

# Essex Safeguarding Children Board

## Child Safeguarding Practice Review Briefing

### Child S

What is a Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR)?  
[For further information go to our website](#)

#### **Background**

Child S was under 3 months old when they died, the child was subject to a child protection plan at the time of their death. The baby was cared for by Mother and her partner.

A postmortem examination established that Child S had several injuries consistent with being 'non-accidental'; including:

- Skull fractures consistent with blunt force
- Bleeding around the brain
- Rib fractures
- Fractures to both wrists

Throughout mother's pregnancy and until the baby's death there were assumptions made that mother's partner was the father even though mother had disclosed at initial appointments, he was not the biological father.

Mother and her partner were both found guilty and are currently serving custodial sentences.

#### **Key themes and learning points**

- This case was during the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and Lockdown; There were rapid changes in safeguarding practice, a sudden loss of usual multi-agency communication pathways and different approaches to the delivery of services across the network. This mitigated against a coherent planned multi-agency approach.
- The safeguarding system pays insufficient attention to the role of fathers/male carers and in this case the male carer was relied upon to provide support and safety without a full understanding of his own support needs or parenting capacity.
- In order to work effectively with culturally diverse families, practitioners need the knowledge, skills and confidence to work with the family to ask the right questions and move beyond stereotypes and assumptions.
- Whilst risks were recognised, a fuller understanding could have been achieved through utilisation of expertise across the whole network. This would have helped the management of risk through flexible plans specifically focused on achieving change.
- Safeguarding children procedures need to be understood and used as "live" documents that drive safe effective multi-agency practice.
- Being open to uncertainty is uncomfortable; to maintain positions of 'safe uncertainty' practitioners need structured space to reflect individually and collectively on the evolving nature of dangers to children, including differing perspectives within the multi-agency network and the emotional impact of the work.

This document has been produced by Essex Safeguarding Children Board and summarises the report written by the independent lead reviewer Jane Wonnacott. It reflects the information available and considered relevant at the time of reporting.

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#### Multi-agency Recommendations and Responses to Recommendations

##### **Recommendation One**

Safeguarding partners should work together to evaluate the impact of Covid-19 on national and local safeguarding practice and develop an action plan for responding to the evolving context. This evaluation and plan should:

- Pay attention to the emotional impact of the pandemic on staff and families and its impact on current practice
- Establish what has worked well and should be retained
- Agree where changes have had a negative effect on safeguarding practice and need to be amended.

##### **Response:**

Safeguarding partners are committed to ensuring that the learning from Covid-19 strengthens future safeguarding practice, maintains a focus on children's lived experiences, and supports a resilient and responsive workforce.

Virtual meetings, an essential part of practice during Covid-19 are now only used in exceptional circumstances with children and families. Where virtual meetings are used support for the child and family is in place.

##### **Recommendation Two**

Essex Safeguarding Children Board should ask Partner agencies to set clear expectations about the involvement of fathers/male carers in their work with children and provide evidence of positive engagement with men in the system.

##### **Response:**

In response to this recommendation, the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) has developed a dedicated practice tool: **Engaging with Father Figures**

This resource supports practitioners to actively consider, identify, and engage fathers and male carers in assessments and interventions, recognising their significant impact on children's lives and outcomes.

The tool promotes reflective practice and challenges professionals to move beyond traditional patterns of engagement, ensuring that fathers and male carers are appropriately included in safeguarding processes, information-sharing, and decision-making. It is supported by a wider suite of resources designed to strengthen practice and ensure that the voices of fathers and male carers are clearly heard and meaningfully considered.

The publication of the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report 'The Myth of Invisible Men' in September 2021 prompted services to review and strengthen their practice in relation to fathers and male carers. It encouraged practitioners to consider the roles, strengths and potential risks associated with all significant caregivers, resulting in increased professional curiosity, improved information gathering, and more effective safeguarding assessments.

##### **Recommendation Three**

Partner agencies should demonstrate a commitment to culturally competent practice through providing evidence of the following:

- Clarity about the meaning of cultural competence within their agency.
- The dissemination of information as to why cultural competence is integral to safeguarding practice
- Staff support and practice development
- Evaluation of the impact of staff development activities.

##### **Response:**

In response to this recommendation, there has been a significant drive and cultural shift across the partnership in recent years. For example, Essex Children's Social Care has adopted an Anti-Racist Practice framework and appointed a dedicated Anti-Racist Service Manager. This role has led to the development of policies and protocols aimed at strengthening learning, enhancing workforce development, and embedding sustainable cultural change.

This focus is further reinforced regionally through the Eastern Region Sector Led Improvement Team, which provides a programme of regular webinars, learning opportunities, and development sessions to support practitioners in embedding culturally competent practice. Local Authorities across the Eastern Region have signed up to the anti-racist pledge.

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To further support practitioners, the Essex Safeguarding Children Board has developed a **Race, Ethnicity, Culture and Religion Practice Tool**, alongside a range of complementary resources, including podcasts, curated reading lists, and dedicated sections within the SET Procedures, all of which aim to embed culturally informed safeguarding practice. The theme for the Stay Safe conferences in 2026, was inclusion and diversity, offering colleagues a valuable opportunity to connect, share experiences, and reflect on current practice and how it might be strengthened going forward. Agenda items included a thought-provoking session about anti-racist practice, a case study provided by Essex Police which included neurodiversity and racism. Additional inputs focused on supporting neurodiverse young people and championing the needs of the LGBTQI+ and Gypsy Roma, Traveller communities.

#### **Recommendation Four**

All agencies involved in safeguarding children should re-establish the importance of multi-agency assessment and plans and ensure that the voice of all practitioners who are involved with the family is heard when there are concerns about the safety of a child.

#### **Response:**

Safeguarding partners are committed to ensuring that assessments and plans are truly multi-agency, reflect the perspectives of all practitioners, and take a holistic Whole Family approach that recognises the complex interplay of needs within families to improve outcomes for children.

#### **Recommendation Five**

Practitioners should be equipped with an understanding of the impact of multiple births on a family and include this as a factor when assessing risk and establishing the nature of family support needed.

#### **Response:**

Safeguarding partners are committed to ensuring that practitioners recognise the unique challenges associated with multiple births and respond with proportionate, coordinated, and whole-family support, particularly where additional vulnerabilities such as parental mental health difficulties and alcohol misuse are present.

#### **Recommendation Six**

Partner agencies should review the role of substance misuse services and adult mental health services within the child protection assessment and planning processes. These services should be commissioned and designed to ensure that they can provide appropriate expertise and intervention.

#### **Response:**

Social Care and substance misuse agencies have been working together to improve relationships and joint working. Where adult mental health or substance misuse are working with adults who are caring for children they are invited to participate in safeguarding children meetings, with the parent's consent.

#### **Recommendation Seven**

Children's Social Care should review the use of written agreements within safety plans and ensure that the instruction not to use written agreements is understood and implemented consistently throughout Essex.

#### **Response:**

Children's Social Care guidance makes it clear that written agreements should not be used, managers within children's social care will monitor this. Other agencies need to ensure that they are not using written agreements either and to challenge an agency if it is suggested for a family.

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#### Multi-agency Recommendations and Responses to Recommendations

##### **Recommendation Eight**

The Safeguarding Board should work with partner agencies to establish a common understanding of what prevents practitioners using established procedures in their day-to-day work. This should inform a strategy to be implemented by individual agencies aimed at improving partnership working, consistent use of procedures across agencies and an expectation that where procedures are not followed the rationale is clearly communicated across the network.

##### **Response:**

In April 2026 updated Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures were launched. The new procedures are accessible online procedures that are easy to navigate. Multi-agency briefings were held at the time of the launch to support practitioners to navigate the new procedures, and communication was widely cascaded electronically and through learning and development opportunities. As the procedures are now web-enabled it has made it easier to move between sections of the procedures and to add links to supplementary guidance.

The Effective Support for Children and Families guidance was updated in October 2024; there were significant changes to how the indicators of need were presented and there was extensive consultation across the partnership during this process.

Feedback on the new SET Procedures and Essex Effective Support guidance has been positive. All agencies in Essex are committed to promoting the use of local procedures and identifying when there are barriers to this.

##### **Recommendation Nine**

All agencies should promote a positive approach to the use of escalation procedures so that they are used to support creative conversations that improve practice. Use of escalation should be regularly reviewed by the Safeguarding Board.

##### **Response:**

In response to this recommendation, the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) has reinforced and amplified the messages set out within the SET Procedures in relation to professional escalation.

There is a clear expectation across the partnership that all agencies promote a positive and constructive approach to the use of escalation procedures. Escalation is positioned not as a challenge to professional relationships, but as a supportive mechanism to enable respectful, solution-focused, and professionally curious conversations that strengthen decision-making and improve safeguarding practice.

The emphasis is on creating a culture where practitioners feel confident and supported to escalate concerns where necessary, recognising this as an essential component of effective multi-agency working and a safeguard against drift, delay, or uncertainty in response to risk.

##### **Recommendation Ten**

The Safeguarding Board should work with partner agencies to understand and remove any actual or perceived barriers to multi-agency reflective discussions and ask partner agencies to develop a system of facilitated multi professional reflective discussions where complex cases can be explored together.

##### **Response:**

Work is underway to develop guidance to support practitioners to have reflective discussions when appropriate.

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##### **Recommendation Eleven**

Every agency involved in safeguarding children should evaluate the effectiveness of their arrangements for staff supervision in order to ensure that this moves beyond a focus on task and process and provides the emotional support and challenge that is needed to support critical reflection and assessment of risk.

##### **Response:**

Individual agencies will be asked to evidence effective safeguarding supervision as part of their responses to these recommendations.

#### Changes to practice following this review

- Work has started on building relationships with substance misuse agencies and developing a protocol
- Non-accidental Injury e learning package developed
- ESCB runs a virtual non-accidental injuries learning session every 6 months, delegates are invited to take the training package back into their own organisation and deliver it to colleagues.
- Promoting Whole Family Approach practice principles across the workforce.

#### Links to resources on the ESCB Website

- SET Child Protection Procedures
- ESCB - Non-accidental injuries
- ESCB-Working with male carers
- ESCB – Race, Ethnicity, Culture and Religion practice tool
- Whole Family Approach

#### Further Reading and Resources

- Working Together 2026
- NSPCC - Children living with parental substance misuse
- Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children | Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel
- Vulnerable babies | Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel