date guidance about how frequently children and families should be visited.
27. Practitioners also have access to up to date policy to follow when there are concerns about a child or their parent disengaging from services or where parents are resistant to accepting support.

Working with parents where substance use and domestic abuse is a concern

28. Over one hundred practitioners across different agencies have attended a newly developed training course focusing on the risks and impact of parents using cannabis. Feedback shows that practitioners have increased their knowledge and understanding about cannabis use and are motivated to apply their learning in their work with children and families.
29. The Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust has developed a cannabis assessment tool which has been implemented across the service. A substance misuse workbook has been developed to use with parents which explores their motivation to reduce drug use, how to manage triggers and high risk situations and how to prevent relapse. Training in the use of this workbook and in assessing the impact of substance misuse on parenting capacity has been delivered to all staff. Additionally, professional curiosity workshops have been delivered to over 95% of practitioners involved with families where there are substance misuse issues. Learning from these workshops has been embedded via one-to-one supervision sessions. The Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust has also delivered a learning event on the impact of cannabis on parenting and family life.
30. Cafcass continues to improve their mandatory programme of learning for all practitioners and managers to help improve the response to domestic abuse.
31. Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust have delivered bespoke training sessions to the children's service related to domestic abuse which includes the impact of this behaviour on children.
32. The probation service has introduced an improved risk management framework which focuses on victim safety planning.

The response to injuries

33. Derbyshire local authority children's services has developed practitioner's knowledge and understanding of how to respond appropriately to injuries sustained by children and there is evidence from reflective case reviews and scrutiny panels that relevant guidance is being used to support practice and decision making.
34. The Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust have a mandatory requirement for all practitioners to attend the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Level 3 Keeping Babies Safe training.

35. Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust have strategies in place to ensure that practitioners are aware of and are complying with guidance to help keep babies safe. Policies have been developed in line with the Derbyshire and Derby City Practice Guidance on Bruising in Babies and Children. The vulnerabilities of babies are integrated into all levels of training and it is a mandatory requirement that health visitors attend the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Level 3 Keeping Babies Safe training.
36. Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust have an advice line for practitioners to seek specialist guidance on responding to injuries and to help them make appropriate decisions.

The quality of service provided to children

37. 75% of cases reviewed by Derbyshire local authority children's services have been judged to be good or better in key areas including assessment, care planning and reflecting the voice of the child.
38. The Ofsted inspection found that: *"a comprehensive, holistic learning approach to quality assurance is well embedded. Learning from practice reviews, regular reflective case reviews, thematic dip sampling and practice learning days are constructively informing training and service developments".*
39. The Ofsted inspection further found that: *"the senior leadership of Derbyshire County Council recognises and prioritises the needs of its children" and there is: ".... a clear understanding and grip of the main challenges they face in improving the lives of their most vulnerable children."*

Workforce and staffing

40. Since 2020, over forty newly qualified social workers have been recruited and 86% remain in post. There has been a reduction in the number of social work vacancies since 2019 and as of September 2023, there are 36 more permanent social workers in frontline practice and a reduction in vacancies to less than 30%.
41. The Ofsted inspection found that: *"senior leaders have established a positive organisational culture, evident across the whole workforce. Workers feel respected and valued by leaders."*
42. Derbyshire local authority children's services has created a learning and development framework to make sure that all practitioners, especially those that are newly qualified, are provided with opportunities to improve their practice supported

by supervision and guidance by experienced staff and managers. The Ofsted inspection found that: *"the social work academy is effective in supporting and training a large cohort of newly qualified staff. 'Grow your own' and apprenticeship options are helping to bring on more social workers from within the existing workforce. The locality-based structure is popular with the staff, who value the ability to build trusting relationships over time with children and families."*

43. Contingencies are in place to respond appropriately to workload and capacity issues. The Ofsted inspection found that: *"the children's services performance framework is well developed, helping leaders to identify granular issues and trends in practice and workload capacity across the county and quickly respond to emerging pressures."*

44. Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust monitor and respond to staff absences daily to ensure that there is no reduction in the service provided to children and their families.

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February 2024

Read the Ofsted inspection of Derbyshire local authority children's services, published in January 2024 here: <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50237006>