Introduction

The Tri-borough multi-agency group continues to meet to review conclusions and recommendations from serious case reviews and other reviews of practice which have taken place locally or nationally. One of the aims of the meeting is to identify key learning points which should inform our practice when working with vulnerable children and their families. At the group’s November meeting, the following Reviews were considered:

1. An Individual Management Review of a young person who had died aged 16. He was adopted in 2005 and went on to receive a number of services from two of the Tri-borough authorities. His adoption had broken down and he was looked after by another London authority at the time of his death. The Coroner’s report identified opiate toxicity as the cause of death.

2. An Individual Management Review provided by a local Housing Department as part of Serious Case Review carried out by a south London authority. The review was in relation to an 18 month old girl who had died of multiple injuries in February 2013. The family were asylum seekers who had spent around three months in a relative’s flat in a Tri-borough authority before moving into temporary accommodation elsewhere. A few months later, the family was joined by the father and 4 other children and were moved to larger accommodation. There were no concerns about the family prior to the arrival of the father, they had registered with GPs and immunisations were up to date.

3. A Multi-Agency Management Review report on a 19 year old who claimed never to have attended school throughout his childhood amongst other safeguarding allegations. The purpose of the review was to identify which services, if any had been involved with the young person and whether any opportunities had been missed to assess his need and intervene. The only service he was found to be registered with was a GP practice. There were no records of any referral to or action by Family or Education services.
### Working with mobile families

Working with children in London inevitably means addressing the needs of families who frequently move from one borough to another. Learning from recent Individual Management Reviews includes:

- The NOTIFY system used by Housing departments is not always a reliable way of ensuring families are supported as they move into housing elsewhere. It’s not always clear who monitors new NOTIFY referrals and what response can be expected from a receiving borough. One of the recommendations of the Serious Case Review was to ask the London Safeguarding Children Board to improve that way that NOTIFY is used.
- Often GPs are the only professionals who become aware of newly arrived, mobile families. Are there clear systems in place for GPs in the Tri-borough area to inform local health visitors when mobile families register with them?
- Universal services might not always be the most appropriate response to mobile families. We need to be particularly mindful of the needs of such families which have children aged under 5.
- The SCR identified a particular need to be vigilant over the impact of changes in composition or reunification of large families which can take place following a move.

### Handovers of Cases

- The last Learning Review stressed a structured approach to this process, with time for new workers to appraise previous work, supported by good record keeping.
- In the more recently reviewed cases, handovers were also an issue with at least one of the transfers between two local authorities being seen as being of poor quality.

### Children in Need

- The previous Learning Review mentioned the importance of having an appropriate person to chair CIN review meetings, ensuring the meetings take place at the required intervals and that they are minuted with effective information shared with those who need to know afterwards.
- Additional points to bear in mind from more recent reviews include the importance of including those who have key information in such meetings. How well do we gather information from workers who have the most regular contact with families, e.g. Family Support Workers? Also, when such input is received do we listen and act upon it?
Working with adoptive families and adopted children

Particular learning points included:

- A particular approach is often needed when older children are adopted and poor attachments with birth parents continue to have a major impact on their behaviour. The reality of the strong links the child concerned had with his birth family were not recognised and therefore little work was undertaken to manage this; the influence of his birth family strengthened over time and was not a helpful influence on him. Sufficient work is needed to manage these contacts and this aspect of young people’s lives.

- While it is acknowledged that many adopters face particular challenges from the children they are parenting, practitioners should be alert to their assessments of risk and judgment being influenced by the adopter status of parents. In the reviewed case, the assessment of the life for the child at home did not appear to capture his real experience. Less weight was given to the son’s feedback and child protection action was not taken. With the benefit of hindsight it seems likely that, had the mother not been an adopter, there would have been a different response.

- Good multi agency networking and sharing of information was required for this case – the Child in Need framework should have been applied which would have led to regular multi agency meetings being held.

Initial Learning from the Review of WV (Southbank International School)

This case was subject to considerable publicity last year after an international criminal investigation led to a referral to the Metropolitan police and Westminster Family Services regarding a former teacher, Mr Vahey, at the International school in Westminster. A SCR is to be published on this case but national guidance has recommended that practice lessons from Reviews should be passed on as soon as they are identified, rather than waiting for the full report.

While there will be other lessons from the full SCR, there is a clear message that recruitment checks on Mr Vahey were not thorough. He had a conviction for child abuse in the USA and a full recruitment check could have revealed that he was an unsuitable person to work with children. This highlights the need for all LSCB member agencies to be reminded to make what overseas checks they can when considering the employment of candidates who have worked or lived overseas.

More about Serious Case Reviews

The NSPCC publish a list of the executive summaries or full overview reports of all serious case reviews, significant case reviews or multi-agency child practice reviews published. It includes backgrounds of the cases, particular themes and recommendations. The full list of reviews plus a range of other information about the SCR process can be found on the NSPCC website here.
How do you respond to children who don’t go to school?

The review of the case of the boy who claimed never to have attended school led to queries as to why his family appeared not to have been challenged over this.

In England there is not a system through which families are automatically prompted to enrol their children at school when they reach statutory school age. Ensuring children get a suitable education is a parental responsibility and as local authorities do not have a record of all children living in the area, it is not possible to prompt families. Should a parent want to keep a child “below the radar”, under present systems and regulations, it is possible to do so.

If parents do not take appropriate action at the right time, the only way this might be addressed is when picked up by other agencies or members of the community, and support is provided to get the child into school. Children who do not go to school and don’t receive an education are at risk of both not reaching their potential and not being monitored and supported if they are vulnerable for other reasons.

All professionals need to be aware that while education is compulsory, school is not. Parents are within their rights to “elect” to home educate their children. While parents do not have to register or seek approval from the local authority when they choose to do this, they are expected to ensure that the education they provide is “efficient” and “suitable”. The vast majority of parents who home educate their children do this for clear reasons and take their responsibilities seriously. However when professionals come into contact with families who appear to have taken this option, it is important that they refer the case to the ACE team who will ensure that the child is properly supported and the education provided is suitable.

ACE (Attendance (Statutory), Child employment & entertainment, Elective home education and children missing education) will make contact with the family concerned to talk to the parents/carers and child about what is being provided and reviewing examples of what the pupil is learning. No financial support is provided although the local authority can provide help if a family are committed but struggling or if support is needed with school admission if they have changed their minds about home education, having realised what’s involved. ACE can also advise on exam facilities or arrange to visit again in a few months.

Further information for parents about “elective home education” is available here and a Tri-borough policy is also available. The ACE team can be contacted on 020 8753 2877. ACE also respond to and track children missing from education and from September 2013 when the service was set up, would have been the agency most likely to have responded and intervened should the local authority have been notified.

A main lesson from this case is that professionals from all agencies should be curious about educational arrangements for any children they are in contact with and that should seek advice and intervention from the relevant services if there is any doubt over the arrangements in place.

The review recommended that health commissioners and providers were given more information about services including Early Help that can support families through key transition points. GPs and others will also be made aware that there is a requirement to notify the local authority if a parent has elected to home educate.

You may be interested in Home Education – Learning from Case Reviews published by the NSPCC in March 2014.