



Bristol Safeguarding  
Children Board

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### **Serious Case Review report published by Safeguarding Board in the case of Becky Watts**

Bristol Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) have today (15 March) published a review commissioned following the tragic murder of Becky Watts by her step-brother who, along with his then-partner, were convicted of murder and manslaughter respectively and sentenced in November 2015.

The report considers the involvement of professionals who worked with Becky and her immediate family in the three and a half years prior to her death, from 2011 to 2015. It does not consider the circumstances in which Becky died or contributory factors related to her step-brother and his then-partner.

This report found no evidence that the murder could have been predicted or prevented by any professional working with Becky.

Two research questions relating to how the psychological history of family members is used as part of multi-agency assessments and service provision and how agencies work together to understand a young person and co-ordinate services where there is limited multi-agency involvement were considered by the review.

The purpose of a Serious Case Review is not to apportion blame to individuals but consider what a serious incident can show about how effectively systems are working together, and where improvements need to be made. The findings of the Serious Case Review are based on analysis of the case notes of professionals working with Becky during the period the review covers. Additionally, the reviewers considered reports, conversations with those professionals who worked directly with Becky and her family and review of national research, local systems and policies in authoring the report.

Becky's immediate family members also had the opportunity to contribute their views and perspectives and read the final report. Their comments on the review's findings are included in section 1.15 of the report.

Bridget Griffin and Jane Wiffin, the two experienced independent reviewers who authored the report, noted that despite finding no evidence Becky's death could have been prevented by the professionals who worked with her, opportunities to improve practice were identified.

The review found areas of good practice and praised the efforts of individual professionals who worked with Becky and her immediate family. Areas of improvement are contained in five findings that highlight how, at the time when agencies were working with Becky, effective means of assessing and understanding the often complex needs of adolescents were not in place and that subsequent service provision could not therefore meet those needs. Among the important issues found by the report is the repeated finding that the lack of engagement by fathers in child welfare practice is less likely to be challenged by professionals, leading to gaps in understanding of the impact they could make to children's lives.

Sally Lewis, Independent Chair of the Bristol Safeguarding Children Board, said: "Becky's death was a most tragic case, the effects of which continue to live with her family and friends. Our thoughts continue to be with those close to her and I wish to thank those family and friends who participated



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in this review. Their courage to engage with the reviewers and safeguarding professionals ensured that this report is as comprehensive as it could be. I also thank the professionals and agencies who engaged with the review for their professionalism and determination to support this process.

“The Board accepts the findings of the review and I am satisfied that much work has taken place since Becky’s death to address most of the findings identified. Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility and the need to continually develop practices and policy to meet the ever changing needs of children, young people and adolescents is one that is taken very seriously.

“Understanding the needs and circumstances of adolescents is crucial to ensuring the appropriate level of multi-agency support and action is provided. This review highlights that at the time of working with Becky there were inconsistencies in the multi-agency system approach to understanding those needs and as a result not all agencies involved could operate to their full potential.

“The BSCB have put a significant focus on the response to adolescents and has sought to raise public and professional awareness of adolescent vulnerability. Specialist training on safeguarding adolescents is provided to professionals by the board, drawing on experiences from this case and others to build expertise in the workforce. This has been reinforced by the most recent BSCB annual conference which was designed and presented by young people from groups across the city and included speakers with specialist knowledge and experience of working with adolescents. This conference was attended by over 200 professionals from across agencies and charities, many of whom work with young people.

“Training has also been rolled out to schools across Bristol that brings together mental health leads and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to embed long term collaboration and integrated working. This programme is establishing an important network of professionals from across the organisations involved to promote closer working and improve responses to children and adolescents emotional wellbeing.

“As Independent Chair of the board I have witnessed much evidence of the good work that has already been done to ensure a better understanding of the needs of adolescents. However there remains action on the horizon to build further upon these positive developments. Working with agencies the Board has contributed to the development of the city’s Early Help service so that a wider range of families in need of support can access services. This new service will launch in the coming year and will provide a more robust multi-agency approach to assessing the needs and support available for families.

“Working together and practicing effective communication has also been a continuing focus for agencies and professionals with support from the Board. Despite much work both to modernise case management systems to create robust appropriate inter-agency access to data and a continual delivery of professional development in this area, there remains a need to ensure these processes and practices are embedded.

“The review rightly identifies that the engagement of fathers remains an area yet to be fully achieved. The Board and I are committed to improving practice in this area and to building upon the Think Family approach in more fully understanding children and adolescent needs. It is important that we understand wider family structures to ensure that a full picture of children’s lives are



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ascertained. I have already communicated this commitment to the city's Health and Wellbeing Board and shared this report with the Chair of the Children and Family Partnership Board to engage in a dialogue about how, together we can address this need. The BSCB will continue to challenge the unhelpful social stereotypes of the role of fathers in safeguarding through its training and conference service."

Anyone who is concerned about the wellbeing or safety of a child should call First Response on 0117 903 6444 in working hours, the police on 101 out-of-hours or, if you think there is immediate danger to someone, 999.

The Serious Case Review is available on the Bristol Safeguarding Children Website at <https://bristolsafeguarding.org/children-home/serious-case-reviews/bristol-scrcs/>. Alongside the report is the Board's response to the review, setting out the activity undertaken against each of the findings and the intention to undertake future action to meet these.

**Ends**

**Notes to Editors:**

1. The family of Becky Watts have engaged with the BSCB during the Serious Case Review and in preparation for the publication of the report. They have asked the Board to request on their behalf that they are not contacted by media. The family continue to grieve for their loss and the Board ask that the press respect their privacy.
2. Please make every effort to include in your coverage details of how readers, listeners or viewers can access support if they are concerned for the safety of a child or young person:

Safeguarding for children in Bristol- First Response on 0117 903 6444 in working hours, the police on 101 out-of-hours or, if you think there is immediate danger to someone call 999. Children or young people can contact Childline on 0800 1111, 24 hours a day for confidential support about any concerns or worries.

3. Any questions or enquiries regarding this review or the Board's response can be directed to:

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