

7 minute briefing: Summary of findings from LCSPR Child O



For all those working with adults, children and families

Visit <https://bexleysafeguardingpartnership.co.uk/> for the full report and other useful resources

1. What is a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) and which agencies were involved in the review?

The purpose of a LCSPR is to look at what happened and why, focusing on the systems that practitioners work within and what action we need to take to change those systems so that practice can be improved.

The agencies involved in this review were Bexley Children's Social Care, Bromley Healthcare, 2 local nursery provisions (Bexley), CAFCASS, CAMHS, Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust, Lambeth Children's Social Care, Lambeth Probation Services, Metropolitan Police Service, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, SOLACE, and Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust. Bexley S.H.I.E.L.D. would like to thank these agencies for their participation in the review. Child O's family were consulted with as part of the review and we would like to thank them for sharing their views.

2. What Happened For This Child And Their Family?

Child O experienced neglect in his early life while in the care of his birth parents. He was moved to live with extended family on a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) from the age of 18 months. He continued to have contact with his mother which the family were responsible for arranging and managing. The Local Authority placing Child O had not provided a suitable level of support in the initial stages of the placement, and did not notify the Local Authority in which Child O had been placed.

When Child O was four years old, he digested some of his mother's drugs during one of her visits to spend time with him, and he required life-saving, medical treatment.

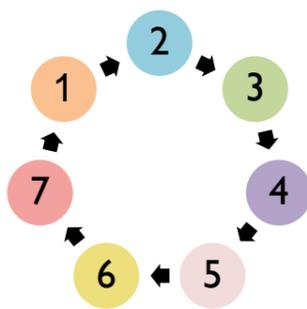
Following the incident from which Child O fully recovered, it became evident that the family required support in managing Child O's behaviour and more guidance on managing the mother's time with Child O. The support provided to the family by professionals had not been as coordinated as it could have been and there were missed opportunities for services to better understand and respond to the needs of the family prior to this incident.

7. Useful resources

- Child O report ([see Bexley S.H.I.E.L.D. website page on learning reviews](#)), published April 2021
- [Applications for Special Guardianship Orders](#), Bexley Children's Services Procedures Manual, April 2020
- [Children and Families Moving Across Local Authority Boundaries](#), Section 6, London Child protection procedures, 2020
- [Special guardianship guidance](#), Department for Education, January 2017
- [Recommendations to achieve best practice in the child protection and family justice systems: Special guardianship orders](#), Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, June 2020
- [Triennial review of serious case reviews, 2014-2017](#), Department for Education, March 2020
- [The voice of the child: learning lessons from serious case reviews](#), Ofsted, April 2011

Specific resources for families

- [An A-Z of terms](#), Family Rights Group, (includes information on special guardian, special guardianship allowance and special guardianship order)
- [What is a special guardianship order?](#), Family Rights Group
- [Special Guardianship: what does it mean for birth parents?](#), Family Rights Group, July 2014
- [Support for relatives and friends who are looking after someone else's child](#), Family Rights Group, November 2018



3. What is a Special Guardianship Order?

A Special Guardianship Order is a formal court order which places a child or young person with someone permanently and gives this person parental responsibility for the child. This could be a grandparent, close relative or a family friend.

Children placed under these arrangements often continue to have contact with their birth parents.

4. What we have learned ...

- The **importance of thorough background checks on all potential carers** including by adult mental health, housing, and domestic abuse agencies where relevant.
- Assessments need to adopt a **'Think Family' approach** and include where relevant information from both adult services (including adult mental health) and children services.
- The importance of **assessments** taking into consideration the **longer-term stability of placements** and the **impact of placements on individual carers and their families**.
- The need to **understand parental substance use** and its relevance to contact arrangements with non-resident carers
- The need to ensure **support plans consider the long-term stability of placements** based on individual circumstances and the needs of proposed carers and children.
- Special Guardianship placements require **support plans** that are **tailored to the individual needs** of the children to ensure that children who have experienced significant change and trauma and their carers are supported by relevant services from the outset of any new living arrangements to access the support they need.
- A **'team around the child' approach** could better help all agencies and services involved with a child to be coordinated and ensure there is support in place from the start of a placement taking into account vulnerability factors and circumstances which may influence stability, such as when children have additional needs, and supporting children in transition from one carer to another.
- **When children move from one Local Authority to another**, it is imperative that there is forward planning and a handover process that considers the support needs of individual children, including children who are already part of the household where the child/children will live.
- Local Authorities need to consider as part of the Special Guardianship process, the **merits of postponing making final orders** in cases of complexity; this includes situations when it would be helpful to allow time for placements to be tested out. This provides an opportunity to consider additional support needs and or alternative placement arrangements including Supervision Orders and Child in Need plans where necessary.
- **Quality assurance systems** need to ensure Special Guardianship assessments are of good quality before-sign off and submission to court.
- The importance of **all agencies understanding the meaning of Special Guardianship** and its implications for children and families.

Key learning from family feedback during this review:

- There is a need for **support to be in place from the start of a placement**.
- The Local Authority responsible for the Special Guardianship arrangements to **ensure follow-up checks and visits are in place** to ensure that the child's support plan is effective.
- **Support plans must be communicated effectively so they can be fully understood by family members**.
- **Carers need to be prepared and equipped to manage ongoing communications between children and their parents and or previous carers** ahead of and, where necessary, during early stages of placement.

6. Next steps

- Bexley S.H.I.E.L.D. is seeking assurances that the existing quality assurance processes for Special Guardianship assessments incorporate the learning from this review by 30/4/21.
- One pager guidance on support planning for Special Guardianship and including when children are transferring from one borough to another to be produced by Bexley S.H.I.E.L.D. and London Borough of Bexley Children's Social Care by 30/4/21.
- Dissemination of information including briefing sessions across the multi-agency safeguarding partnership in Bexley on Special Guardianship and the implications for practice by Bexley S.H.I.E.L.D. by 30/7/21 .
- Think Family training to include consideration of Special Guardianship arrangements commissioned by Bexley S.H.I.E.L.D. by 29/10/21.
- Trauma informed practice training for professionals and potential carers by London Borough of Bexley Children's Social Care by 29/5/21.

5. What changes have been made already ...

- London Borough of Lambeth Children's Social Care has updated its quality assurance processes and all Special Guardianship reports have to be signed off by a senior manager.
- Cafcass ensure that all Special Guardianship reports are quality assured by managers prior to being submitted to the court for final decision-making.
- London Borough of Bexley Early Years Services has updated their training packages to ensure Special Guardianship and its meaning is included in training programmes.
- Bromley Healthcare now discuss all children placed on Special Guardianship Orders in supervision to ensure there is oversight on individual children's developmental progress and any safeguarding issues linked to the children's placements.

