

New multi-agency safeguarding group formed following serious case review

A multi-agency task force is being developed to further improve safeguarding practices in Norfolk as a result of a new serious case review about non-accidental injuries to pre-mobile babies.

The 'thematic' serious case review, which was conducted by the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP), looked at six cases of serious injuries to babies in the county over a three-year period.

This is the first time the partnership has proactively linked together this number of cases and involved practitioners and senior leaders from organisations across Norfolk to examine the common themes and identify ways to act on the lessons learned.

The six children were harmed by their parents between May 2015 and April 2018. Three cases have already been published as serious case reviews but have been revisited, one of these included the tragic death of a six-month-old baby. Two more recent serious cases of harm, and an additional sixth case which would not normally have met the criteria for a serious case review, have been examined alongside these earlier cases. All the cases are or have been subject to criminal investigations.

David Ashcroft, independent chairman of the NSCP said: "This report looks at the serious injuries inflicted on six small children. It makes for difficult and sad reading and as a partnership we want to do all we can to prevent abuse of any kind to any child.

"This review has given us a really useful insight into what supports good practice and the pressures that can impact on practice. We all need to be alert to the indications where parents may need extra help in keeping small children safe, and to minimise the risks they may face.

"Hundreds of children across the county successfully receive support and protection every day and we know that services in Norfolk continue to improve – Ofsted highlighted this when they looked at the contact and referral process in the county last year. There is a real passion and commitment across agencies to continue that improvement.

"Much of the learning identified in this review is not exclusive to Norfolk and there is no magic wand, in the form of a series of recommendations, that provide an easy answer."

Mr Ashcroft added: "Nationally there has been an increase in the prevalence of very young children suffering non-accidental injuries and in Norfolk we want to better understand why this is happening and what agencies can do to support parents and protect children.

"A national review has just started to look at these types of incidents, our thematic review shows Norfolk is ahead of the rest of the country in examining what can be learnt."

The review made two recommendations: to urgently form the multi-agency task force; and for the NSCP to build on the work that has been completed during this review and adopt a whole-systems approach to future learning.

The key findings were:

- Multi-agency risk assessments and 'risk sensible' practice must be strengthened with respectful relationships, ownership of risk/decision making and collective problem-solving.
- Greater appreciation needs to be taken that safeguarding children is a human service and the emotional impact of the work on the workforce has a bearing on how children are safeguarded.
- The multi-agency safeguarding workforce protects children from harm every day and improves their outcomes and is a precious resource and its value and examples of good practice should be celebrated and promoted.
- More recognition should be given to the impact of adverse childhood experiences on parents and how this affects how they treat their children
- Frontline workers should ensure they know where the hot spots and vulnerabilities are in their caseloads and prioritise accordingly and have 'courageous conversations' challenging perspectives and decisions with colleagues, managers, political leaders and all stakeholders.
- More recognition about the impact on safeguarding of flux, restructures, inspections and reviews happening within the organisations involved in the safeguarding process.
- Increase the energy and commitment to build partnership working at the front line and strategic level with a creative, long-term view, joint priorities and a shared understanding/language and vision.

Terms of reference have already been set out for the task force, which will be known as the Strategic Safeguarding Analysis Group (SSAG). It aims to improve multi-agency safeguarding practice by refining the way data is gathered, shared and analysed and priorities are set across all organisations.

Notes to editors

Every Local Authority in the country has to have a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Agreement (MASA) in partnership with the Police and Health. In Norfolk, the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP) is led by the three statutory partners who work together with other local agencies including the voluntary sector to make sure that children are protected from harm and that their welfare is promoted. The NSCP has robust independent scrutiny arrangements to ensure that people working with children carry out their safeguarding responsibilities as required by the law.

NSCP undertakes Serious Case Reviews (now called Safeguarding Practice Reviews) independently and has been a pioneer in developing innovative reviews that generate learning for all agencies and professionals working with children.