

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review – Child Q

Statement of the Independent Child Safeguarding Commissioner

A number of questions have been raised about the time it has taken to complete the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) concerning Child Q. I thought it would be helpful to provide an overview of the timeline.

Before doing that, I'd like to begin by extending my thanks once again to Child Q and her family for their participation, their dignity and their patience. I'd also like to put on record the significant contribution made by our Senior Professional Advisor, the support of the reference panel and the efforts of all those who helped administer the review. The review was undertaken in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, that understandably presented a set of unique challenges to all those involved.

I also want to emphasise the importance of differentiating between the focus of this review, the complaint made to Child Q's school and the ongoing investigation by the IOPC. Consistent with statutory guidance, the LCSPR has been undertaken with the express intent of establishing learning and preventing or reducing the risk of recurrence of similar incidents. It has not been within the scope of this review to consider conduct-based matters and any queries about these processes are ultimately issues for the organisations involved.

Child Q first came to my attention on 11 January 2021 and a Rapid Review meeting was convened two days later. The Rapid Review report and the decision to instigate the LCSPR was submitted to the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (CSPRP) on 15 January 2021. The National CSPRP considered the case on 26 January 2021 and responded on 2 February 2021.

Across February and March 2021, lead authors were confirmed, a reference panel identified, and a forward plan of key interviews developed. We were mindful of the impact on Child Q and whilst the family were quickly notified of the review, it was right not to interrupt the immediate support services being provided. At the outset, the review team worked with the Council to facilitate communication and ensure that support was wrapped around Child Q and her family. The review was aware that formal complaints had been made and we were mindful not to impede or undermine any of these processes.

We completed interviews with Child Q, her family and the school teachers by mid-April 2021. The headteacher and Local Authority Designated Officer were interviewed in May 2021. However, we continued to be frustrated in our inability to access the police officers involved in the search. This was due to the internal investigative processes of the MPS and the requirement not to undermine their investigation.

Over the next three months, we continued to press the MPS for access to the officers involved, or at the very least, their statements. Due to the nature and range of complaints, the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) had become formally involved. On 6 July 2021, I wrote to the Director General of the IOPC explaining the situation and asking if he could reconcile the issue of access. This resulted in the CHSCP being designated an 'interested party' to the IOPC's investigation. This allowed for the lawful sharing of relevant information which was received in October 2021. Whilst eventually resolved, the difficulties encountered are exactly why the review has made its first recommendation for the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and the IOPC.

Other work followed and advice from the reference panel, research and data helped us come to a position whereby the findings and recommendations could be focused and developed. In the New Year, we completed fact checking and final rounds of engagement, including with the family (and their solicitor), the reference group, the MPS and the IOPC. Throughout the review process, safeguarding partners and relevant agencies of the CHSCP, LA leaders / officers and key agencies were routinely briefed.

I hope this overview provides helpful context and would ask that those interested in the case read the report in full. I look forward to working with the community, safeguarding professionals and others to ensure that our young people can live, learn and thrive. No young person should ever again have to endure such an ordeal.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Gamble', written in a cursive style.

Jim Gamble QPM
Independent Child Safeguarding Commissioner
City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership