



Child Safeguarding Practice

Review (CSPR)

Samantha

Commissioned by Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership

Report dated December 2023

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership (SSP) commissioned this Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) after Samantha and her mother Milli were murdered on in September 2022 by Samantha's father, Adam.
- 1.2 Samantha was 12 years old (born in 2010), of mixed heritage (her mother was Indian, and her father was white British) and lived with both parents. She was diagnosed with autism in May 2013 after concerns were raised at her 2-year developmental review. She was a lovely, happy child who enjoyed school, was lively and always giggling and smiling, a '*ray of sunshine*' – although she could be very determined to get her own way. Samantha could be incredibly empathetic towards people who were important to her, recognising when those around her were stressed or upset. She had come on leaps and bounds socially and in terms of her ability to communicate in the 18 months before she died. She was able to verbalise short sentences in her memorably deep voice or use the Picture Exchange Communication System¹ (PECS) to express herself.
- 1.3 In addition to attending Hillside Special School from 2013, Samantha received support from Suffolk County Council's Children and Young People Services as a Child in Need (CIN), and Speech and Language Therapy and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) from the local Health Service. She had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which focused on behaviour management, communication, family maintenance and empowerment, toileting and, as Samantha got older, included self and personal development. In March 2019, Samantha's behaviour was reported to have become more difficult for her mother to manage. Lockdown was stressful for the family, knowing Adam had been made redundant and would finish work in September 2020.
- 1.4 Police received a referral from the Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust (NFSFT) in January 2021 alleging that Adam was physically and mentally abusive towards Milli and had raped her in the past. Milli engaged with an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA), predominantly via WhatsApp and said that she intended to separate from Adam. However, she did not support police action and did not believe Samantha was at risk from her father as these incidents did not take place in front of her. Consequently, the case was closed. The parents told professionals that they were separating but were trying to resolve a number of practical barriers to enable and allow Milli to move out. From September 2021, Samantha's school recorded that there had been a number of incidents when Samantha had displayed aggressive behaviour, coinciding with the onset of puberty. Over the course of the year this reduced significantly, as Samantha responded positively to her new teacher. Practitioners who visited the family home reported that Samantha could be more challenging at home, particularly towards her mother, and would spend a lot of time watching her favourite cartoon on her iPad.
- 1.5 Shortly before Samantha returned to school after the summer holidays in 2022, Milli told the school that she was separating from Adam. She had found a new place to live, with the intention that Samantha would stay with her father until Milli was settled. On 8 September, Milli's new partner became concerned that she was not responding to messages and after discovering that she had not attended work, contacted Samantha's school. Samantha was not present and neither parent could be contacted on their mobiles. Police attended the family home and discovered the tragedy.
- 1.6 Samantha had an amazing network of support around her and the quality of education and care she received was outstanding. The authors are grateful to the practitioners and managers who met with them to share their fond memories of Samantha and Milli. They were honest and

¹ [PECS® - Picture Exchange Communication System \(pecs-unitedkingdom.com\)](https://www.pecs-unitedkingdom.com)

reflective when they discussed the case. The impact of the tragedy on each of them, the wider professional network and community, has been profound. Many practitioners shared touching memorials for Samantha, such as planting her favourite flowers (Black-Eyed Susans) and flower boxes painted by the children in her class, who have struggled to come to terms with the loss of her vibrant presence.

- 1.7 There is no evidence that the way this tragedy unfolded could have been reasonably foreseen, based on the information held by the agencies involved.
- 1.8 Both families were invited to participate in the review process, and we are very grateful to Milli's aunt and Adam's sister for meeting with the authors and generously sharing their lovely memories of Samantha and Milli. The insight that they have provided in respect of Milli and Adam's relationship has also been invaluable. This shocking tragedy has been devastating for both families and the authors and the Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership wish to express their sincere condolences for their grief.

2. Scope of Review

Purpose of a Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR)

- 2.1. The purpose of having a CSPR is not to re-investigate or to apportion blame, to undertake human resources duties or to establish how someone died. It is:
 - To establish whether there are lessons to be learned from the circumstances of the case about the way in which local professionals and agencies worked together to safeguard children;
 - To review the effectiveness of procedures (both multi-agency and those of individual organisations);
 - To inform and improve local interagency practice;
 - To improve practice by acting on learning (developing best practice); and
 - To prepare or commission a summary report which brings together and analyses the findings of the various reports from agencies in order to make recommendations for future action.
- 2.2. There is a strong focus on understanding the underlying issues that informed agency and professionals' actions and what, if anything, prevented them from being able to help and protect Samantha from harm. The learning produced through a CSPR concerns 'systems findings', which are the underlying issues that helped or hindered in the case and are systemic rather than one-off issues. Systems findings identify social and organisational factors that make it harder or easier for practitioners to proactively safeguard, within and between agencies.

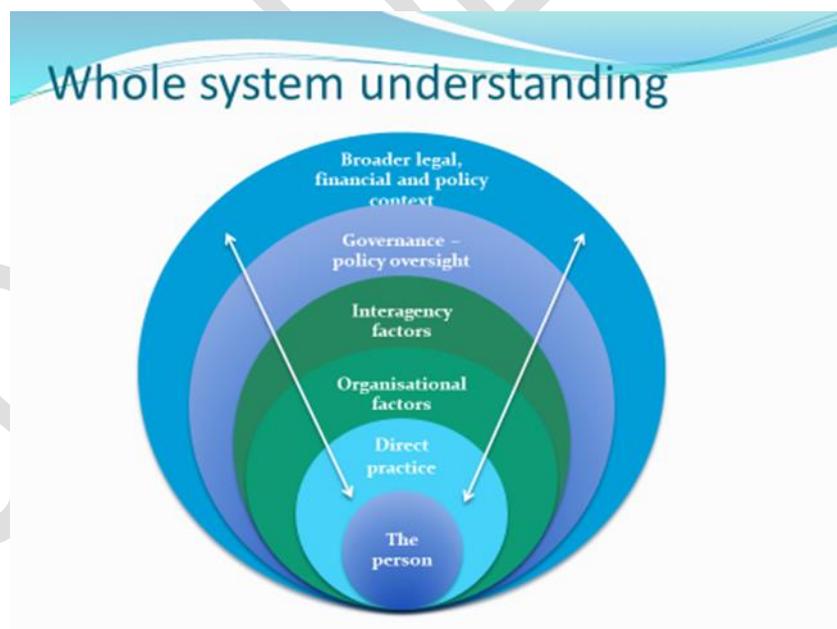
Themes

- 2.3. The SSP prioritised the following themes for illumination through the CSPR, focussing on a period from March 2019 to September 2022:
 - As a child diagnosed with severe autism with very limited verbal skills, how effectively were practitioners able to engage with Samantha's efforts to communicate her daily life? How did diagnostic overshadowing, including behavioural assumptions around puberty or parental explanations, influence the professional interpretation of her verbal and non-verbal cues?
 - What analysis was there of the risks to Samantha arising from living in a household where there had been ongoing abuse between her parents and an alleged rape? What critical thinking and challenge was evident in respect of the minimisation and normalisation of abuse and harm in the home?

- How did the restrictions arising from the Covid-19 pandemic impact on family stressors, the professional oversight of Samantha's welfare, and support available to her mother as a person who had alleged abuse?
- What professional and community support was available for the parents caring for a severely disabled child?
- How were cultural issues explored in respect of:
 - Milli's experience as an Indian immigrant to Britain,
 - Samantha's experience of having parents from different cultural backgrounds, and
 - Adam's belief systems.

Methodology

- 2.4. In addition to reviewing returns prepared by each agency and key documents in respect of Samantha, meetings took place with frontline practitioners who worked directly with Samantha and her parents, and senior managers responsible for overseeing the departments involved. The case has been analysed using a learning together approach, through the lens of evidence-based learning from research and the findings of other published CSPRs.² Learning from good practice and a discussion of the legal framework will also be included. By using that evidence-base, the focus for this review has been on identifying the facilitators and barriers with respect to implementing what has been codified as good practice. The review will adopt a whole system focus. What enables and what obstructs best practice may reside in one or more of several domains, as captured in the diagram below.³ Moreover, the different domains may be aligned or misaligned, meaning that part of the focus must fall on whether what might enable best practice in one domain is undermined by the components of another domain.



- 2.5. The review covers the period from March 2019 to September 2022, although additional background information has been included for context. This covers when a referral was made to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in respect of Samantha's increasingly difficult behaviours and Milli reaching crisis point before COVID, through to the date Samantha sadly

² Preston-Shoot, M., Braye, S., Preston, O., Allen, K. and Spreadbury, K. (2020) National SAR Analysis April 2017 – March 2019: Findings for Sector-Led Improvement. London: LGA/ADASS

³ Braye, S., Orr, D. and Preston-Shoot, M. (2015) 'Learning lessons about self-neglect? An analysis of serious case reviews.' Journal of Adult Protection, 17 (1), 3-18.

died. The timeline also aligns with the Domestic Homicide Review, which will look at the past 3 years of Milli's life.

Contributing agencies

2.6. The following agencies provided documentation to support the review:

- Education Services
- Hillside Special School
- Suffolk Constabulary
- Children and Young Person's Health Services
- East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust
- Long Melford / Lavenham GP Surgery
- Suffolk Children and Young People's Services
- Integrated Community Paediatric Services: Speech and Language

Parallel processes

- 2.7. On 7 October 2022, the Coroner opened an inquest, which was adjourned pending further investigation.
- 2.8. On 12 May 2023, Adam was found guilty of Samantha and Milli's murders after a 4-week trial and he was subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum of 40 years.
- 2.9. To ensure that lessons are also learned in respect of Milli and her relationship with Adam, a separate Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) process will take place in parallel with this LSCP review. DHRs are one way to improve responses to domestic violence and aim to reduce the risk of what happened to Samantha and Milli happening to others. The DHR will try to ensure that agencies involved understand what happened that led to the death of Samantha and Milli and identify where responses to the situation could be improved. They will also recommend actions to improve responses to domestic violence situations in the future. Although this CSRP addresses how Milli's disclosures of domestic abuse were used by the professional network to analyse the risks to Samantha. These issues will primarily be addressed through the DHR process.

3. Description of Samantha

- 3.1. Samantha was a happy child who made an impact on everyone around her, with a sassy personality that filled a room and an infectious giggle. She adored the touch, feel and look of books and would dash to the library from her classroom at any opportunity. She liked to play with strings and bendy pipes and loved swimming, music and dancing. A 'girly girl' she liked to look pretty and having pampering sessions and her mother ensured she was always well presented with beautiful hair. As she reached her 'tweens', Samantha became more conscious about what she was wearing. She enjoyed cooking and had performed onstage at the school show, and her mother sent varied and creative food for her school lunches, which made Samantha feel special.
- 3.2. Although Samantha could make piercing noises when excited or involuntarily flap her hands or feet (which could be mistaken for aggression), she responded cheerfully to gentle boundaries, taking herself outside to calm down. Samantha could be incredibly empathetic towards people who were important to her, recognising when those around her were stressed or upset, and would stroke their faces to make them feel better. By contrast, she had little interest in people who she did not like, giving strong non-verbal cues that she did not want to engage with them, such as putting her hands over her eyes and groaning.

- 3.3. Samantha's behaviour was observed to be more controlled at school (where there were 5-6 trained adults in the classroom) than at home, and the community behavioural support team noted that this was common for many children, irrespective of any learning needs, as they felt more relaxed in their home environment. It could also be more difficult for parents at home to sustain the consistent boundaries required to help a child with severe autism develop new skills, when they may be tired or frustrated themselves. Samantha often presented more calmly in her father's care and could become aggressive towards Milli, kicking or hitting her when she became distressed. This was because Milli was very petite and as Samantha approached puberty, she became larger and physically stronger than her mother, whereas Adam was a large man, who could restrain Samantha without effort. There were also concerns that Adam would undermine the boundaries Milli tried to set. Samantha was very cheeky and would use her charm to get her way, for example she knew that her parents were so pleased when she communicated verbally that she could use this to get them to reward her with her favourite foods, even though both parents agreed that her weight needed to be managed. Milli's family were surprised at how much weight Samantha had gained since they last saw her and reported that Adam would overfeed her junk food, undermining Milli's efforts to give her a healthy home-cooked diet.
- 3.4. Practitioners commented that Samantha was maturing into a strong young woman, working towards independence. Although her behaviours could become more oppositional while learning new skills, this would reduce as those skills became part of her routine. For her 12th birthday, Milli was able to take Samantha out for a meal at a local pub, which she was delighted about, as Milli had always dreamed of being able to take Samantha out safely to socialise.

Samantha's communication

- 3.5. Even as a 6-month-old baby, Samantha's family noticed that she did not engage with adults in the way most children do. She was first diagnosed with autism and a learning disability at the age of 2 years old. When Samantha started nursery at 3, she was described as being at a pre-intentional level of communication, possibly unaware of the world around her. At this age, staff would physically prompt her to motivate her motor activity. Initially her parents struggled to come to terms with her disability and although this was a difficult journey for them, they agreed for her to attend a special school. Adam's sister reflected how sad and lonely it must sometimes have felt for the parents during this period, as they grew to accept that Samantha would not develop in the same way as most other children. She said that Adam in particular struggled to accept this and sought to shelter Samantha from the world. She was surprised to realise during a visit when Samantha was 5 that she had never been allowed to interact with animals, and encouraged Milli to go together with her to a soft play area with a petting zoo, which Samantha loved.
- 3.6. Staff at school worked carefully with Samantha to develop her use of PECS, where the child is taught to exchange a picture for something they want to develop functional communication. She also learned some Makaton signs, a language programme that uses signs, symbols and speech, giving her different options when communicating. Samantha's progress could be uneven, and her parents had some difficulty consistently integrating this at home, although Milli took the PECS training three times. Samantha's determined nature could be a hindrance to this at times – she wanted to do things her own way and preferred to give people physical cues, often putting away her PECS cards in the hope that adults would give up.
- 3.7. By the time she was 10, Samantha had made massive strides in her progress. Her school and speech and language therapists used a child-centred approach to identify what motivated her, in particular her love of items that were sensorily stimulating. She was able to verbalise some words in her deep voice, and could put short, concrete sentences together verbally or using PECS, for example "*I want two more*" or "*I want red monkey*". Her teacher had been blown away when Samantha returned to school after the summer holidays in 2022 as they had expected her to have regressed to an extent, but she had retained her skills and presented as having

gained maturity and an ability to tolerate new experiences better. Interestingly, Samantha was fascinated by foreign languages and in addition to watching cartoons in different languages, she knew a few words of Bulgarian, her teacher's first language.

- 3.8. The school worked with Samantha to help her to express her emotions, noting that for autistic children, abstract concepts could be very difficult to understand. The school would use photos together with music and movement to help the children to understand the connection between the word for an emotion, and how this made them feel. Although Samantha was making some progress, she was not yet able to consistently attribute the correct emotion to a situation, which could make it very difficult to understand the feelings she was trying to communicate.

4. Description of Parents

Milli

- 4.1. Milli was born in Mumbai, India to successful professional parents and had a loving extended family in both India and the UK who supported her emotionally and financially. Her family described her as bubbly, charming and generous, and she was someone who would go to any length to help others. She visited her family in the UK regularly throughout her childhood, before moving to Leicester to study for a degree in hospitality, which is when she met Adam online.
- 4.2. Practitioners described Milli as an energetic, confident and engaging woman, who was petite and took pride in her appearance. She usually presented as very cheerful and appeared to be quite open talking a mile a minute, however, she could be selective about speaking to professionals about more personal topics and at times, would minimise disclosures that she had previously made, or give information which could appear contradictory. On one occasion when she appeared in a low mood and a staff member at Samantha's school asked whether she was alright, Milli said *"I get up and slap on my makeup face and people assume I'm ok, but they do not need to know"*.
- 4.3. Her love and dedication for Samantha shone through, and overwhelmingly, she was the parent who engaged with professionals around her care, attending child in need and EHCP meetings, doing the vast majority of pick-ups and drop-offs from school and undertaking PECS training three times in order to better support Samantha's communication. She undertook most of Samantha's personal care needs, particularly as Samantha became older and reached puberty. She was careful not to undermine Adam to professionals, and her family said that she would allow him to take credit for the care she provided.
- 4.4. At times Milli would be ready to engage with the structured and consistent boundaries Samantha needed at home as well as at school, but this could be uneven, and she could become emotionally heightened when Samantha became distressed or resistant to changes that were necessary to support her independence. For a period, Samantha displayed aggression towards her mother including flapping her hands or kicking, although it was not always clear whether these were voluntary movements or involuntary tics, and this had started to reduce as Samantha matured. However, their interactions could also be very loving, and Samantha liked to move her face very close to her mother's.
- 4.5. After Adam and Milli had agreed to end their marriage (albeit they continued to live in the same house for practical reasons), Milli started a new relationship with a work colleague. The couple had a supportive circle of friends they socialised with. They would help Milli to take Samantha out into the community, to parks, shops and the beach, which supported them both to become more independent and confident. Her family thought that these were really positive friendships, and liked her friends very much when Milli introduced them. Milli's family were clear that this was a key reason for the positive changes that practitioners had reported in Samantha's

presentation, providing lovely videos of Milli and her friends on outings with Samantha where she was playing with dogs and having a lot of fun. Milli was thriving in a new job and seemed to be enjoying life again.

- 4.6. Milli's family were deeply upset that media reports during the criminal trial parroted Adam's characterisation of her new relationship as an 'affair' or the implication that Milli's behaviour had contributed to her and Samantha's deaths. The injustice and harmful impact of this victim blaming narrative in respect of murdered women is widely recognised:

"Tales of infidelity on the part of a murdered woman are woven into the tapestry of how she came to be stabbed to death in her bedroom. Or, we hear how the pressures of work just got "too much" for some poor husband, who then shot and killed his wife and children. We never hear these stories told about men who kill other men... When we use qualifying language that perpetrators might also use in their defence, we amplify those justifications"⁴

- 4.7. Milli's family were touched by the support they have continued to receive from Milli's friends and the community including Samantha's school. They felt that the outpouring of grief and subsequent memorials were a tribute to Milli's kind and generous spirit. Milli's aunt also spoke in glowing terms of the kindness and support that the police and victim support team had given their family, when breaking the news of the murder and throughout the criminal process.

Adam

- 4.8. Adam was from Bristol and his parents separated when he was at primary school. He and his sister were raised by their mother, who remarried shortly before Adam started high school. His sister reported that their mother was a strong, loving woman and their stepfather was a kind man. Domestic abuse and coercion were not a feature of their childhood, and she could not fathom where his misogynist views or belief system had originated. When his sister's own relationship had ended (before he met Milli), Adam had moved into her home to support her and had been very caring to her and her children. Adam's sister described him as intelligent but arrogant in his beliefs and as an adult he did not maintain personal friendships.
- 4.9. Adam presented to professionals as a silent figure in the household and was rarely seen outside the family home, even though he claimed to be Samantha's primary carer from September 2020 when he was made redundant. From this time, it appears that he rarely left the house. He did not generally answer the phone to professionals and did not attend meetings about Samantha or write in her communication diary for school. Adam seemed very isolated, with no identifiable friends and was not in close contact with his family. One practitioner who had known him since Samantha was very young described him as "a controlling and domineering man". His conversations with professionals focussed solely on Samantha and her needs, he rarely disclosed personal information in respect of himself or engaged in social chitchat. School staff reported that Adam could challenge their actions at times, for example, he did not like the fact that Samantha was escorted by two staff members to and from the car park for pick-ups after school to stop her running in front of cars in the carpark, and when Samantha had matured sufficiently for this to be reduced to one staff member, he likened this to her being "treated like an animal", a description they strongly objected to as this was necessary for her safety.
- 4.10. However, practitioners who saw Adam caring for Samantha at home reported that he appeared very caring, playing with her and attending warmly to her. Adam spoke to her softly and calmly and because of his large stature, had a calming influence. He was able to absorb advice from professionals in respect of setting boundaries and even when Samantha was resistant to behavioural support and became distressed, he could step back and recognise that they were trying to achieve a goal that was important for Samantha's independence. The school noted an

⁴ [Why are we blaming Epsom College headteacher Emma Pattison for her own murder? | The Independent](#)

incident when they were speaking to Milli by telephone and could hear Adam challenging what they were saying in the background, but when they asked to be put on speakerphone so they could speak to him directly, he became very friendly and compliant.

- 4.11. Both families discussed their experience that Milli provided the bulk of care for Samantha and that this had become a significant tension in their relationship when Adam lost his job, meaning Milli had to work extended hours to cover the household bills. Milli was frustrated that in addition to working long hours, providing Samantha's personal care, doing the school runs and attending all of the meetings with agencies, she was also doing all the housework and cooking. Although Adam's interactions with Samantha were gentle, it was not clear what, if any, practical care he was actually providing beyond his physical presence from the time Milli dropped Samantha back from school until she returned from work in the evening to take Samantha for a drive to settle her for bed. Samantha was usually observed to be entranced by cartoons on her tablet when seen at home.
- 4.12. In his final conversation with a professional on 7 September 2022, Adam focussed on obtaining practical support for Samantha once Milli moved out, asking for support in having a wet room installed in the house, improving the garden so that she had somewhere to play and obtaining a carer for Samantha's personal care. The conversation presented as being very much focussed on reaching out for Samantha's future. However, this may have also been recognition by Adam that when Milli moved out he would become responsible for cooking, cleaning and caring for Samantha, taking on the responsibilities that he had abdicated to Milli. Further, he was losing his source of financial support and his only meaningful social support. The tension between his misogynist world view and the reality of his near-total dependence on Milli is very stark.
- 4.13. Adam's family are shocked and devastated by his actions and were appalled by the statements he made during his murder trial. Despite the physical distance, Adam's sister had a close relationship with Milli, speaking with her often. The family mourn the loss of both Samantha and Milli profoundly.

Parental relationship

- 4.14. Adam and Milli met online in 2009 after Milli moved to the UK to study at university. Adam had followed her to India unannounced when she had gone home for a wedding to ask her to go out with him, although he must have planned this as overseas visitors to India require a visa. He moved to Leicester to live with her, and they were married towards the end of 2009, after obtaining approval to do so from the Home Office due to Milli's immigration status. Samantha was born 8 months later after a very difficult birth. Milli made an application for leave to remain in the UK as a spouse in July 2010 and on 2 November 2012, she was granted indefinite leave to remain. This meant she was entitled to benefits, council housing etc if she needed these and was no longer legally dependent on Adam for her immigration status. However, Adam leveraged her immigration status as a means to exert control over Milli, telling her that he could have her deported and stop her having any contact with Samantha. He would not allow her to obtain a passport for Samantha, so as to prevent her from taking her to India to meet her parents.
- 4.15. Milli reported that when they married, Adam became physically and emotionally abusive towards her, including hitting her and pushing her into furniture while she was pregnant with Samantha, and trashing the hotel room on the night of their wedding. Although she did not report this to police at that time, she told her family and although they encouraged her to leave him, she refused to do so. Her father threatened Adam if he hurt her again, so the physical abuse stopped. Her family reported that Milli had told her midwife in Leicester about the abuse and that the midwife had raised a safeguarding alert, but it appears this information was not passed on to agencies in Suffolk when the family moved when Samantha was around 2. However, when Milli later disclosed this in 2020, she told professionals that Adam had raped her, and had continued to be emotionally abusive and controlling, monitoring her phone and emails. He

controlled Milli's diet, using blood glucose test strips (intended for use by diabetics) to monitor what she had eaten. Although Milli did not want to support a criminal prosecution and said that she felt pressured by the involvement of professionals, she said that she intended to leave Adam as soon as she could secure her British citizenship.

- 4.16. As early as April 2021, Adam also spoke to professionals about the marriage having come to an end, that Milli would be moving out once she could afford a flat, and he would continue to care for Samantha in the family home. However, the timescales for this kept changing as Adam created barriers to Milli leaving, telling her that her immigration status was dependent on him, and that as he would be caring for Samantha, he would keep their rental property, all of the family's savings and benefits and their car, even though she needed this to get to her jobs. He made her sign a written agreement to this effect, and the first clause of this prohibited Milli from taking Samantha to Leicester to visit her family.
- 4.17. Milli's family were concerned about the relationship from the outset as they disliked Adam's manner, but when Milli did not heed their concerns they accepted that this was her decision and that she was in love with him. However, he rarely came to visit with Milli and Samantha and when he did, he would stand over them rather than sitting down and refuse to speak, which they felt was intended to be intimidating. Adam looked for work away from Leicester, which they believed was planned to separate Milli from her support networks and prevent them influencing or protecting her. However, Adam was always keen to take money from them, which they were always generously willing to provide to help support Milli and Samantha until Milli asked them to stop sending money as Adam had become used to depending on this rather than looking for work. When the family visited Suffolk, he made them feel unwelcome, refusing to speak to them and he did not allow Milli's friends to visit the house. After the pandemic hit, he seized on this as an opportunity to permanently exclude them, telling the family that he would not allow people who had been vaccinated into the home, even though Milli had been vaccinated. Milli was upset by Adam's decision that Samantha would not be vaccinated, but he told her this could not happen without his agreement.
- 4.18. Adam's sister felt that at the start of the relationship, the couple had been 'blissfully happy', but that this had changed when Milli fell pregnant as it seemed Adam was jealous of the baby. Milli told her about his emotional abuse and controlling behaviour and that he would press his knuckles into her leg, but never told her about the other physical abuse, rape or any threats. Adam's sister also thought that he chose to move far away from Leicester and Bristol to isolate Milli from the support of their families. Milli told the sister that she was worried about her immigration status and that Adam had told her that he would take Samantha from her. His sister was concerned that it appeared that Milli did not have a bank card and always had to ask Adam to transfer money. As a practitioner working in domestic violence herself, Adam's sister warned Milli about this controlling behaviour and had repeatedly told Milli that she and Samantha could live with her for as long as they needed to if she left Adam. Because of her professional experience, she told Milli that if she did leave Adam, she should do this when he was out of the house to avoid a confrontation.
- 4.19. Practitioners who saw the couple together commented that they would bicker and that their exchanges involved constant 'point scoring'. Although unpleasant this did not present as threatening and was not considered abnormal in the context of a couple who had separated but were forced to remain living in the same house for financial reasons. This could also be seen during the covert videos that Milli recorded of their arguments which were characterised by mutual contempt. As set out above, after the couple had agreed to separate, Milli started a new relationship. She did not tell Adam about who she was seeing, but during one of the covert videos he accused her of seeing someone and she replied derisively. Her family explained that after years of experiencing emotional abuse and trying to make her marriage work by placating Adam, Milli's confidence had grown through her new relationship and she was standing up for herself. She told Adam she was no longer going to tolerate his abusive behaviour.

4.20. Milli's mother was frightened that she had seen Adam making gestures in the background of her video-calls with Milli that made the mother believe he would try to kill her, and warned Milli that she needed to leave. However, Milli believed he would not hurt her. Her aunt and uncle told Milli that they would pay the deposit and 6 months' rent in advance as she kept missing out on the flats that she visited due to the competitive housing market. They also bought a car for her, so that she could get to work, removing the last of the barriers Adam had created to prevent Milli's independence.

5. Narrative chronology

- 5.1. Samantha had multiple periods of support from the Children's Community Learning Disability Nursing Team, the first from October 2014 to February 2016 which included 31 sessions and joint working with Speech and Language therapists. There was some concern about incidents of self-harm. Samantha was assessed by the Norfolk and Suffolk Mental Health Foundation Trust's Child and Family Team between January and July 2016. This focused on her behaviours, including aggression and recommended early help and sensory assessment. She received further support from the Children's Community Learning Disability Nursing Team from June 2018 to April 2021 due to her behaviours, which included shouting, screaming, aggression and ignoring boundaries and was referred to the Emotional Well-Being Hub in November 2018. In January 2019, staff at Hillside School noticed bruises under Samantha's knee and shin, about the size of a thumb.
- 5.2. A MASH episode was logged on 27 March 2019 by Hillside School, reporting difficulties in managing Samantha's behaviour and Milli being at crisis point. Samantha's father, Adam, worked nights and Samantha was physically challenging towards Milli, Samantha was growing up and was physically much stronger than her. Adam worked shifts and although Samantha would listen to him, sometimes he reported that he found her behaviour more challenging and he was worried for his wife. This was triaged as a single agency need and for CYPs's Disabled Children's team to complete a Social Work Assessment. As a result of the MASH episode, Samantha was allocated to the Disabled Children and Young People's Team and she remained open to the team for the rest of her life. She was referred to the Specialist Learning Disability CAMHS in April 2019, due to significant concerns regarding attention and activity levels impacting on her education and difficult behaviours including aggression. In May 2019, drug treatment was considered by Samantha's psychiatrist but Samantha could not tolerate the prescribed drug, Methylphenidate, hence this was discontinued.
- 5.3. The Social Work Assessment in relation to the March referral was completed on 24 May 2019, and it was noted that Samantha had never slept in her own room, always sleeping 'skin to skin' with one of her parents. Milli said that sometimes she felt so low she wanted to pack her bags and return to India on her own.
- 5.4. In October 2019, Samantha's mother told the school that Samantha would not tolerate her parents being in the same room together. On 23 January 2020, Milli spoke to a member of school staff about her concerns about Adam staying on until June and then being made redundant, and that they would have to move house and put Samantha in a new school. She was described as feeling better once she had got this off her chest. A CIN visit took place on 6 Feb 2020 where it was noted the family may be moving because of Adam being made redundant. Milli was disappointed by this as the family had been in Suffolk for 9 years, Samantha was happy at school and Milli felt supported.
- 5.5. England entered the first national lockdown in respect of the Covid-19 pandemic on 23 March 2020 and schools were closed until 1 June 2020. In March 2020, Milli had a telephone support call with a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) and reported that she was coping, but was anxious about long-term support for managing Samantha at home. A COVID risk plan was completed on 6 April 2020 and reviewed on 30 April 2020, noting that as Samantha was in a

high-risk health category and RAG-rated green in terms of social need, this meant that she did not require face-to-face contact for safeguarding reasons and home visits would not be carried out.

- 5.6. The family were visited at home by CAMHS on 29 April 2020, but Adam was very hostile and asked the CAMHS worker to leave. CAMHS reported Adam's behaviour to CYPS, but it does not appear that this incident was used to update the COVID risk plan in respect of social need when this was reviewed on 30 April. Milli called the CAMHS worker the next day to apologise and told him that Adam was very controlling and that she was not allowed to go out. She reported that Adam had gone on about the worker's visit long after he had left. The CAMHS worker asked whether Adam had ever been abusive in the past and Milli said that he had been once when Samantha was about 2 years old, but her father came over from India and spoke to him so this had never happened again. Milli said that they had moved to Suffolk to isolate her from her family and friends, but maintained that Adam was a good dad, that Samantha was never at risk and that she loved her father. The CAMHS worker said that he had observed this interaction and had no concerns about Adam around Samantha but was concerned for Milli and felt there may be some domestic abuse. Again, this information was not used to review the risk assessment and it is unclear whether this disclosure of abuse was relayed to CYPS.
- 5.7. A CIN meeting took place at the school on 15 June 2020 where the fact Adam would be made redundant in September and how this would impact on the family were discussed. Milli became upset, saying that they were finding lockdown and the redundancy difficult, but that Adam was able to get Samantha to do a lot on his Friday's off work. Between mid-June and mid-July 2020, Milli became distressed that Samantha was being moved to a new class. Following a conversation between CYPS and the school, it became clear she was telling both agencies that she had not had support from the other. Milli told the SLT in a telephone call on 3 August 2020 that she was pleased with the progress Samantha had made in respect of her communication skills, but at this point she did not feel supported by school so was planning to complain.
- 5.8. Adam was made redundant on 4 September 2020 and Milli expressed her concerns to the school about how difficult this would be for him and them as a family. A home visit was undertaken by CYPS on 9 September 2020 where Milli reported Adam had not been able to find another job so they were thinking of him becoming Samantha's main carer with Milli taking on extra hours at her workplace. A telephone consultation between Milli, the Community Paediatrician, and the SLT on 23 September 2020 reported good progress was being made in lockdown and that Samantha's behaviours had settled and her sleep pattern improved. Milli was however worried that Samantha's weight was increasing rapidly. On 18 November 2020, Samantha was tearful when she came into school and Milli said she had woken early and was not in a good mood.
- 5.9. On 26 November 2020, the Government introduced a tier system, placing different levels of restriction on regions dependant on the local Covid-19 infection rates, with the expectation that this would be lifted before Christmas. Suffolk was placed in Tier 4, requiring people to stay home and schools in the areas were closed. On 10 December 2020, it was noted during a CYPS case supervision that the family had struggled throughout lockdown as Samantha did not have a school place and that the family circumstances remained stressful.
- 5.10. Learning Disability (LD) CAMHS emailed CYPS on 15 December 2020 advising that during the home visit the day prior, Milli disclosed she was leaving Adam and taking Samantha with her, although she had not disclosed when. Milli advised Adam was tracking everything she did on email as he had her passwords. He was also tracking her on her iPhone. Adam's sister had advised her to leave the home whilst Adam was out as there could be consequences if she left whilst he was there. Milli denied physical abuse but confirmed she was being controlled and belittled. LD CAMHS expressed concerns for Milli and Samantha's welfare. On 19 December

2020, the Government announced that people living in regions in Tier 4 must stay at home and could not spend Christmas with their families.

- 5.11. From 4 January until 8 March 2021, all schools were again closed for the third national Covid-19 lockdown. CYPS contacted Milli on 4 January 2021 by telephone, where Milli shared that the situation was not good at home as the relationship with Adam was very strained. Milli was looking to leave, although she wanted to remain in Suffolk. She was exhausted because she was doing everything for Samantha. Due to the Covid restrictions in place during this period, a walk was arranged so the social worker could talk with Milli. This walk took place on 6 January 2021 where Milli stated that her concerns were about belittling and control. Adam was also accusing her of having affairs which she denied. She was worried about being deported back to India if she left Adam. Whilst she was keeping plans secret from him, she said she did not feel unsafe around him. Milli also had contact with the SLT Assistant on 4 January and reported that Samantha had been making good progress while school was closed.
- 5.12. LD CAMHS meet with Milli on 12 January 2021 at a work colleague's house where she shared her family history. She also disclosed that she was in a previous abusive relationship and was abused by a third party. Milli further disclosed that Adam had raped her on the night of their wedding. The social worker advised Milli of a form to complete to look at the level of risk she was facing. The social worker and LD CAMHS met on 13 January to discuss the information gathered about abuse. They concluded Samantha was safe enough at home and Milli had the situation under control. Samantha's school was not informed of these disclosures, and were not invited to take part in safety planning.
- 5.13. On 14 January 2021, Suffolk Constabulary were notified by NSFT about an incident of rape and to concerns that Milli was in a physically and mentally abusive relationship with Adam. A domestic abuse, stalking and honour-based violence (DASH) risk assessment was completed on 19 January, which noted that he had isolated her from her family, was tracking her on her iPhone, and had slammed a glass table into her stomach and hit her in places people would not be able to see while she was pregnant with Samantha, although he had since deleted the photos she took of the bruises. The DASH was graded as high risk on 20 January and Milli was referred to the domestic abuse team for an IDVA to be allocated. LD CAMHS notified CYPS the same day that Milli had recently informed Adam she was leaving him and asked for a divorce. They noted the risk level may have increased. LD CAMHS shared with the police the fact that Adam had forced sex on Milli in the past and that she had been abused by two other men known to her in the past. As a result of these concerns, Milli engaged with an IDVA but she did not support police action. The coercion and controlling behaviour and rape allegations were therefore closed. Police made a safeguarding referral to Social Services on 19 January 2021, which included details of how Milli had disclosed historic rapes, the fact that Adam was not aware that Milli was seeking support or help from domestic abuse or police teams, and that he must not be alerted to it for the safety of both Milli and Samantha. At the time, Milli was trying to find somewhere else for them to live and Milli did not think Samantha was at risk from her father as he was not abusive in front of her. Samantha had an allocated social worker, details of which were included in the referral. However, police did not identify this referral as an Operation Encompass referral, which is the process for the police to refer domestic abuse directly to schools so that staff can monitor children's welfare in real time.
- 5.14. Milli told CYPS on 20 January 2021 that she was feeling pressured by police to press charges. She did not want to do this, commenting that Adam and Samantha had a great bond and that she and Adam were now co-parenting. The next day the social worker wrote to the police officer dealing with the case explaining Milli did not want to press charges. The letter also stated that professionals were content that Samantha was safe. Police responded on 27 January 2021 to confirm they were not taking any further action and noted that Milli was engaging with services.

- 5.15. A home visit was undertaken by the social worker on 15 February 2021 where it was recorded that the couple were now leading separate lives. Adam did not go out and spent much of his time on his computer. It was noted Milli did not want the situation mentioned at the CIN meeting the following week as she felt this could be a trigger for Adam to become abusive towards her. The case was presented to MARAC on 9 February 2021 and the Domestic Abuse team, outlining the above risks and noting their concern that she was looking to leave the relationship, which could increase the risk level, but that she did not support prosecution and did not want support. IDVA services noted that they were waiting for Milli to leave Adam, then they could support her with a non-molestation order. CYPS noted that Milli felt under pressure to press charges. The only action included in the action plan was for the social worker to contact the IDVA after a planned visit the following day.
- 5.16. A telephone call between the social worker and Milli on 1 March 2021 recorded that she was upset and exhausted given all the contact from police and IDVA. She expressed they were making things more difficult for her. On 23 March 2021 Milli spoke to her GP about separating from Adam and said that she felt in control. Her GP recorded that Milli said she was neither feeling depressed nor suicidal. On 3 March, Milli told the IDVA that Adam had been helping her to complete her application for British citizenship and that they had agreed to separate once this was resolved as neither of them wanted to be in the marriage. She told the IDVA that she had no fear of Adam and “*feels empowered to call the shots*”. She was aware that the IDVA service was a short-term intervention and the case was therefore closed on 9 March 2023. A home visit was then undertaken on 12 April 2021 by the social worker and it was again noted that the situation was ‘ok’. The plan was for Samantha to live with Milli from Monday to Friday, and then with Adam at weekends, which meant Milli would be the main carer claiming the benefits that Adam was claiming at that time.
- 5.17. On 16 April 2021, Milli told the school that Samantha had hit her really hard, injuring her back. A CIN meeting took place on 15 June 2021, which discussed Milli’s ongoing difficulties in managing Samantha’s behaviour and that this, together with Adam’s upcoming redundancy were impacting on the parents’ relationship. On 17 June 2021, Samantha’s teacher advised that Samantha was aggressive and not having a good day. The Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) Assistant was able to engage Samantha in a game, and she responded with clapping, smiling and laughing. The teacher asked Adam to collect Samantha instead of Milli, and told him that Samantha had been kicking cars and frequently kicked Milli.
- 5.18. LD CAMHS advised the social worker on 7 July 2021 that a further disclosure had been made by Milli that Adam was being coercive and degrading. Again, the school was not informed of this.
- 5.19. The chronology provided by the school showed occasions from the summer term 2021 onwards where Samantha was unsettled and upset on arrival at school and had on occasion physically abused Milli. This was noted as coinciding with signs of the onset of puberty and possibly related to hormonal changes, alongside a suspected viral or urine infection in September 2021. Staff explored these behaviours appropriately with Milli at the time. A home visit was undertaken by the social worker on 1 September 2021 which was focused on Samantha’s needs. Both parents engaged in conversation about Samantha and her progress.
- 5.20. On 21 September 2021, Adam sent an email to the head teacher at Hillside:
- “as today is the beginning of the “vaccinations” being held in school for 12-15yr olds you will be having visitors to the school to administer “vaccination”. although Samantha is only 11 years of age, I am fully informing you, your future successors and your colleagues which includes all visitors, be it signed or unsigned that i Adam of sound mind, father/owner of Samantha, know **not** to give consent for any testing medically or otherwise for example swabbing for rt pcr test/lateral flow test and any administering or treatment for example nasal*

sprays/injections on Samantha. you are required to inform me when such actions are attempted. send a reply to confirm you have received and understand.” [original grammar and punctuation]

- 5.21. On 30 September, Samantha was off school for a week with a suspected UTI and on her return to school was demonstrating that she did not feel well, crying and pointing to her stomach and head, refusing to eat or drink, with a slight temperature and fever. The next day Milli told the school that the doctor did not want Samantha to attend the surgery as they thought she had a virus that had been going around, and that the school may therefore prefer her to stay at home. Later in October, Milli informed the school that there were some changes in the family situation that may be affecting Samantha, as she and Adam were going through a separation process.
- 5.22. At the end of October 2021 Milli tested positive for COVID, and she and Adam made the decision to keep Samantha at home so they self-isolated as a family. In November 2021, Milli told school staff that Adam contacted the school to let them know that Samantha would not be having the flu jab even though she had it previously because Samantha was “his property and he was not allowing anyone to test on or jab her”. She was off school again with vomiting and diarrhoea at the end of the month.
- 5.23. The social worker spoke to Milli on the telephone on 13 January 2022 where she confirmed her citizenship application was progressing and that things were ok at home, with both parents being civil towards each other. Adam was still Samantha’s main carer. In late January and again in late February, Samantha was off school due to a heavy period and pain.
- 5.24. SLT’s observation and review of Samantha in class on 11 February 2022 showed Samantha being observed to be engaging in sensory seeking behaviours, easy to engage, laughing and making some eye contact. On 25 February 2022, Samantha’s SLT annual review report was completed based on three SLT observations that had taken place at school. A CIN meeting held on 7 March 2022 noted “*Samantha is very settled in her new class and loving the sensory timetable making her much calmer and happier, this is carrying through to home too.*” In case supervision on 22 March 2022, the social worker advised there was reference to past domestic abuse concerns and that Milli had secured money from her family in India to rent a new home for her and Samantha, although she was not planning to take Samantha with her initially. Milli was due to imminently become a UK citizen, and this was granted on 24 March 2022.
- 5.25. During a telephone consultation between the community paediatrician and Milli on 13 April 2022, it was shared that parents were struggling with Samantha’s behaviour, which was described as aggressive - hitting, kicking, biting and lashing out. This was impacting on their ability to take her out of the home. A re-referral was made to the Learning Disability Behavioural Support Team on 21 April 2022. Milli cancelled a meeting with the school in June 2022 saying she felt emotionally and physically drained. She also cancelled a CIN meeting in July 2022 stating she had not received the minutes for the previous three meetings. The last time Samantha was seen by CYPS was in June 2022 as part of the CIN plan.
- 5.26. Also during June 2022, Samantha refused to go swimming with school and dropped on the floor continually producing high-pitched sounds and touching her private parts, making a face as if in pain. The school used the AAC symbol grid to encourage her to communicate if she was in pain but she kept pushing it away. There was a similar incident later that same month where during PE, after being encouraged to follow instructions, she dropped to the floor again producing loud vocalizations and excessively touching her vagina. Milli confirmed at the parents’ evening in July 2022 that she had observed similar behaviour from Samantha at home in that before she was due to have her period, she touched her vagina more, was constantly on the move, looked for food at all times, was louder and her mood changed frequently.

- 5.27. During July 2022, Milli told the school that she was speaking with her lawyer as she needed to “get out” and said “*this can't go on any longer as it is*”. She had been seen dropping Samantha off with another man in the car, which she seemed pleased about. The Children’s Community Learning Disability Nursing Team started working with Samantha again from July 2022 and four sessions were completed, with a care plan focussing on community access, self and personal development, family maintenance and empowerment and menstruation. Samantha’s social worker visited in August and reported that this was a pleasant visit with all three of the family at home and the parents talking openly about the separation. The parents had agreed that Adam would be the main carer until Milli had settled into her new home and they talked about how they would work together to look after Samantha.
- 5.28. Milli had a conversation with a teaching assistant in Tesco on 24 August 2022 where she explained she had moved out and had found a new place to live. When asked how Samantha was, Milli advised she was with her dad and “*I will fight for her once I'm sorted*”. The teaching assistant told Samantha’s teacher, who said she would call to check how things had been over the summer, under the cover of a reminder to bring Samantha’s swimming costume on the first day of school. However, Milli did not answer her mobile but did answer the home landline, which was a surprise as the teacher had understood the Milli had already moved out, but the teacher felt unable to explore the family’s situation as Adam might be there. She asked the teaching assistants to be vigilant about who was picking Samantha up and dropping her off and to let her know if Milli picked Samantha up by herself after school, so that she could pop out to speak with her discretely.
- 5.29. Samantha’s community support worker from the learning disability team visited the family on 2 September 2022, family dynamics were discussed and nothing was documented that would indicate that Samantha or Milli were at risk of significant harm, however no direct questioning in relation to domestic abuse was documented in the records. Both parents appeared to be united in their responses about meeting Samantha’s needs after they separated.
- 5.30. On 7 September 2022 during a PSHE lesson, Samantha expressed she felt sad and worried. This was the first time she selected those feelings to communicate. However, Samantha was still learning the words to communicate her feelings and did not always use these consistently. She presented as being in a happy mood, laughing and she started to dance immediately after saying this.
- 5.31. Samantha was last seen at her home with Milli and Adam on the afternoon of 7 September 2022 by the community behavioural support worker as part of an ongoing package of care to support the family. The purpose of the contact was behaviour management with further home sessions booked to continue menstruation and continence promotion. Samantha did not enjoy the process of continence training but would go unprompted to sit on the toilet which was remarkable emotional developmental progress relative to previous training sessions. Both parents and Samantha were present for the contact, and although the parents bickered, this did not appear aggressive, and Samantha was hyper focused on her iPad. Adam had sunglasses on his head, and they were bobbing down and they were making a game of it. Milli had a snack so Samantha tapped her on the knee which meant ‘*give me some please*’ and the worker reflected that Samantha had developed in terms of her skills and maturity. Adam spoke alone to the worker, he said the couple were separating, that Milli was finding a flat on her own and he would look after Samantha. He asked about getting a personal carer and asked for a letter of support in respect of Samantha’s sensory needs in the home and a wet room and secure garden. A further session was booked for the following week and they planned to apply for school meals. The worker spoke with Milli about her difficulties in securing a new flat, but hoped that the increased income from her new job would enable her to move forward. Nothing about this visit raised concern that either Milli or Samantha were at risk, the parents were focused on the future and their intention to co-parent Samantha.

- 5.32. On the morning of 8 September 2022, police attended the family home following up a welfare concern as Milli did not attend work, Samantha did not attend school, neither parent was answering their mobile and police records highlighted a history of domestic abuse for this address. Upon arriving at the address, police reported a strong smell of gas coming from the property, so Fire and Rescue Service were called. Adam came outside the property trying to attack the Fire and Rescue Service with a knife, and was subsequently tasered by the police. Tragically, Milli and Samantha were found dead in the house, both with stab wounds. Samantha died from a single stab wound. Milli's cause of death was pressure to the neck.
- 5.33. Adam had multiple self-inflicted stab wounds and was taken to hospital for treatment. On 12 May 2023, he was found guilty of both murders after a 4-week trial and was subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum of 40 years, after telling the court that he did not regret his actions. The judge noted videos that Milli had covertly filmed of arguments between the couple which evidenced a great deal of mistrust and bad feeling between them. The judge said:

“You have attempted to justify these murders by reference to a deeply flawed set of beliefs about the law that you appear largely to have derived from internet searches. You say that Milli's infidelity with [Milli's new partner] was a form of treason and that the punishment for treason is death. You say that killing her was therefore legal. You say that Samantha, being your daughter, was your property, and you therefore had the right to kill her rather than leave her behind after your death to be looked after by what you consider to be a corrupt system. You held that view despite the excellent support Samantha received from her community support workers and her school.” [paragraph 21 of the sentencing remarks]

6. Analysis of Agencies' Actions

- 6.1. This section examines how and why events occurred, what information was shared, the decisions that were made and the actions that were taken or not taken. We have grouped these according to the key lines of enquiry, highlighting good practice as well as opportunities to improve practice.

Risk analysis in respect of domestic abuse

What analysis was there of the risks to Samantha arising from living in a household where there had been ongoing abuse between her parents and an alleged rape? What critical thinking and challenge was evident in respect of the minimisation and normalisation of abuse and harm in the home?

- 6.2. When Milli disclosed to a staff member at NSFT that Adam had subjected her to physical and emotional abuse and rape in December 2020, this was promptly and appropriately referred to the Domestic Abuse Service and police, although Milli was not happy that police had been informed. A Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment was completed by the Domestic Abuse team and although this was initially graded medium risk based on the points system, when reviewed to apply professional judgment to the contextual information, this was regraded to high risk. The DASH assessment highlighted that Milli was *“looking to leave a lengthy abusive relationship which has included rape, violence, isolation and control, this significantly impacts her risk for the future”* an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) was allocated and the case was referred to Suffolk's Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). All of these steps were in line with good practice. Milli told the IDVA that she was worried that if she spoke to the police, she would be in more danger and that she planned to move out, leaving Samantha in Adam's care as she did not believe he posed any risk to Samantha and thought that her parents would help her financially. She agreed to contact the IDVA daily to confirm that she was safe and although all of these communications were via WhatsApp, she confirmed that she was managing the situation and that a friend was

helping her with her immigration status. Milli intended to get help from the IDVA to obtain a non-molestation order once she left Adam.

- 6.3. However, undue weight was given to Milli's assertion that Adam was no longer a risk to her and would not harm Samantha. Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Act recognises children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right if they see, hear, or experience the effects of the abuse, and are related to either the victim or perpetrator. The fact that Samantha had disabilities that impacted the way she processed her experiences did not alter her status as a victim of domestic abuse. Milli reported that Adam continued to slap, pinch and poke her and had raised concerns that were indicative of coercive control, including Adam isolating her from friends and family and monitoring her devices. Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 (the 2015 Act) introduced the criminal offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship. The offence was brought into force in recognition of the severe impact of controlling or coercive behaviour which can comprise economic, emotional and psychological abuse, technology-facilitated domestic abuse, as well as threats, whether or not they are accompanied by physical and sexual violence or abuse.
- 6.4. Milli had alleged two other incidents when she had been sexually abused by other men, which may have resulted in her normalising this abuse. Despite having Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK (which entitled her to benefits and to come and go freely from the country), Milli was highly fixated on the need to secure her British citizenship to give her the freedom to leave the relationship. Although CYPS staff and her family had many conversations with Milli to reassure her that she was not at risk of deportation, this fear was another element of Adam exerting control by giving her misinformation about her immigration status. A survey of BAME migrant women experiencing domestic abuse indicated that 92% reported that their perpetrator used their immigration status against them, which acted as a barrier to asking for help.⁵ Milli's self-reported risk needed to be weighed against the impact of this coercive and controlling behaviour.
- 6.5. Although the case was re-presented to MARAC on 9 February 2021 and information in respect of Samantha's needs was shared by the agencies attending, again Milli's assertions that Samantha was not at risk were taken at face value. This was a missed opportunity to promote 'team around the family' approach and ensure that CYPS social workers understood coercive control and the need to put in place ongoing support and protection for Samantha, in accordance with best practice guidance.⁶ While cases being presented to MARAC may have already been considered by MASH (which include 15 embedded IDVAs to support multi-agency analysis of referrals) or CYPS, MARAC has a vital role as a critical friend to other agencies, examining their decision making and offering further suggestions to improve safety planning. Leaders in Suffolk noted that in 2021, the volume of cases being presented to MARAC was very high, which limited its ability to explore and problem solve in respect of each case. Following the recommendations of the MARAC Steering Group in October 2022, the number of cases being heard each month was halved, to ensure that each case was given due consideration.
- 6.6. In the last year, police have strengthened the Operation Encompass process. Previously, referrals were only made to schools when officers had been called out to a domestic abuse 'incident', so that staff could be alert and responsive if children were distressed in the immediate aftermath of abuse. However, now schools will also receive a referral when police are notified of historic or chronic domestic abuse, so that the children's welfare can be monitored on an ongoing basis. The IDVA service has also established a CYP Outreach team supporting the children of high-risk victims, which works with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and schools to support children to process their experiences, understand healthy and unhealthy relationships and carry out safety planning. This is getting fantastic feedback from children, their parents and

⁵ [Domestic Abuse in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups | Interventions Alliance](#)

⁶ https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Coercive%20control%20guidance%20for%20MARACs_0.pdf

schools, although this is a consent-based resource and it is unclear whether Milli would have consented to Samantha being referred, given that she did not want Adam to know that she had made disclosures to professionals.

- 6.7. In March 2021, Milli told the IDVA that Adam had been helping her to complete her application for British citizenship and that they had agreed to separate once this was resolved as neither of them wanted to be in the marriage. She told the IDVA that she had no fear of Adam and “*feels empowered to call the shots*”. Subsequent to this, there were regular references to Adam and Milli openly discussing separation, and this appears to have ameliorated the professional concern in respect of risk. However, one domestic abuse expert commented during a learning event that Milli’s feeling of empowerment should have been a red flag, as there is now a well-established evidence base that victims are at greatest risk of death (particularly where coercive, controlling behaviours are a factor) when perpetrator’s behaviours are challenged or a relationship ends.⁷ Further, many leaders felt that Adam’s relaxed attitude to the separation was used to disarm professionals. They emphasised the importance of keeping the risk analysis in respect of the increased risks at the point of separation that had been identified in the risk assessment fresh in practitioners’ minds.
- 6.8. Given Samantha’s limited communication, a careful risk assessment needed to be carried out through a new Child and Family assessment in respect of the domestic abuse she was being exposed to and how this could impact her, drawing together the professional network to share information. Although LD CAMHS and CYPS staff met to discuss the allegations and took the view that Samantha was not at risk, this should have involved all relevant members of the team around the family. In particular staff from the school, who saw Samantha every weekday and the community behavioural support team who regularly visited the family at home should have been involved. This would have allowed practitioners from all relevant agencies to share information they held that could be relevant to the risk analysis. A number of practitioners referred to holding ‘soft’ intelligence about incidents that appeared minor and unrelated to safeguarding at the time, but which, in the context of allegations of domestic abuse, could help support a more holistic analysis of risk. This is consistent with the Collaborative Casework framework for Adults, Children & Families and Mental Health developed by the SSP to promote collective debate and assessment and multi-agency, holistic working with families. As the CYPS and LD CAMHS practitioners who were involved in decision making around the disclosure were not available for the learning events, it was unclear whether the school and other agencies were not informed as a form of ‘gatekeeping’, or the decision makers had not been aware of who should be invited. Education services reported that it was common for schools not to be invited to strategy meetings as the logistics of schools attending can be complex due to the volume of meetings.
- 6.9. Despite Milli’s denial that Samantha was at risk, the fact that Samantha was living in an environment where she was being exposed to her father abusing her mother and was intensely vulnerable due to her learning needs and inability to communicate clearly meant that the threshold for a safeguarding investigation under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 was met. The threshold is low as the local authority only needs to have “*reasonable cause to suspect*” that the child is at risk of suffering significant harm. This, in turn, should have triggered a social work assessment which would have allowed these risks to be explored with the professional network in the context of Samantha’s presentation. This could have been undertaken without the need to disclose the allegations to Adam, if social workers took the view that there was a sound legal basis for non-disclosure. There was the possibility in this case that disclosure would increase the level of risk to Milli or Samantha, therefore this may have outweighed his data protection rights in respect of disclosure, Article 8 rights or his rights as a person with parental responsibility for Samantha. Even if practitioners took the view that the threshold for a s47 strategy meeting was not met, that would not preclude a multi-agency discussion to gather

⁷ [Controlling or coercive behaviour: statutory guidance framework \(accessible\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

information and ensure that the key risks and safety plan were understood by the professional network.

- 6.10. Health partners identified the importance of ensuring that all practitioners working with the child attended these multi-agency forums, as there was a tendency for certain health representatives to be invited to meetings (such as the school nurse), when other health services may hold relevant intelligence. Colleagues from other agencies often thought of 'health' generically, without realising that different services may be part of completely separate organisations, so a proactive approach was needed by those invited to check whether any other health services should also be invited.
- 6.11. Importantly, a clear understanding of the nature of the allegations Milli had made would have allowed all of the partner agencies to monitor Samantha's behaviour and presentation going forward and to be alert to changes which may indicate that the risks or level of harm she was being exposed to were increasing. Instead, the school picked up occasional snippets of information during Child in Need meetings when Milli would make comments such as "*you've been to the home, you know what he's like*". This left agencies to try to infer the context rather than discussing this openly in an appropriately confidential forum. Consequently, the school was vigilant in monitoring Samantha for marks or bruises and any changes in behaviour. However, staff were not clear whether Adam was aware of these allegations, nor were they aware of the analysis in the DASH risk assessment that the risks to Milli were likely to increase at the point she physically left the home. Although Milli told the school in August 2022 that she was making concrete plans to move out from the family home, the school was not aware of the advice that this could increase the danger to Milli.
- 6.12. CYPS and LD CAMHS devised a safety plan with Milli, agreeing a code word for her to use on the basis that if she used this, her IDVA would come to the house to help her leave the property. However, the IDVA was not consulted and when they became aware of this plan, told CYPS that this was wholly inappropriate as if Milli was in danger, she needed to contact 999. LD CAMHS also increased the frequency of their home visits to allow them to monitor the situation in the home, which was appropriate in the context of the risks.
- 6.13. Practitioners commented that it could be difficult to know where to record some information that came to light, for example, Milli's comment to the community behavioural support team that Adam thought she was seeing someone else, as they did not want to record this on Samantha's file where Adam could see this. Another practitioner was unclear whether information she had obtained about the family through a second job could be reported in the context of her role in a partner agency. As a consequence, there was a risk that this 'soft' intelligence, which was so relevant to the analysis of Samantha's experiences, could be missed, or lost over time as individual staff members moved on. Senior Managers at Hillside Special School clarified that they used a system called CPoms, where staff were drilled to record any intelligence or conversations, on the basis that even low-key discussion may provide a piece of a puzzle later. This good practice could be used as a model for other agencies to record 'soft' intelligence' and enable this to be shared when appropriate.

Systems finding

- 6.14. Although Adam's actions were shocking and were not foreseeable based on the information available to practitioners, the decision not to share Milli's disclosure of domestic abuse with all relevant agencies involved in Samantha's care meant that the risk analysis was based on incomplete intelligence and that those agencies could not support safety planning and risk management going forward. SSP should take steps to embed the Collaborative Casework framework across all agencies to support more effective multi-agency working.

Recommendation 1: Learning from this review should be used as a case example during domestic abuse training across the partnership, to support better reflective practice in respect of Suffolk's Collaborative Casework approach to safeguarding.

Recommendation 2: Clear advice should be given to frontline staff in respect of the benefits of multi-agency professionals meetings and information sharing between the team around the family to support information gathering, risk assessment and safety planning.

Recommendation 3: A multi-agency audit should be conducted in respect of domestic abuse cases referrals to determine whether thresholds are being appropriately applied when taking decisions about whether to undertake social work assessments and convene professionals meetings.

Recommendation 4: Agencies should give guidance for children's practitioners on where to record information which related to one parent rather than the child and should not be shared with the other parent for confidentiality reasons.

Recommendation 5: SSP should liaise with MARAC to seek agreement that when cases involving children are presented to MARAC, the conference discussion should include explicit consideration of whether a multi-agency professionals meeting should be concerned in respect of the children, to assess and manage the specific risks to them, having regard to each child's assessed needs. Where a parent's perception of the level of risk to a child is relied on to formulate the professional risk analysis or safety plan, this should be carefully explored and challenged by MARAC. If agreed by MARAC, this should be included in MARAC chair training.

Recognition of Samantha's verbal and non-verbal cues

As a child diagnosed with severe autism with very limited verbal skills, how effectively were practitioners able to engage with her efforts to communicate her daily life? How did diagnostic overshadowing, including behavioural assumptions around puberty or parental explanations, influence the professional interpretation of her verbal and non-verbal cues?

6.15. There is clear evidence that the practitioners working with Samantha worked thoughtfully to support her in communicating her needs as outlined at paragraphs 3.5 - 3.8 and professionals who had supported Samantha repeatedly during different periods of her childhood noted that her communication skills had developed beyond their expectations based on her early presentation. However, because this was still limited to short and concrete sentences, and her ability to communicate abstract concepts such as emotions was in its nascency, practitioners were heavily reliant on contextual information to interpret her efforts to communicate. The interpretation that much of Samantha's unsettled behaviour related to the onset of puberty was reasonable. There were some clear physical signs that this was the case, as Samantha would frequently touch her vagina when her period was due.

6.16. The fact that the school and other agencies were not informed of Milli's disclosures about domestic abuse in December 2020 – January 2021 meant that they were not given the intelligence they needed to properly weigh other possible explanations for Samantha or her parents' behaviours. For example, at one point, Milli told a staff member at the school that she felt Adam would undermine her efforts to set boundaries for Samantha in order to make himself look like the better parent, which exacerbated the difficulties she had in physically controlling Samantha as she outgrew Milli's petite size. Perpetrators of coercive controlling behaviour will often use children as a way to control the victim or manipulate professionals into unwittingly colluding with them.⁸ In the context of the allegations of Adam's coercive and controlling behaviour, Samantha's aggression towards Milli may have been viewed differently – almost as

⁸ [Coercive control guidance for MARACs 0.pdf \(safelives.org.uk\)](#)

a form of 'weaponising' Samantha's behaviour against Milli. Adam's assertions that he was Samantha's primary carer may also have been approached with more scepticism as this was inconsistent with the experiences of Samantha's school and extended family members. This manipulation of professionals gave weight to Adam's threats to Milli that he would be able to stop her seeing Samantha and likely delayed her leaving as Milli had made a number of comments to professionals that indicated that it was not her choice for Samantha to remain with Adam.

- 6.17. On 7 September 2022 during a PSHE lesson, Samantha expressed for the first time that she felt sad and worried. However, Samantha was still learning the words to communicate her feelings and did not always use these consistently. The timing of this communication is tragic as Samantha died that night, and school staff expressed their distress that they may have missed Samantha's efforts to communicate her worries about her home situation. However, to their credit, the staff had carefully considered this at the time, tried to ascertain whether Samantha was accurately reporting her emotional state based on her physical cues (laughing and dancing immediately after communicating this), and intended to monitor this going forward. The teacher had also asked the teaching assistants who oversaw her after school pick-ups to let her know if Milli arrived alone so that she could speak with her, both to discuss this issue and Milli's earlier disclosure that she was moving out of the family home. This was a proportionate response to Samantha's communicated emotions, given the contextual information held by the school.
- 6.18. The impact of the parents' 'bickering' in front of Samantha at home may not have been given appropriate weight as practitioners observed that Samantha appeared oblivious to this, as she was fixated on her favourite cartoons on her tablet and did not seem to react. This contrasts to the descriptions given by many practitioners that Samantha was an empathetic child who reacted to the emotional state of the people who were important to her and it is unclear the extent to which Samantha was processing this toxic environment. Exposure to domestic violence can have a negative impact on any child's development, mental health, and well-being. This is equally true for children with a diagnosis of autism who may display increased behavioural and emotional problems including acting out their distress through aggression, defiance, oppositional behaviour, or self-harm.⁹ Whilst the interactions observed are likely to have been 'lower level' given that professionals were in the room, the covert videos indicated that on at least one occasion when the couple were in private, this had escalated to Adam shouting at and standing over Milli in an intimidating manner and others showed Samantha present. Again, it appears that the practitioners who observed this behaviour were unaware of Milli's previous allegations of domestic abuse.
- 6.19. Some agencies reported that domestic abuse training had not been offered since before the pandemic, and questioned whether this incorporated issues such as misogyny and tips for exploring issues of domestic abuse in a manner that supports survivors to recognise and articulate the abuse they are experiencing. Similarly, they reported that since the Collaborative Casework approach had been launched, this had not been refreshed.

Systems finding

- 6.20. Samantha's communication style was well understood by the practitioners working closely with her, who provided her with an exemplary standard of support, but the gaps previously identified in respect of information sharing limited their ability to analyse her behaviours against her experiences. Knowledge and application of domestic abuse across partner agencies and, how this may impact on children with learning disabilities or neurodivergence, is inconsistent .

⁹ Hoover, D.W. The Effects of Psychological Trauma on Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: a Research Review. *Rev J Autism Dev Disord* 2, 287–299 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40489-015-0052-y>

Recommendation 6: All partner agencies should refresh their training offer in respect of domestic abuse and promote accessible resources, to ensure practitioners are equipped to look for and identify patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour and how this may present in the context of a child's situation and learning needs.

Support for parents

What professional and community support was available for the parents caring for a severely disabled child?

- 6.21. Samantha was referred to the community behavioural support team on a number of occasions for targeted support in developing new skills in her home environment, such as toileting and managing her periods. This practical support was delivered in a sensitive manner that was bespoke for Samantha, but with adjustments for the skills and personalities of each parent. Hillside school also offered good quality support to the family, carrying out a home visit when Samantha joined the school to help the parents understand how to work collaboratively with the school to deliver the consistent boundaries Samantha needed. The school regularly contacted the family by telephone or email, providing information and guidance in respect of Samantha's case, training (including PECS and Makaton) for parents and other offers of support available depending on the family's needs. From a community perspective, parents at the school had a Facebook group as an informal source of support.
- 6.22. Milli engaged well with agencies and appeared confident in seeking support, in particular in relation to her care of Samantha. She was sociable and well supported by friends and workmates and had formed close relationships with some members of the professional network who she felt comfortable approaching for help, for example one practitioner who supported her with her immigration application. Despite a number of occasions when Milli told professionals that she remained living in the family home due to practical barriers such as her financial circumstances or her immigration status, it is unclear whether any practical support was offered to help her move.
- 6.23. Practitioners queried whether enough consideration was given to Adam's mental health or support that he may need. He was known to have lost his job, gained weight, was socially isolated and reclusive, his marriage had broken down, and he was shortly to become the primary carer for a child with complex special needs. Although evidence could not be obtained from Adam's computer or mobile because he had destroyed these after killing Milli, it seems likely from his comments during his trial that he had become involved with toxic masculinity and conspiracy theory groups online, fuelling his distorted worldview. It does not appear that counselling or a mental health referral were discussed with him. Whilst this may relate to his reluctance to discuss personal issues with professionals, this may in part have been due to stereotypes that mothers will take the lead in respect of personal care for their children and contact with the school. Even when Adam was reported to take over as Samantha's primary carer from September 2020, the vast majority of contact with professionals continued to be with Milli, however this did not appear to trigger professional curiosity in respect of his welfare. Whilst this tragedy was not reasonably foreseeable, research¹⁰ shows that 62% of murder-suicide perpetrators in England and Wales had mental health needs but that few had been in recent contact with mental health services before the crime, which was commonly preceded by a relationship breakdown.
- 6.24. Algorithms on social media can drive users towards progressively more extreme content over time, leading them to increasingly radicalised political views, including through the 'manosphere', which are online communities that oppose the empowerment of women. One

¹⁰ Flynn S, Gask L, Appleby L and Shaw J (2016) Homicide-suicide and the role of mental disorder: a national consecutive case series; [Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology](#) 51(6)

phenomenon that has developed as a consequence of this is the incel (involuntarily celibate) movement, an “*online ecosystem [that] breeds and encourages extreme attitudes related to suicide, interpersonal violence and violent misogyny.*”¹¹ The UK government's ‘Prevent’ strategy, an anti-extremism framework, has recognised incels as a category within radicalisation for several years, but the number of referrals to Prevent sharply rose in the year to March 2022, making up 1% of referrals.¹²

- 6.25. While Adam had been married, Milli shared with professionals that they had not shared a bed since Samantha was born. Research¹³ indicates that the incel phenomenon promote three levels of violence, personal violence, interpersonal violence and societal violence, and the first two of these can be seen in Adam’s behaviour. Personal violence includes self-harm and suicidal ideation, but also the concept of ‘Lay Down and Rot’, a phrase claiming that self-development, positive behaviour or corrective actions are pointless, because incels feel their socioeconomic or physiological traits are immutable. Acceptable ‘rotting’ behaviour includes inactivity, browsing incel forums and avoiding ‘offline’ social interaction. Adam’s social isolation and reliance on Milli to do all of the cooking, cleaning, shopping for the household, as well as Samantha’s personal care and earning the household income is consistent with this concept. The incel community also encourages its members to perpetrate interpersonal violence and to take others with them if they are going to attempt suicide.
- 6.26. A 2021 online poll of incels found that 68% of respondents reported depression, 74% experienced anxiety and 40% reported an autism diagnosis.¹⁴ Hopelessness, significantly exacerbated by cognitive distortions such as all-or-nothing thinking, misattributions, lack of empathy and victim stances, provides a justification for subsequent acts of extreme violence.¹⁵ Although cognitive behavioural therapy or compassion-focussed therapy have been identified as possible means of reframing incel’s cognitive distortions, research¹⁶ also indicates that there is a general mistrust of mental health professionals amongst incels. A belief that most mental health professionals are women may impede self-helping behaviour, and incels can view advice from non-incels as unhelpful and insulting. Improved access to mental health resources for young men online and addressing ‘toxic masculinity’ to encourage healthier expression of emotions and self-esteem in boys and strengthen the internal locus of control is essential to counter incel ideology.¹⁷
- 6.27. It is also possible that the fact Milli had disclosed that Adam had abused her impacted the professional response to his needs. The ‘victim/perpetrator paradigm’ explores the narrative that portrays victims and perpetrators as separate, distinct and mutually exclusive.¹⁸ In the context of this review, this considers whether the perception of an individual as being a perpetrator, or posing a risk to others, impacts on the manner in which the professionals involved in supporting them respond to safeguarding concerns, because they struggle to recognise that a perpetrator may also have needs themselves. Further, in meeting these needs, it may be possible to mitigate some of the risk that the individual poses to others.

¹¹ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-08/ran_cn_incel_phenomenon_20210803_en.pdf

¹² [Large rise in men referred to Prevent over women-hating incel ideology | UK security and counter-terrorism | The Guardian](#)

¹³ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-08/ran_cn_incel_phenomenon_20210803_en.pdf

¹⁴ [Online Poll Results Provide New Insights into Incel Community | ADL](#)

¹⁵ Williams, DJ, Arntfield, M (2020) Extreme sex-negativity: an examination of helplessness, hopelessness, and misattribution of blame among “incel” multiple homicide offenders. *Journal of Positive Sexuality*, 6: 33–42.10.51681/1.613

¹⁶ Speckhard, A, Ellenberg, M, Morton, J, et al. (2021) Involuntary celibates’ experiences of and grievance over sexual exclusion and the potential threat of violence among those active in an online incel forum. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 14: 89–121.

¹⁷ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-08/ran_cn_incel_phenomenon_20210803_en.pdf

¹⁸ Borer TA (2003) A Taxonomy of Victims and Perpetrators: Human Rights and Reconciliation in South Africa. *Human Rights Quarterly* 25(4): 1088–1116.

- 6.28. During the learning events, the authors explored whether options were available in Suffolk for mediation for couples in circumstance when allegations of domestic abuse had been made. Attendees were concerned that this could provide an opportunity for an abuser to continue manipulating or controlling their victim. It is important that the support offered to a family responds to the dynamic situation and in this case, Milli had told the IDVA on 3 March 2021 that she and Adam had agreed to separate once her citizenship came through and she could afford a flat, but with no clear timescale for this. In that context, support to improve the communication style between the parents may have been an opportunity to lower the risk level for Milli and Samantha and reduce the toxicity in the household while this situation was resolved and in the longer term as co-parents. Further, the time-limited nature of the IDVA support does not necessarily provide the flexibility that may be needed to embed risk interventions in a way that works for the victim and their children. A victim of abuse may initially be unwilling to support a prosecution or more robust intervention as they believe the perpetrator or their situation will change imminently, but may be willing to reconsider later if those improvements do not materialise.
- 6.29. It does not appear that a parent carer assessment¹⁹ was carried out by CYPS in respect of either Milli or Adam's care of Samantha and it is possible that this may have helped to focus the social worker in respect of identifying the parents' broader support needs, as opposed to Samantha's needs. Leaders commented that because the funding had been removed as a consequence of austerity measures, many parents saw no point in engaging in the assessment process. This misses the purpose of parent carer support, which is to ensure that parents do not become so overwhelmed by their caring responsibilities that they become unable to care for their disabled child safely. This may include supporting parents to access support through partner agencies such as Community Mental Health.
- 6.30. Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership completed a CSPR in March 2022 in respect of another young person, K, which also considered the young person's EHCP. This made a recommendation:
- "SSP to collaborate with SEND leads in Suffolk to ensure EHCPs are holistic and include an assessment of risk of vulnerabilities and the potential impact these may have on their care needs and wellbeing. Closer working between SEND and the SSP would support integration of these two key areas of work. Any work should include co-production with children and young people with additional needs and their parents."*
- 6.31. This recommendation is equally relevant to Samantha's case, as a clear analysis of her parents' situation, home environment and her own vulnerabilities within her EHCP may have supported better risk analysis.

Systems finding

- 6.32. Although the direct support provided to Samantha was excellent and Milli appears confident and engaged with the professional network, Adam was not offered support in respect of his mental health, which appeared to be deteriorating, nor was mediation considered to improve communication between Samantha's parents. While Adam's role as a perpetrator of domestic abuse may have been perceived as a barrier to these supports, agencies were aware that the parents intended him to continue to be Samantha's primary carer, so targeted support was needed to reduce the risk he might pose to her. A strategic approach across Suffolk to tackling extremist misogyny and toxic masculinity may have supported practitioners to recognise risk factors in Adam's behaviour.

¹⁹Pursuant to section 17ZD of the Children Act 1989

Recommendation 7: *The Integrated Care Board should review what mental health, mediation and counselling services are available across the wider partnership to perpetrators of domestic abuse and ensure that these are publicised for partner agencies.*

Recommendation 8: *CYPS should review how it complies with its duties to parent carers pursuant to s17ZD of the Children Act 1989. Thereafter, CYPS should provide assurance to SSP of how they intend to meet this legal duty going forward to provide a holistic view of parental ability to safely meet their children's needs whilst also maintaining their own wellbeing.*

Recommendation 9: *Partner agencies should use supervision and training to challenge stereotypes in respect of parenting roles for men and women and undertake audits to establish whether there are systemic differences in the nature of support offered to male and female primary carers, in accordance with duties under the Equalities Act 2010.*

Recommendation 10: *SSP together with Suffolk's Community Safety Partnership and Prevent panel should develop a strategic approach to tackling extremist misogyny and toxic masculinity, including preventative education online and in schools, training for frontline practitioners and targeted therapeutic intervention.*

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

How did the restrictions arising from the Covid-19 pandemic impact on family stressors, the professional oversight of Samantha's welfare, and support available to her mother as a person who had alleged abuse?

- 6.33. When England first went into lockdown in March 2020, Samantha and her parents self-isolated as Samantha's health conditions meant that she was at high risk if she contracted Covid-19. Samantha returned to school in May 2020 and, as a specialist school for children with disabilities the school remained open throughout the subsequent lockdowns. However, to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 outbreaks, the school was segregated into age groups with separate playgrounds and neither children nor staff from the different areas had physical contact with each other. This disrupted some of the normal oversight that senior leaders had in respect of safeguarding issues, in particular, informal discussions with staff about lower-level concerns.
- 6.34. Other frontline services for Samantha such as community behavioural support, continued to provide face-to-face appointments during lockdown. The CAMHS service moved from being a mix of home and school-based appointments to services being predominantly delivered at school to reduce the risk of infection, but this may have been experienced by parents as a reduction in practical support. Leaders noted that EHCP reviews were often delayed and some of the usual informal interactions between CYPS and other services such as social workers' regular visits to children at school, home and during appointments offered by other services were disrupted by the lockdown rules. These have since been reintroduced and professional relationships are strengthening again. However, many social workers now regularly work from home rather than come into the office, which again, impacts on informal opportunities for management oversight. It is vital that agencies mitigate the impact of these changes in working practices by strengthening supervision processes. As a consequence of these issues, Suffolk's escalation policy has just been relaunched, to provide a pathway to secure closer partnership working on cases which have become 'stuck'.
- 6.35. Milli's disclosure on 15 December 2020 that Adam had been abusing her was made after Suffolk was placed into Tier 4 lockdown and two weeks before England entered the third national lockdown. As a consequence, guidance for IDVAs that where possible, contact by telephone should be avoided in favour of face-to-face meetings²⁰ could not be followed, and the IDVA

²⁰ [Coercive control guidance for MARACs 0.pdf \(safelives.org.uk\)](#)

communicated with Milli by WhatsApp. Given that Milli had expressed her concern that Adam was monitoring her devices, this could have placed her at risk. The CYPS social worker showed good practice by meeting Milli for a walk so that they could safely discuss her disclosure without placing her at risk from Adam and this information was shared with the IDVA.

6.36. Practitioners reflected that so much had been learned about the impact of the lockdowns on vulnerable families, and the responsibility agencies had to work collaboratively to scaffold these very isolated families. They discussed the needs for a structured approach to proactively reach out to all of those in need of support, rather than rely on people who may have high levels of medical or mental health needs to approach services. In the case of this family, both Samantha and her parents experienced significant turmoil and challenges during the lockdown period despite the existing services continuing to support Samantha. However, it is unclear whether the disruption caused by the pandemic meant that referrals were not considered for additional services which may have been beneficial, such as the mental health support for Adam discussed above, on the basis that it was believed that the impact of the pandemic on those services had been greater.

Systems finding

6.37. Although Samantha's school and other support services continued to support her face-to-face, efforts to minimise cross-contamination may have reduced opportunities for staff to seek informal supervision or guidance from senior managers and may have been experienced by the parents as a reduction in the support they received to care for Samantha, in the context of a number of additional stressors on the family.

Recommendation 11: *Partner agencies should continue to ensure that during periods of wide-scale service disruption, systems are in place to proactively reach out to isolated families, increasing services where necessary to address any increased stressors.*

Exploring cultural issues

How were cultural issues explored in respect of:

- *Milli's experience as an Indian immigrant to Britain,*
- *Samantha's experience of having parents from different cultural backgrounds, and*
- *Adam's belief systems.*

6.38. There are delightful photographs of Samantha in traditional saris and staff at the school noted that Milli enjoyed cooking Indian food for her. However, Milli said that she had not been able to take Samantha to visit her parents in India because she did not have British citizenship. It is unclear why she thought that this would prevent her from going on holiday when she had indefinite leave to remain, which meant she could come and go without restriction. However, it may be that Milli did not feel able to leave Samantha behind when she provided the majority of her care, as Adam had refused to get a passport for Samantha.

6.39. Practitioners commented that they had rarely discussed Milli's Indian culture with her, beyond light conversations about food or weddings. India is a hugely diverse country and attitudes to women's rights, marriage and domestic abuse vary greatly across different regions, religions, and communities. Agencies were unable to clarify what region of India Milli was from, her family's primary language or religion. This was particularly important in the context of her experience of domestic abuse. It is very clear that Milli's family were strongly of the view that the couple should separate, and they provided practical, financial and emotional support to her to leave Adam. However, practitioners were not aware of her family's position and opening up a conversation about her cultural experiences may have been an opportunity to identify that her family members could have played a key role in her safety plan. It may also have helped to

explore the misinformation Adam was using to control Milli in respect of his ability to influence Home Office decisions about her immigration status.

- 6.40. It is important that practitioners have the confidence to respectfully discuss the cultural experiences of people whose background differs from their own, which can be a particular challenge in an area such as Suffolk which is one of the less ethnically diverse areas of the UK.²¹ Participants in the learning events explained that while it could be easy to discuss the positive aspects of someone's culture, it could be difficult to have conversations about more sensitive issues. For example, the Indian Penal Code²² explicitly excludes sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife from the definition of rape. This may have contextualised Milli's decision not to contact the police when Adam physically assaulted her early in their relationship, as well as her decision in December 2020 not to support a criminal prosecution when she disclosed this and that he had raped her. Further, practitioners should be aware that children who identify as having a mixed or multiple ethnic identity are significantly more likely to experience abuse before the age of 16 years than children whose parents are of the same ethnicity (32% compared to 21% White or 11% Asian).²³ The Domestic Abuse Service has now employed a minority specialist IDVA, who is experienced in engaging with people who are BAME, LGBTQ+ or have a learning disability, although as one specialist covers the whole Suffolk area, they are unable to be allocated to all cases.
- 6.41. One of the covert videos found on Milli's mobile by police showed Adam becoming aggressive and making statements to Milli that she was his 'property' because she had signed a marriage 'contract'. Although Milli's response to Adam was dismissive, there is no indication that Milli disclosed this information either to professionals or to any of her friends or co-workers. Given the varied cultural views in respect of women's rights across India, it may be that even though she clearly disagreed with this, she found it less shocking for someone to express these views than it may have been to someone raised in the UK. An informed and thoughtful discussion about possible cultural differences may have better supported Milli to recognise Adam's abnormal and controlling mindset.
- 6.42. The only occasion when Adam's views on 'ownership' of Samantha were raised with agencies was when he wrote to the school on 21 September 2021, stating that he refused consent to Samantha receiving a Covid-19 vaccine or lateral flow testing as the "father/owner" of Samantha. Although this statement is appalling, this was during a period when vaccine scepticism was a highly politicised issue and a number of blogs gave parents dubious advice about the wording needed to prevent their child being vaccinated, when simply withholding consent would suffice in law. Milli discussed this with the school a few weeks later in the context of Samantha's influenza vaccine but again, this was in the context of vaccine scepticism. It is only in hindsight, after Adam confessed his crime to the police, setting out his belief system that the killing had been lawful because Samantha and Milli were his 'property' that this early warning sign leaps out as a huge red flag. Again, had the school been aware of the allegations of domestic abuse, greater weight may possibly have been given to this issue.

Systems finding

- 6.43. Practitioners lacked awareness or confidence in respect of discussing potentially sensitive cultural issues, which hindered a more nuanced analysis of the family situation and Samantha's experiences.

Recommendation 12: Partner agencies should ensure that frontline practitioners can access advice in respect of the cultural experiences of people from different countries or religions, to

²¹ [2021 Census ethnicity summary \(suffolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/2021-census-ethnicity-summary) 87.3% of Suffolk's population is White British compared to 74.4% for the rest of England and Wales and 2.3% of Suffolk's population is Asian, compared to 9.3% nationally.

²² Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code, exception 2

²³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/childabuseextentandnatureenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>

develop their confidence in having respectful conversations about sensitive issues. This may involve commissioning training or proactive engagement with relevant organisations.

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7. Glossary

CIN	Child in Need
CSPR	Child Safeguarding Practice Review
CYPS	Children's Young People Services within Suffolk County Council
DASH	Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment risk assessment
EHCP	Education Health and Care Plan
GP	General Practitioner
ICB	Integrated Care Board
IDVA	Independent Domestic Violence Advocate
LDCAMHS	Learning Disabilities Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services
MARAC	Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub – central point through which all safeguarding referrals are made
NSFT	Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust
SCC	Suffolk County Council
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SLT	Speech and Language Therapy
SSP	Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership