

Safeguarding system needs to tackle “stubborn challenges”

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has published its Annual Report for 2020. The independent expert panel reviews serious child safeguarding cases – when a child dies or suffers serious harm, and abuse or neglect is known or suspected. New figures show the panel received 482 serious incident notifications which occurred in 2020, with 206 of these incidents involving children who tragically died.

In this exceptional year, local safeguarding partners have shown resilience, creativity and adaptability to maintain support for vulnerable children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the analysis shows that all agencies need to address the stubborn challenges, such as weak information sharing and risk assessment, that have too often, over decades, persistently beset child protection practice.

Examples include initial risk assessments not being updated in response to new information about parental mental health concerns and alcohol and substance misuse, or information of previous convictions for sexual offences not being shared due to a lack of understanding about GDPR and data protection regulations.

Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Chair, Annie Hudson said:

During 2020 professionals working to safeguard vulnerable children showed extraordinary ability and resourcefulness in the way that they adapted and innovated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The national Panel focusses on the most serious cases of child abuse and neglect; through this specific lens, we have been able to highlight the urgent need for everyone involved in safeguarding children to address some of the stubborn challenges which have bedevilled much child protection practice.

Issues related to effective information sharing, risk assessment and decision making have assumed even greater significance over the past year. It is vital therefore that government departments work together, and with the Panel and local safeguarding partners, to tackle these challenges in what is always very challenging and difficult but potentially lifesaving work.

The report identifies 6 cross-cutting practice themes for safeguarding partners to make a difference in reducing serious harm and preventing child deaths in the context of abuse or neglect. These themes are supported by a bank of case studies that encapsulate key learning from case reviews.

- Understanding what the child’s daily life is like

- Working with families where their engagement is reluctant and sporadic
- Critical thinking and challenge
- Responding to changing risk and need
- Sharing information in a timely and appropriate way
- Organisational leadership and culture for good outcomes

In order to help tackle these issues, the panel is prioritising risk assessment and decision making in its 2021 work programme. It is also working with the independent review of children's social care to ensure any recommendations take account of the patterns and trends from serious incidents to better protect all vulnerable children. Also published today is a report into implementing the multi-agency safeguarding reforms by Sir Alan Wood. The panel will have regard to this report and work to implement any recommendations to improve the safeguarding system.

Notes to editors

The [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#) is an independent body that was set up in July 2018 to identify, commission and oversee reviews of serious child safeguarding cases. It brings together experts from social care, policing and health to provide a multi-agency view on cases which they believe raise issues that are complex, or of national importance.

The Panel received notification of 482 incidents occurring between 1 January and 31 December 2020, relating to 514 children. Of those 482 notifications, 206 were in relation to child deaths and 267 related to serious harm. Nine notifications were for other issues, such as where the young person was a perpetrator of harm.

Also published today are supplementary reports, which underpin the data and analysis highlighted in the [Panel's Annual Report 2020](#). These include:

Panel Chair Annie Hudson is available for interview on behalf of the Panel. Contact Amina Makele on 07889133791.