

Case Summary Oliver

Oliver was born in September 2019. He had two older siblings one aged sixteen months and one almost three years of age. Oliver's mother had had a challenging childhood and had a period of time on the child protection register. When she was 16, she commenced a relationship with the father of her three children.

Oliver's mother came to the attention of Children's Services again as an adult when a referral was received from midwifery in June 2016. She was pregnant with her first child. A social work assessment was undertaken, and this resulted in a period of child in need planning. Worries concerning neglect, possible domestic violence and the father's belief that physical chastisement of a child was acceptable were identified as part of the assessment.

In June 2018, a further referral from midwifery was received. The mother was 36 weeks pregnant with her second child. Although she had not declined ante-natal care, she had not engaged and was avoidant of contact attempts made by the midwife. There were worries within the referral regarding Oliver's father who was queried to be controlling. A second social work assessment was undertaken with a further period of child in need planning agreed.

After the birth of the second child, it was established that he had not been registered, the family had limited financial resources and the home conditions were neglectful. Support was available from the paternal grandparents.

The case was closed to social care in March 2019 as the home conditions had improved, the couple had engaged and had agreed to adhere to a letter of expectations. At the closure of the CiN plan it was known that mother was pregnant with her third child, Oliver.

Several domestic abuse incidents and altercations between the parents occurred at the end of 2018 and in 2019. Police noted that the children had not appeared alarmed by the incidents and that the parents appeared not to be worried that the children were witnessing them. An incident on the 15th of September resulted in a single agency S47 investigation and a social work assessment being completed. The family were seen by a social worker and health visitor on the 15th of October 2019 as part of the social work assessment. A MARAC was held on the 3rd of October 2019. Following this visit the decision for an initial child protection conference was made.

On the morning of 22nd October 2019 Children's Services were informed by Police that Oliver's father had telephoned for an ambulance that day at 10.15 am having discovered that he wasn't breathing. The mother had been breast feeding the baby on the sofa and had fallen asleep. The ambulance attended but the baby was not able to be resuscitated and was pronounced dead. Oliver's mother was arrested due to the concern that she may have

been under the influence of cannabis from the night before. The father admitted to cannabis use which was causing him some withdrawal symptoms.

The health visitor had seen Oliver the week before he died at home in order to complete his six-week check. He was noted to be developing as expected. There were concerns that he was sleeping in a Moses basket between the two older children's beds and not in the bedroom with the mother. Oliver's father had not been seen on any visit by the midwife or the health visitor; he was always asleep upstairs.

Oliver's mother presented as anxious, withdrawn, defensive when questioned or asked to explain where father was at the visits. Concerns were raised about the father's violent and controlling behaviour and that he didn't support in the care of the children. Professionals visiting the home for visits said the children could often be seen at the front door trying to open it with no adults visibly present.

The home conditions at the time of Oliver's death have been described as very poor and had the children not been removed due to Oliver's death, police have said that they would have been sufficiently concerned to take out a Police Protection Order and take the children to a place of safety.

Cause of death was unascertained.

Oliver was just over a month old at the time of his death.

Summary of Learning

- Practitioners in all agencies should know and understand what is meant by curiosity and challenge to ensure they remain child focused in their practice and that they understand the lived experiences of the children. Managers should understand their role in the development of curiosity and challenge through effective supervision and encouragement of reflective practice.
- To ensure that Health, CYP and Police are familiar with the findings and recommendations of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Report into SUDI and that they undertake to familiarise their staff with the findings.
- To develop the early recognition and identification of neglect in Health and Early Help services.
- To be reassured that nurseries and Early Years providers are receiving training that develops an understanding of neglect, and neglect factors within the context of poverty and deprivation.
- To ensure that the history of a family is always captured and used to inform cases.
- To ensure that the role of fathers is considered by all professionals when assessing the risks to children, particularly in relation to babies and new fathers. Questions should be asked about the role of the father when assessing the risks to the children and should include how supportive he is, his family history, behaviours in the home.