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### Background

In 2022 Child Y, Adult A, and Adult B, were convicted of perverting the course of justice, and of the murder of Child T who died in July 2021. Child Y was aged 13 years at the time of the death of Child T and was aged 14 years when convicted.

At the time of Child T's death, Child Y lived with Adults A and B under a Child Arrangement Order (CAO). He was estranged from his mother following an alleged assault on him by her. Child Y had been looked after by the Local Authority prior to the Court granting the CAO.



## EXTENDED CHILD PRACTICE REVIEW

### CHILD Y



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### Practice and organisational Learning

The impact of Covid-19 on making informed and accurate assessments of young people in the school environment. Attendance was inconsistent due to periods of isolation which meant that Child Y was not seen as consistently as he would have been under non-Covid-19 circumstances. Concerning behaviours were evident pre-covid, and although school recognised his vulnerability, it is possible that the level of vulnerability was not recognised during this period because he was perceived as one of many children who were struggling with the situation and displaying similar behaviours.

An opportunity to assess Child Y's safety and wellbeing within the family arrangement was missed when Child T's injury in August 2020 did not progress to a S47 investigation. When the concerns about potential non-accidental injury disappeared, it seems that all other concerns relating to Adult A's historic convictions, domestic violence and child protection disappeared also.

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### Effective Practice

- Regular communication from school during Covid-19 and positive educational input despite challenges with Child Y's behaviour.
- Information about risk was shared by Police who were responsive, shared information, made welfare checks, and liaised with Children's Services about case management arrangements.
- There was regular contact between the mental health unit and MASH/Children's Services where information was shared about disclosures made by Child Y's mother.
- Due to the concerns for Child Y's safety and because Adult A did not have parental responsibility for Child Y, the Local Authority made an urgent application to the Court, requesting an Interim Care Order and that Child Y be placed within the care of the Local Authority.
- Child Y's mother was supported by adult services to recover belongings, with housing, and was offered an extended opt-in to services period.

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### Practice and organisational learning

Adult A was perceived as a reliable narrator of events, and Child Y's mother was perceived as an unreliable narrator, possibly because of her mental ill-health. Adult A's narrative dominated, and this clouded initial judgement about the potential risk that Adult A posed to Child Y and the other children in the household, despite evidence of coercive control of Child Y's mother and violent offending in the past.

The child protection medical was delayed and the presence of Adult A enabled him to provide a narrative about Child Y's injuries and appeared to influence Child Y's conduct when questioned.

Child Y's mother was villainised, and her views about the longer-term care of her son were dismissed or ignored.

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### Practice and organisational learning

Insufficient arrangements were in place to support a transition from foster care to Adult A; not enough time was allowed for a phased increase of contact and overnight stays before Child Y returned to live with Adult A.

After a significant event involving another child in the household, a multi-agency strategy discussion including health should have taken place earlier in the day, and this might have influenced the decisions that were taken to leave the children in the care of Adult A and Adult B.

Processes for young people in custody are not child focused in unusual circumstances. The placement options were restricted because only some information could be shared with providers due to their being a live police investigation. Furthermore, specific restrictions were imposed by the Court which further limited the type of placement that could be identified. This meant that Child Y was in police custody for longer than would be usually expected.

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### Practice and organisational learning

It is not evident that there was sufficient managerial oversight of the assessment, or that there was time given to reflective discussion about the complexity of the situation. An opportunity within the Local Authority Children's Services for senior managerial oversight of the plan was missed - Adult A's criminal history was not presented to the Agency Decision Maker because it was not necessary to do so when Adult A was no longer being considered as a foster carer for Child Y.

The planning for the transition of Child Y from foster care to Adult A was undertaken against a backdrop of significant pressures on finding and keeping suitable placements for children and young people who are looked after by local authorities. Significant efforts were being made to maintain Child Y's second foster placement, and it would not have been easy to identify and maintain another suitable placement to meet Child Y's particular needs.

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### Practice and organisational learning

Significant weight was given to Child Y's wishes and feelings about whom he lived with, without sufficient exploration of what was motivating him.

Though some individuals in different agencies were speaking with each other, a forum for systematic multi-agency information sharing was not present outside of the Child Protection or Child Looked After reviewing process.

There was a four-week timescale to complete a Parenting Assessment within the Family Court proceedings. This is much shorter than the usual time allowed, and there was an absence of challenge to the Court.

Assessments were insufficiently analytical and did not look in depth at the complexities of the adult relationships, Child Y's needs, and little attention was paid to Adult B's parenting, whilst attention was given to finding what was positive. Gaps in assessment were not challenged.

