

Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Lancashire Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership

Child LR and Child LP Learning Brief

This briefing has been produced for all multi agency staff working with children and their families. The briefing sets out to share important information and learning from two (one full and one partial) Serious Case Reviews (SCR) carried out in Lancashire in 2019.

Details of the SCRs

Child LR SCR was published in 2019. A copy can be requested from the Safeguarding Business Unit [here](#).

Child LP SCR was decommissioned mid-point following completion of the criminal investigation resulting in no neglect charges.

Both reviews were in response to sudden unexpected infant deaths and happened within 2 weeks of each other. There were similar findings in each case which included:

- Both babies under 5 months co-sleeping with mother who had been drinking alcohol.
- Both had a sibling under 8 years with no previous health/education concerns.
- Both had contact with a half sibling over 11 years from father's previous relationship.
- Both families had past involvement with children's social care in a different area but no involvement at the time of death.
- Parents did not disclose past history of children social care concern with midwife.
- Different relevant information was held by GP, Health Visitor and Midwife despite all working with the same family at the same time.
- Impact of a new baby on the family was not assessed despite historical concern.
- Safeguarding lead/team not consulted despite past historical serious concerns.
- Alcohol and drugs including prescribed medication were a feature in both reviews.
- Domestic abuse featured in one case.
- Low level maternal mental health in the other.
- Parents were arrested following concerns of neglect following the deaths in both cases.
- History of criminal behaviour by parents.
- There were several gaps in information between one agency and another.

Key Learning Themes

Some key areas of learning taken from the SCRs:

Safer sleeping arrangements:

According to [Child and Maternal Health – Public Health Profiles 2015/17](#) Lancashire had a worse than average infant mortality rating. This has been the position for a number of years despite a number of local campaigns and initiatives.

The SCRs highlighted:

- Good practice by Midwives and Health Visitors who inspected the sleeping arrangements for baby.
- Safer sleep was discussed with parents and information provided.
- More work required to enable professionals to work with families to make an individualised assessment of sleeping arrangements to improve safer sleep for infants and reduce risk.
- Need to strengthen the message – ***'never share a bed with your baby if either you or your partner has drunk alcohol or taken drugs (including medications that may make you drowsy) this can make you less responsive to a baby'***

Low level perinatal mental health issues.

- [NICE Guidance \(2014, updated 2020\)](#) states that 'depression and anxiety are the most common mental health problems (around 12%) during pregnancy and following birth.'
- Local Perinatal Mental Health Teams are available to support women who meet threshold for services. However, those with low level mental health issues need support too.

Assessment of Domestic Abuse and risk.

Domestic Abuse featured in 1 review. This was historical serious domestic abuse in

¹ [Safer Sleep for baby, Six steps to safer sleep \(2020\)](#)

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The SCRs highlighted:

- Use of nationally recognised mental health assessment tools such as:
 - Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ)
 - Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
- Recognising women who would benefit from continuity of care during pregnancy and following birth.
- Listening and talking sessions are good use of a professional's time in supporting women and gaining trust.
- A trusting relationship is good to provide confidence and gain consent for early help work.

Assessment of drugs and alcohol on parenting

- Both SCRs featured alcohol and drug use within the family including prescribed medication.
- Past history was not taken into consideration when considering the impact of caring for a new baby.
- The [Pre-Birth Protocol](#) would have been a useful tool for bringing all relevant multiagency information together.
- Parents expect to be asked direct questions about their alcohol and drug use.
- Smelling cannabis in the home is a good way of starting a conversation about cannabis use and safety for baby and other children.

another area. Social Care was involved at the time and parents agreed to split. Mother moved to new area and father followed and moved back in.

The SCR highlighted:

- This is a recurring issue.
- When a child protection referral is made about an unborn baby where historical domestic abuse exists it is good to get information from previous children's social care teams, police and health colleagues to gain the bigger picture.
- Multiagency working with families helps to reduce risk.

Top Tips for Practitioners:

- **Access multiagency training** and keep up to date with local and national guidance.
- **Don't keep safeguarding concerns to yourself** – discuss with your line manager or safeguarding lead to agree a plan.
- **Share information** – effective communication pathways between professionals working with the same family at the same time is essential.
- **Be professionally curious** – ask questions and get personal - parents expect it!
You may need to ask the same question more than once before you get the truth.
- **Ask to see where baby sleeps night and day** – Parents expect it! Any refusal can be considered alongside any other concerns which exist.
- **Key message** – *'Never share a bed with your baby after drugs or alcohol, including medications that may make you drowsy. Overlay in these circumstances can lead to a criminal investigation'*²

Safer Sleep tools for practitioners: Resources for practitioners and parents can be found [here](#)

Thank you everyone for the work you do every day to safeguard and support children.

² [Safer Sleep for baby, Six steps to safer sleep \(2020\)](#)