Child Safeguarding Practice Review
Learning Brief: Harry

Reading | West Berkshire | Wokingham

Review Background

Harry is a young person who was arrested, and later convicted, for a serious violent crime. He had been known to several partnership agencies and at the time of the incident was being supported by Early Help Services from Wokingham Borough Council. Harry had been diagnosed with a developmental disability and had an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP).

A local Child Safeguarding Practice Review was commissioned to identify learning for the multi-agency partnership to improve how we can better work together to safeguard young people. There was a particular focus on the provision of services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and for young people who are demonstrating emerging offending behaviour, to both divert them from these activities but also safeguard them from the associated risks. The independent reviewer spoke to practitioners who had worked with Harry and his family, as well as Harry's mother to ensure that the family's views were central to the findings.

Learning

Supporting effective early help/ social care interventions that maintain positive family engagement:

- There were a number of referrals to Children's Services, the result of which did not always:
  - fully consider the outcome or impact of previous Early Help support interventions or whether they had been successful.
  - evidence that Harry's special educational needs were understood and how this might influence the support he and his family could benefit from.
- Services must be able to adapt their approach to families, particularly if previous engagement has been ineffective or declined, focussing on building positive relationships and communication, to identify the most appropriate support to provide better results for the child and family.
- Taking an earlier joint agency approach would have enabled the gathering of key information and devising a robust multi-agency plan.

Learning: Positive Practice

It is important to recognise that local case reviews also identify positive practice. In this case the reviewer found:

- Since Harry's case a number of improvements have been made to the Early Help and Youth Justice Services within Wokingham Borough Council, including:
  - a performance framework that measures the quality and outcomes of interventions
  - improved youth justice service pathways
  - an enhanced Early Help Hub, involving a greater number of partnership organisations and groups, which provides additional pathways of support for young people and their families
  - a new exclusion prevention programme, currently being trialled within a number of schools, offering targeted 1-1 support for a young person as an alternative to exclusion.
- Examples of good quality child and family assessments which sought to capture the voice of Harry.
- Wokingham Children's Services have a comprehensive and ambitious Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy, with an improvement board overseeing delivery, which should affect significant positive change.
- The determination and perseverance of the police in ensuring that a strategy meeting was held in October 2020. This was a positive example of professionals using the escalation process at a practitioner level and how this can result in positive outcomes.

Learning:

Improved local capacity and support for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND):

- In Harry's case, his Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) did not include multi-agency information or safeguarding/child protection concerns. Inclusion of this information is vital to best support the child, family, and education setting.
- It is not standard practice to review an EHCP when a child moves from another Local Authority area, or from primary to secondary school. However, when these situations coincide it is important that an EHCP review is undertaken to confirm that the setting is appropriate, that the child's history is known by the new SEND Team and school, all of whom can therefore better support the move.
- Reduced capacity within the SEN Team during this review period meant that they were limited in their ability to respond to concerns in relation to the support needed for Harry, his family, and the schools. This, alongside the lack of specialist school provision, meant that Harry was out of school for several months. This has been acknowledged and a SEND Improvement Strategy is now in place.

Learning

Effective and appropriate information sharing to prevent exclusions, specifically for children with SEND:

- When a child moves school, it is important for the new school to be aware of key information known by the previous setting, such as the involvement of partnership agencies working with the child. This is particularly important for children with SEND to enable the school to properly assess whether they can meet that child's needs and manage any associated risks. When this doesn't happen, this can lead to placements failing, causing significant distress to the child and family and the disruption of education.
- In Harry's case, the high number of exclusions had a negative impact upon him, affecting his mental wellbeing, pushing him away from supportive figures and made him more susceptible to negative influences. The new exclusion prevention programme being trialled, would have provided more tailored support for Harry and his family, and the schools.

Practitioner Questions and Information

- For information and practical support that voluntary and community groups can offer, plus links to information and services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families see: Wokingham Family Information Service
- Do you know where to find your local thresholds of need document? This is vital in enabling you to understand what support may be available for a child and their family - BWSCP Threshold Guidance.
- Do you know how where to find the Child Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence Analysis and Indicator Tool? – BWSCP Child Exploitation
- Do you know how to escalate concerns? See the BWSCP website for more information on our escalation guidance.
- Do you feel comfortable sharing children's information with your colleagues? See our website for Information Sharing guidance.

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Learning:

Appropriate and timely response to criminal behaviour:

- There were examples of Thames Valley Police failing to quickly inform Harry's mother and partnership agencies of incidents of criminality, and there were significant delays during the investigation of offences and incidents.
- There was a tendency to see Harry purely as an offender and not seek to understand why he may have become involved in serious crime and disorder.
- Thames Valley Police has identified a need to develop a safeguarding mindset and culture, and an organisation wide training programme has already been agreed.

Recommendations for the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership

A range of recommendations were made. These include the following, with implementation updates at the point of publication of the report, shown in contrast colour:

- In relation to children with Education, Health Care Plans (EHCPs):
  - Development of a new procedure for the early review of EHCPs when a child or young person moves local authority area at the same time as transitioning from primary to secondary school. This action is already completed, and a live tracking system is in place.
  - Improve information sharing processes across Berkshire West, to provide an enhanced level of information sharing for students who have an EHCP at the time of changing education establishments. Being discussed across Berkshire West.
  - The local authority should review the provision of resources and pathways available to schools, in order to reduce the use of exclusions for children and young people with EHCP. A vulnerable learners panel has been established, which includes school representation, to create and embed these resources.
- The local authority and the BWSCP should agree arrangements to support the implementation of the Wokingham SEND Strategy (2021-25). A multi-agency improvement panel has already been established and it will provide assurance and regular data to the BWSCP.
- Thames Valley Police should produce new policy and guidance in relation to children and young people who are identified as suspects in a criminal investigation, underpinned by an annual training programme to develop a culture of safeguarding and partnership working. Child criminality was included in the vulnerability and risk training delivered in 2022 and will be reinforced again in 2023.
- Wokingham Children's Services should update policy and guidance for the review of referrals and contacts that involve children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Practice Standards have been updated. A check to establish if a child has an EHCP in now in place and the EHCP will be reviewed if a social worker is due to visit a child.
- Wokingham Children's Services, with the support of the BWSCP, to conduct a multi-agency audit of cases where the Early Help service has been tasked to support young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Due to be completed by early 2023.
- Wokingham Children's Services to consider how the full benefits of the Exclusion Prevention scheme may be provided to young people who live in Wokingham, whilst attending school in a different local authority area. The pilot programme is progressing, and the future project specification includes this cross-border requirement.

Strategic leaders in Wokingham Borough Council, Thames Valley Police and health services are actively progressing an action plan.