



# Case Review executive summary

February 2006

## Introduction

This is a summary of a serious case review recently conducted by ACPC. It concerns the circumstances surrounding a four-week old infant who sustained life-threatening injuries associated with child maltreatment.

There were additionally concerns expressed about how effectively local agencies had worked together in providing services to the child and family. The purpose of the review is therefore to identify lessons that might be learned in generating better-informed practice in keeping children safe.

## Familiar themes

A number of familiar themes were identified during the course of the review which may influence how effectively professionals take action in safeguarding children's welfare:

- The existence of pre-disposing risk factors surrounding substance misuse, domestic violence and maltreatment of other children in a family.
- Managing an "at risk" pregnancy.
- Vulnerability of young, fractious infants.
- The association of minor bruising with subsequent diagnosis of more serious injuries.
- Challenges for doctors associated with "differential diagnosis" in young infants.
- Implications of missed health appointments upon assessments in child welfare.
- Applying "post-Laming" standards to the discharge of vulnerable children from hospital.
- Identification and tracking of individuals (particularly males) who pose a risk to children.

## Synopsis

The child's parents were living in the south of England when this, mother's first pregnancy, was confirmed. She was also in touch with mental health services because of depressive symptoms associated with emotional effects of a previous violent relationship.

It was not clear to what extent mother's mental health history was appreciated by ante-natal services upon the couple's return to Staffordshire. In every other respect the pregnancy was seen as unremarkable. A number of mental health appointments however were not kept.

The child was born by normal delivery at 37 weeks. He was however presented at hospital at four weeks old because of inconsolable crying and was also noted to have faint bruising to his face and lower leg. Mother attributed this to friction with dad's belt buckle. He was otherwise found to be well and was discharged later the same day to the care of his parents, for health visitor follow-up.

Continued overleaf

### Synopsis continued

The health visitor however referred the matter promptly to social services whereupon it transpired that father had previous convictions for serious assaults on another child. A court order was obtained and the child was placed in foster care.

Subsequent examination revealed 3 rib fractures among other boney injuries. The child remains with foster carers, now subject of a care order.

### Recommendations by ACPC

Staff need to acknowledge the relevance of pre-disposing risk factors in being alert to responding to potential maltreatment.

Revisions to procedures must take account of detailed aspects of information-sharing and assessment.

To promote the merits of making formal enquiries to the child protection register, at least in the shorter term.

To find more effective ways of disseminating and learning lessons from reviews across agencies.

The emerging Safeguarding Children Board must ensure that all contributing agencies have effective safeguarding arrangements in place, including access to appropriate training.

*Please pass this bulletin  
on to other professional  
colleagues in your  
workplace*

### Lessons Learned

- The vulnerability of infants requires robust information-sharing (ante-natally and post-natally) upon the advent of anything other than routine concerns.
- ACPC has cause to reiterate that: **Episodes of bruising in children under six months should generate an assessment on an inter-agency basis and, in the absence of a satisfactory explanation, should be regarded as suspicious.**
- Enquiries to the child protection register can only be authoritatively made via social services. Professionals making enquiries should have the option of discussing their concerns and of considering making a formal referral in taking action to safeguard a child.  
  
Part 9 of the inter-agency child protection procedures applies.
- Learning lessons from reviews is itself a challenging task that ACPC (and its successor Local Safeguarding Children Board) will need to review in ensuring maximum impact upon operational practice.
- Taking account of historical concerns has to remain a prominent aspect of assessment in child welfare in keeping children safe.
- Information-gathering is a key aspect of information sharing and assessment. Gathering information on father figures is as important as that relating to any other family members.

*If you have any queries about this bulletin  
Phone: Jacquie Clifford 01785 277042  
E-mail: jacquie.clifford@staffordshire.gov.uk*