



The effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements in LBB to safeguard children who are, “living in the context of drug and alcohol misuse and abuse” by their carers

Multi agency audit –why?

Bromley's approach:

- 'Think Family' recognises that where problems impact on an adult, these impact on the care received by children and young people living in families and the care arrangements for them. This can require assessment.

Why in Bromley we do it the way we do:

- The Children Act 2004, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017(page 11) states , 'No single practitioner can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances and, if children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action.'

Multi agency audit – Some context for safeguarding work :

Commonalities :

- Police statistics show that 90% of violent offences involve substance misuse. [Home Office statistics](#) show that 48% of convicted domestic abuse perpetrators had a history of alcohol dependence, and 73% had consumed alcohol prior to the event.

Impact:

- Those who have experienced domestic abuse may misuse substances to cope with the trauma, or the perpetrator may use their dependency to exert control over them. [Research](#) indicates that women (and men) who have experienced extensive physical and sexual violence are more likely than those who have not to have an alcohol problem or be dependent on drugs.

Multi agency audit

- All cases chosen were open cases actively worked in the last six months who were known to Children's Social Care (CSC) and have or had a Child in Need (CIN) or Child Protection (CP) plan and allocated social worker
- Adult carers were known to Change Grow Lives (CGL) through attendance at the Bromley Alcohol and Drug Service (BDAS) and have or had an allocated support worker
- Children and their adult carers were known to other agencies including mental health agencies, education, housing or for other reasons e.g. police call outs

Multi agency audit

- In this audit the majority of cases had features of alcohol misuse and domestic violence
- There are a number of adults who have or have had mental health problems and who live with children and young people
- Children of various ages were witness to incidents of alcohol and drugs misuse and domestic violence. Their needs were being neglected in various ways and impact on their health and well-being, school lives and their presentation including their permanent care arrangements

Multi agency audit – How we did it :

Methodology:

- A core group of 4 was formed , police, BDAS, social care and the Service Improvement Team QA (SIT). This group met and considered information gathered from files , professionals in agencies, social workers, and during discussion about the effectiveness of multiagency working.
- To assist agencies and social workers were asked to examine their records to review the following key areas:
- That safeguarding thresholds were clear for each case and set out well by the lead agency, in this case CSC?
- When an agency worked with the child/ young person did their records reflect work undertaken including referrals and responses to these, that agencies record this work which was reviewed and conformed to agency standards?
- Whether good communication was on-going throughout the lifetime of the case e.g. agencies were invited to all appropriate meetings?

Multi agency audit – Cases chosen

Cases : 4 CIN and 2 CP

1. **CIN case.** Police referral reporting male partner heavily intoxicated, assaulted his partner.
2. **2. CP case.** Police referral reporting that the male partner has mental health problems now worsened due to excessive alcohol misuse.
3. **CIN case:** Referral from school in respect of a parent's presentation and behaviour. Past highlights a pattern of non-engagement with key services that aim to work with and support substance misuse.
4. **CIN case.** Referral about a parent's overdose , relationship breakdown , admitted use of cocaine.
5. **CP case.** Child Protection plan since August 2017. Domestic violence involving alcohol misuse where the children have been present. In the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC).
6. **CIN case.** Children suffering emotional harm from hearing or being caught in their parent's unstable relationship. Father returning to the family home under the influence of alcohol.

Critical Judgements : Main Finding

- For 5 of the 6 cases above there continued to be safeguarding issues and these required diligent sharing of information alongside consideration of thresholds
- However , on all cases, bar one, information held by one agency had not been consistently or safely shared within the professional network. This impacted in the worst incidents on thresholds for intervention and how services worked together to mitigate risk
- Subsequently this affected effective working together across the timeline of planning on child protection and child in need cases

Positive findings

- Positively, files across agencies indicate Child Protection Conferences, core groups and CIN meetings are taking place in a timely manner. Other agencies have detailed information on families and make this available to social workers. Children and young people are known to professionals and visible. It was unfortunate that there was little information supplied by education for this audit but social work files indicated interventions had been successful, improving school attendance and behaviours. Children and young people were in receipt of some services for their own mental health needs.
- Files held by SCS, BDAS and other agencies show information is being shared between agencies and documentation updated to include this. On CSC files summaries and assessments had information from these sources. Not all meetings convened are quorate and the range of agencies invited as a matter of routine needs to be broadened e.g. the role of housing is not understood on the majority of case seen.

Critical findings: CSC /CAIT

- Safeguarding concerns had been raised by CAIT in police reports (Merlins) but not followed up with CSC. CSC managers did not record contemporaneous overview of these concerns and strategy discussions were not subsequently held (cases 1 and 4).
- New information was not distributed to other agencies on receipt. On one case, number 1, BDAS was not made aware of an incident of concern.
- Police checks were difficult to complete on adults in homes.
- CAIT at times are not always attending Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) , or review meetings.
- Requests for ICPCs from social workers do not set out the reasons for the conference.
- At the time of audit delays in sending out the child protection plan means that some agencies are unclear what the plan is unless they are included in the core group.
- New legislation, The Domestic Violence Act 2018, has been introduced but agencies were not aware of the use of Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs).

Critical findings: other agencies

- Adult and children's agencies are not showing a joined up "Think Family" approach. Plans were too often standalone single agency plans made by individual agencies and were not sufficiently jointly owned by the agencies.
- GPs were generally not aware of children on child in need plans and decisions to close cases (3 and 4).
- On case number 4 a serious mental health issue did not lead to CHMT considering a referral to CSC or follow up work to consider the implications of an incident of potential self-harm in the context of children requiring safeguarding.
- The Community Rehabilitation Company was not included in the CIN meeting for case 1, and as a result their resources were not used to support the joint planning. An opportunity was missed for the CRC to carry out focused work on domestic abuse with the perpetrator as part of the child in need plan.
- Furthermore details of networks are not captured well and it is sometimes unclear who is working with a family
- Housing services were not involved in any of 5 cases as partner agencies (the 6th is a privately owned property). Housing services are under considered in the multi-agency work.

Multi-agency audit recommendations: general

- ❑ There is a need to improve communication between CSC teams (on longer term cases) and the police Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT), as for instance safeguarding concerns had been raised by CAIT in police reports (Merlins) but did not lead to recorded discussion with CSC
- ❑ BDAS should regard lapses in drug and alcohol misuse on open case which are CP/CIN as a safeguarding issue and refer to CSC
- ❑ CSC managers should record contemporaneous overview of incidents of concern following referrals .
- ❑ New information and risks must be considered with the network and where required at strategy discussions
- ❑ Whilst agencies are required to attend ICPCs anyway, a synopsis in the invite letter of the key concerns would help agencies to recognise the significance of the meeting and prioritise accordingly

Audit report summary

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LEARNING RESOURCES AND EVENTS

The BSCB and its partners are committed to ensuring learning and improvement takes place. Our [Learning and Improvement Framework](#) sets out our vision of building a better Bromley for our children and young people through listening to children, young people and their families, learning from professional practice and taking a lead on change. This involves developing a culture of reflective practice, through sharing best practice to promote a growing understanding of what works well and rigorous analysis when things go wrong.

We learn through conducting multi-agency learning reviews, including [Serious Case Reviews](#), through auditing, user and staff feedback, inspection and safeguarding reports, evaluations, and performance data and intelligence.

We hold seminars and lunchtime briefings to share learning with staff and hold a large annual conference every autumn. Presentations and papers from these events are available below. Learning is embedded in to our training courses and policies and procedures. We also share learning through our App 'push notifications' and our Take Five videos.

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