

Press release:

Statement by Annie Hudson, Chair of Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel

NEW EXPERT CHILD PROTECTION UNITS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

A report investigating the deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson is calling for every local area to have an expert child protection unit.

The national child safeguarding practice review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, 6, and Star Hobson, 16-months, has recommended that experts in police, health and social work should form dedicated multi-agency teams to investigate allegations of serious harm to children.

The independent review, carried out by the national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, looked at the lives of the two children who were murdered by their parents' partners. It identified that failings in how agencies worked together meant concerns raised by wider family members about physical abuse were not properly investigated by police and social workers.

The report reveals that what happened to Arthur and Star are not isolated incidents and their deaths reflect wider problems in child safeguarding practice, including poor information sharing between professionals and weak decision-making. Therefore, the panel is calling for Government to strengthen the child protection system at a national and local level so there is a more effective joined-up response.

Panel Chair, Annie Hudson said:

“Arthur and Star suffered horrific and ultimately fatal abuse. But sadly, whilst their individual stories are unique, many hundreds of children are seriously harmed each year.

“At the moment, each professional who comes into contact with a child holds one piece of the jigsaw of what is happening in a child’s life. Our proposed reforms would bring together experts from social work, police and health into one team so that they can have a better picture of what is happening to a child, listening carefully to relatives’ concerns and taking necessary actions to protect children.

“Professionals working to protect children have to deal with the most complex challenges and some perpetrators of abuse will evade even the most robust safeguards. However, in too many instances, there is inadequate join-up in how agencies respond to high-risk situations where children are being abused.”

The Panel is making eight national recommendations and a number of local recommendations for safeguarding partners in Solihull and Bradford.

The national recommendations include:

- Implementing new expert-led, multi-agency child protection units to undertake investigation, planning and oversight of children at risk.

- Establishing national multi-agency practice standards for child protection. This would provide a standard of quality and consistency in practice for working with children at risk and their families across the country.
- A sharper performance focus and better co-ordination of child protection policy in central Government. This involves the establishment of a national Child Protection Board, bringing together all relevant central Government departments, local government, the police, education and health representatives.

The local recommendations for Safeguarding Partners in Solihull, where Arthur lived, include:

- Ensuring that all assessments undertaken by agencies draw on information and analysis from all relevant professionals, wider family members or other significant adults who try and speak on behalf of the child.
- Reviewing the partnership Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub arrangements to ensure a more “Think Family” approach.
- Reviewing and commissioning strategies to ensure practitioners know how to respond to incidents of domestic abuse and understand the risks to children of prisoners.

The local recommendations for Safeguarding Partners in Bradford, where Star lived, include:

- Agreeing clear expectations regarding risk assessment and decision making and ensuring these are understood by all agencies.
- Reviewing, developing and commissioning a comprehensive early help offer which can be accessed before, during and after the completion of any child and family assessment by children’s social care.
- Reviewing and commissioning domestic abuse services to guide the response of practitioners and ensure there is a robust understanding of what the domestic abuse support offer is in Bradford.

Note - The independent national 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, health, education and the third sector to provide a multi-agency view on cases which they believe raise issues that are complex, or of national importance.