

Cumbria Safeguarding Adults Board

Learning from a Safeguarding Adults Review - Kate

This learning report summarises the key themes and lessons to be learned following a Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) undertaken by Cumbria Safeguarding Adults Board (CSAB) in relation to Kate.

As the review focuses on Kate's life from her 16th birthday, the SAR identifies important learning for both Cumbria Safeguarding Adults Board and Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership partner agencies. The implementation of the learning from this review will be jointly overseen by both partnerships.

1. What is a Safeguarding Adults Review?

A SAR takes place where there is reasonable concern about how members of the Safeguarding Adults Board or other agencies worked together to safeguard the adult, the adult has died, and the Safeguarding Adult Board knows or suspects the death resulted from abuse or neglect.

The SAR process brought together reports and chronologies from agencies who had contact with Kate, in addition to a learning event for practitioners who had been directly involved with Kate. Kate's family were also offered the opportunity to contribute to the review.

2. Background

Kate was a young white British woman who died in 2020, aged 18. The cause of her death was established as being a drug related death.

Services had been involved with Kate and her family since 2018, when it was identified that she was at risk of Child Exploitation. Kate was open to Children's Services until her 18th Birthday.

On reaching 18 years of age, Kate did not receive on-going support from Adult Services as she had no care and support needs under the Care Act 2014 however, drug and alcohol services, the youth offending team and leaving care services remained involved with her.

Unfortunately, Kate's situation, including her vulnerability did not improve, and she sadly died as a result of a drug overdose in 2020. Kate had been on the waiting list for a Mental Health assessment at the time of her death and Adult Social Care had commenced a Care Act assessment in the days leading up to her death. Kate's parents were consulted during the SAR process and provided details of their experience to the SAR author. It is acknowledged that Kate's parents made continued attempts to support their daughter and to keep her safe however, agency intervention was not always conducive to their attempts. Kate's parents have also recognised the difficulties faced by partner agencies in keeping their daughter safe.

Members of Cumbria Safeguarding Children's Partnership and Cumbria Safeguarding Adult Board would like to pass on their condolences to Kate's family. They would also like to thank Kate's parents for their contribution to the review process.

3. Learning Themes

The review identified the following 'systems' and 'practice' learning themes set out below:

3.1 Practice Learning

Raising awareness of the impact of exploitation

The review identified a number of challenges faced by professionals when working with individuals at risk of or being exploited and identified that practitioner's awareness should be improved in relation to the following areas:

- That victims of exploitation often do not disclose the abuse they are experiencing
- The need to reinforce the appropriate use of language and to avoid victim blaming
- The impact of coercion and control on mental capacity when undertaking assessments
- How exploitation impacts an individual's capacity to consent to activity.

Processes to protect children from exploitation

The review identified gaps in multi-agency processes that affected the quality of risk assessments and safety planning. Risk assessments for Kate focused on the risks of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and rarely identified that Kate was a victim of Child Criminal Exploitation. Links between going missing and CSE were not always made. Actions were not always identified to disrupt or pursue perpetrators.

The gaps identified from 2018/19 have been addressed by the implementation of the new Child Exploitation Risk Assessment and Review (CERAR) process. All agencies involved with a young person at risk of or being exploited should share information as part of the risk assessment and safety planning, this includes disruption activity.

Response to young adult victims of exploitation

Practitioners should have awareness of information sharing guidance, specifically when information can be shared without consent.

Use of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

When working with child and adult victims of exploitation practitioners should always consider whether a referral through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) should be made.

Response to homelessness

The review identified there was limited support provided to housing staff by partner agencies and there was limited knowledge of the existing model for the multi-agency response to homelessness for 16–24-year-olds.

Issues around engagement

The review found Kate experienced multiple changes of social worker and leaving care advisors which affected the level of engagement achieved. At times there were up to 9 agencies having contact with Kate, resulting in her becoming overwhelmed and frustrated through being subject to multiple assessments and having to repeat her story. When multiple agencies are involved with an individual consideration should be given to identifying a lead professional to develop a trusted relationship.

3.2 Systems Learning

Transition planning for young people at risk of exploitation – partnership & governance arrangements

Planning for Kate's transition began too late, resulting in a lack of engagement with adult services. There is a need to further develop and embed transitions arrangements across all agencies for identifying the future support needs of children and young people at continuing risk of exploitation once they reach 18 years old.

The adult's and children's safeguarding partnerships should therefore consider whether to develop a cross age group, to better coordinate and strengthen the arrangements for the oversight and governance of exploitation, when young people are moving into adult services.

Response to young adult victims of exploitation

When referrals were made to Adult Social Care the outcome following application of the Care Act was that a safeguarding response was not required. The SAR identified a number of areas to strengthen the response to young adults at risk of exploitation:

- A more fluid approach should be developed in respect of safeguarding responses to young adults that recognises their developmental needs
- A process should be developed for supporting adults at risk of exploitation who do not meet the criteria for Section 42 adult safeguarding enquiries to be initiated
- An escalation process for high-risk cases by CSAB should be considered
- CSCP and CSAB to consider expansion of CERAR Level 2 meetings to allow the consideration of cases involving adults at risk of exploitation

Access to specialist mental health support

The review identified the importance of addressing the difficulties encountered in securing access to mental health support for young people who are involved in substance misuse. There should be further exploration of the opportunities for formalising joint working between CAMHS and substance misuse services to put in place "scaffolding" to help the young person stabilise their drug use sufficiently, to make it safe for them to engage with therapeutic support.

Access to specialist substance misuse services for children

The review identified limited specialist service provision for children involved in high levels of substance misuse. Drug and Alcohol Services had provided support to Kate outside of the contractual arrangements in place at the time and suggested that the identified the gap in commissioned services should be addressed.

Response to homelessness

A gap in specialist provision of temporary accommodation for young people (18 +) who are using substances was also identified, however, this is being addressed through the development of two supported housing schemes.

4. Recommendations

This Safeguarding Adults Review made 11 recommendations for Cumbria Safeguarding Adults Board (CSAB) and Cumbria Safeguarding Children's Partnership (CSCP) in line with the above learning themes. The following recommendations are intended to strengthen safeguarding.

Recommendation 1

CSAB and CSCP, in consultation with the Safer Cumbria Partnership, should seek assurance that professionals across the partnerships:

- (i) understand the need to use appropriate language to describe the circumstances of children and young adults who are at risk of exploitation;
- (ii) are drawing on the social model of consent to inform assessments of situations where children and young people are engaged in sexual activity which may be abusive;
- (iii) are mindful of the need to consider whether mental capacity is being impaired because of coercion and control and / or the effects of substance / alcohol misuse where a young person is making a decision that appears unwise and will potentially place them at risk of continuing exploitation.

Recommendation 2

CSCP should seek assurance through the ongoing evaluation of the implementation of CERAR process that there is evidence that the actions to disrupt or pursue alleged perpetrators are being included in safety plans and being progressed.

Recommendation 3

CSAB and CSCP should seek assurance that in respect of the protocol covering transition processes and pathways in respect of children and young adults at continuing risk of exploitation:

- (i) all relevant member agencies are involved in the further development work to refine and embed the protocol;
- (ii) through audits and dip sampling of cases, there is evidence that the protocol is proving effective in ensuring referrals are being made to adult services, and transition planning meetings are being held, in accordance with the criteria and timescales set out in the protocol.

Recommendation 4

CSAB and CSCP in consultation with the Safer Cumbria Partnership should jointly establish a Task and Finish Group to develop structures and processes at both strategic and operational levels to ensure responsibility, ownership, accountability and governance for children and young adults who are a risk of exploitation are clear and unambiguous.

Recommendation 5

CSAB and CSCP should seek assurance that: -

- (i) there is evidence that the approach taken to applying the principles and eligibility criteria within the Care Act 2014, are enabling young adults at risk of exploitation to receive a safeguarding response, and access appropriate and timely support to meet their assessed needs;
- (ii) that there are agreed arrangements and processes for multi-agency meetings to be convened to consider young adults who have been identified as having complex needs and facing unmanaged risks but where decisions have been made that their situation does not meet the criteria for Section 42 safeguarding enquiries to be initiated;
- (iii) local information sharing protocols include guidance on when information can be lawfully shared without the service user's consent.

Recommendation 6

CSAB and CSCP, in consultation with the Safer Cumbria Partnership, should seek assurance that: -

- (i) professionals across the adult and children's safeguarding partnerships have the necessary understanding of the processes, and potential benefits, in respect of the National Referral Mechanism;
- (ii) that there is evidence that consideration is routinely given as to whether a NRM referral should be made, and where it is established that the NRM referral criteria may be met, referrals are being submitted.

Recommendation 7

The Cumbria Children's Trust Board should request a report from Cumbria, Northumberland Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust on the steps that it has taken to enable support to be provided by CAMHS to children experiencing mental health issues who have a history, or are engaging in, substance and or alcohol misuse.

Recommendation 8

CSCP should seek assurance from commissioners that urgent action is being taken to address the continuing gap in the provision of specialist substance misuse services for children, and that a commissioning strategy is being developed to achieve a comprehensive and flexible service covering the whole spectrum of risk and levels of substance misuse.

CSCP with their relevant partner agencies should consider what provision there is for parents and families supporting children and young people through addiction to ensure that appropriate support and guidance is available including opportunities for peer support.

Recommendation 9

CSAB should seek assurance from Cumbria County Council and the District Councils that: -

- (i) there is evidence that the protocol covering the response to young people aged 18 to 24 years who are homeless, or at immediate risk of homelessness, is being applied effectively, and is securing the necessary multi-agency input;
- (ii) steps are being taken to identify options to increase the availability of appropriate temporary accommodation options for young people who are at risk of exploitation and have ongoing issues around substance and / or alcohol misuse.

Recommendation 10

CSAB should seek assurance that for all cases where there is multi-agency involvement, but which are not subject to formal safeguarding processes, there are procedures in place which include the requirement for agreement to be reached as to who will act as lead professional to co-ordinate multi-agency case planning and oversee delivery of agreed actions.

Recommendation 11

CSAB and CSCP should jointly request its statutory partners to explore further the feasibility of implementing the option set out in this report of introducing the use of "my story passports" to avoid the need for young people at risk of exploitation being subjected to repeat history-taking when new assessments are carried out.

The Safeguarding Partnerships will work in collaboration to develop a robust action plan in response to the recommendations and learning the review identified. Regular assurance will be provided to both partnership Boards in respect of the delivery of the action plan.

CSAB and CSCP will work together to deliver the learning this review identifies. Learning will also be delivered to front line practitioners across the system through a lunch and learn session. Sign up to receive news of learning events [here](#).