

28 July 2022

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review Leiland-James Michael Corkill

Response from Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP)

Leiland-James tragically died on 7 January 2021, he was one year old and had been living in his adoptive placement in Barrow-in-Furness for 5 months at the time of his death. A criminal trial has since found one of his prospective adopters guilty of his murder. She was sentenced to life in prison in June 2022.

In January 2021, Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership began a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) in relation to the services that were provided to Leiland-James and his prospective adopters. The purpose of a Child Safeguarding Practice Review is to identify improvements to be made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The CSCP commissioned an experienced, independent author to undertake the review.

The LCSPR reviewed the work of the following agencies:

- Cumbria County Council Children & Young People Services which provided the adoption service
- GP Practice
- North Cumbria Integrated Care which provided Strengthening Families Service and Medical Advisor to the Adoption Process
- Cumbria Partnership Foundation Trust (CPFT) and Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust (LSCFT) which provided First Steps Service. (CPFT provided the service until October 2019 at which time CPFT was abolished. From October 2019 the service was taken over by LSCFT)
- School

The publication of this report was delayed in order to ensure that it did not prejudice the criminal investigation.

The full findings of the LCSPR are set out in the overview report which has been published alongside this response. The report and its recommendations were agreed and accepted by the Cumbria Safeguarding Children's Services Partnership.

The learning the report identifies is based on the following key findings from the review:

- The medical assessments of potential adopters require a thorough consideration of their medical records and include information from specialists and providers of mental health support. The system would be more robust if these assessments were updated at the point of matching and before an adoption order is made
- Improvements are required regarding seeking, sharing, and considering any adult vulnerabilities that could be a risk to children

- Adoption systems and practice must ensure that there is improved consideration of the lived experience of other children in an adoptive household
- When it is apparent that there are issues with prospective adopters bonding with a child placed with them, a robust and timely professional response is required that recognises the emotional impact on the child and the pressure on carers

Actions Taken to Address the Learning and Recommendations

Individual agencies involved in the review are taking forward the learning and recommendations outlined in the report. The following changes to systems and practice have been made since Leiland-James's death:

- Amendments have been made by First Step regarding the content of letters sent to GP's to prompt the need to consider the impact of vulnerabilities on the care of children.
- GP Practices across Cumbria are strengthening their coding systems to identify vulnerabilities within families, ensuring that upon receipt of records there is a prompt review of any concerns by the practice safeguarding lead.
- GP Safeguarding registers are being reviewed to ensure they are reflective of those children who are in pre-adoptive placement with responsibility and expectation that these children are reviewed regularly and discussed with multi-agency colleagues – e.g. strengthening families at vulnerable families meetings.
- Information is consistently sought by the Adoption Service from providers where historical mental health issues are reported by prospective adopters.
- A detailed lifestyle questionnaire is now completed by adopters, triangulated with information from other sources in particular the GP adoption medical and robustly scrutinised and challenged as necessary by the medical adviser.
- An in-depth review of the Adoption service has been undertaken by the Local Government Association which has provided assurance about practice in respect of adoption in Cumbria.
- A review of visits by social workers has been undertaken to ensure that, across all open adoption cases the allocated child's social worker is visiting as a minimum in accordance with statutory timescales.
- Where there are emerging concerns regarding bonding in placements, we have plans to increase the level of management oversight, support plans are reviewed and updated, clear expectations for increased frequency of contact and support offered with set timescales, all of which will be set out in guidance for staff.
- A new process has been developed to review prospective adopters' finances at key stages in the adoption process and as a key area at for discussion at support visits
- Relevant Health professionals are now invited to adoption planning and matching meetings.
- The adoption service has increased management oversight at key points in the assessment of prospective adopters. This now includes the Team Managers auditing



at key stages within the adoption process including meeting with the prospective adopters.

The work to implement the recommendations and to monitor their impact on practice will become part of the long-term work of the CSCP and member agencies. The CSCP will be seeking evidence and testing via its new Quality Assurance and Scrutiny Framework that the learning from this review is sufficiently embedded and driving practice improvement. The progress of this will be provided via the CSCP's annual report.

Lead Safeguarding Partners, Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership:

John Readman, Executive Director – People, Cumbria County Council

Jonathan Blackwell, Assistant Chief Constable, Cumbria Police

Professor Sarah O'Brien, Chief Nursing Officer, NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board

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