

# Response to Baby L Serious Case Review by Bristol Safeguarding Children Board

## Introduction

This serious case review (SCR) concerns the death of a newborn baby, Baby L, following a concealed pregnancy. Baby L's mother was found guilty of manslaughter with diminished responsibility. Baby L's mother was found to have experienced a "pathological denial of pregnancy".

The SCR was commissioned by Bristol Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB). The criteria for undertaking a SCR was met because of the circumstances in which Baby L died

The review found no action that could or should have been taken by any professionals, and established that the sad death of Baby L was neither predictable nor preventable. The report has highlighted four thematic areas of practice that support learning and aid improvements in safeguarding practice. Some of these findings were identified as a result of good practice observed by agencies involved supporting Baby L's mother and family before birth.

The BSCB accepts and agrees with all the findings within the independently authored report. An action plan is being developed by the Board in response to the review's findings as they apply to Bristol.

The review highlights the importance of close working with services for adults and appropriate consideration of perinatal and maternal mental health needs. These findings will be shared with the Bristol Safeguarding Adults Board as both Boards are committed to continuing to work together to ensure that parents and children are supported and safeguarded.

## Themes for Practice

### Theme 1

#### **Professional awareness and action regarding denied or concealed pregnancy**

##### **Summary**

There is clear guidance about the action to be taken regarding suspicion of denial of pregnancy in the BSCB safeguarding procedures but the Board may wish to raise awareness of this in the context of this case.

## **BSCB Response**

The BSCB will hold practice events open to all practitioners in the city to disseminate the findings of this SCR and reiterate the risks associated with concealed pregnancy. The BSCB is also continuing to publicise the South West Child Protection Procedures amongst professionals. All Board partner agencies are formally committed to these procedures which include information about responding to a concealed pregnancy.

## **Theme 2**

### **Noticing and addressing maternal depression**

#### **Summary**

The Board should consider whether professionals in the city need reminding of the importance of screening and self-help in relation to maternal depression.
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## **BSCB Response**

The BSCB is working closely with the BSAB in ensuring there is better guidance available for practitioners on how to work with parents with care and support needs and in implementing improved approaches to perinatal mental health. In addition the BSCB runs training on working with parents with mental health needs and this will be updated in light of the learning from this SCR.

## **Theme 3**

### **Working effectively with families where English is a second language**

#### **Summary**

The Board could consider prompting the use of tools and frameworks which build effective culturally competent practice in the context of the signs of safety approach.
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## **BSCB Response**

The BSCB is committed to ensuring that all families and children in the city are effectively supported. We will review current multi-agency guidance for practitioners on the use of interpreters and review existing arrangements in the city for accessing interpreting services out of core service hours. The BSCB held a conference in 2016 on 'Building Honest and Effective Relationships with the Communities and People We Serve'. The conference was well attended and positively received by professionals. Learning from the conference will be augmented by the development of new tools to support practitioners in this area of work. These enhancements will be embedded within our multi-agency safeguarding training programme.

## **Theme 4**

### **Professional awareness of vulnerability to exploitation and Human Trafficking**

#### **Summary**

<p>The Board could consider raising awareness of Human Trafficking and the associated best practice guides as part of its current work on sexual exploitation.</p>
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#### **BSCB Response**

The BSCB is pleased that the authors noted this theme as a result of positive practice identified in the review. Whilst human trafficking was ultimately not found to be an issue for Baby L's family, an agency supporting them did identify the family's vulnerability to Human Trafficking due to poverty and isolation. This shows significant progress in the awareness and identification of risk factors for families who may be at higher risk of exploitation and trafficking.

The Board has links to the Anti-Slavery Partnership which is the regional group undertaking the multi-agency response to Trafficking and Modern Slavery. The BSCB Child Sexual Exploitation Sub Group will take steps to raise awareness of Human Trafficking through its communications activity, training and policy reviews to ensure that vulnerability to all forms of exploitation are considered and professionals remain alert and able to respond quickly to support families at increased risk of targeting, as was done in this case.