

# Multi-Agency Deep Dive Audit into how agencies identified and responded to young babies at risk of harm in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic

March 2021

## 7 POINT BRIEFING

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### SUMMARY

Wakefield Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) carried out a deep dive multi-agency audit into how agencies identified and responded to young babies at risk of harm in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The audit considered eight cases of families who were subject to a Child Protection Plan within the past 18 months and had a new born baby within the last 6 months.

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### WHY FOCUS ON YOUNG BABIES?

The pandemic has impact across all child age groups and has posed unprecedented challenges for agencies supporting children and families in maintaining normal service delivering Nationally, young babies (<1 year olds) in particular have been identified as a vulnerable cohort.

Lockdown Babies Briefing (2020) published by The Children's Commissioner Office highlighted concerns in relation to the limitations in universal support offered to new families under restrictions and the reductions in contact with services and inability to maintain birth registers.

Serious incident notifications involving young babies has also risen since the pandemic. The Department for Education (DfE) requested local authorities and safeguarding partners to undertake a review of the current circumstances of families who have been historically in receipt of statutory support and have recently had a new baby within the past 6 months.

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### AUDIT FINDINGS - AREAS WORKING WELL

**Recognition:** The quality in recognising risk of harm was strong. Agencies responded appropriately. Referrals from health services and police were detailed and timely. Timeliness of birth plans and the role of the Multi-Agency Pregnancy Liaison and Assessment Group (MAPLAG) were also strong, which is a good system development in Wakefield.

**Assessment:** Pre-birth assessment across the majority of the cohort was an area of strength. Good evidence in some records demonstrating assessment and planning informed intervention.

**Planning & Intervention:** Most cases showed that Covid-19 did not impact on the level of intervention families received. Number of good examples illustrating the tenacity demonstrated by frontline professionals.

**Joint Working:** Some evidence of good transparency between agencies who were open to challenge in respect of decision making.

**Impact and Outcomes:** All babies were appropriately safeguarded with the level of intervention and support evidenced within records. In one case there was a good example of agencies holding and overseeing risk which led to sustained change

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### AUDIT FINDINGS - AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

**Recognition:** Sharing of documentation was not always evident within records such as strategy meeting minutes, assessment, CPC reports. Health services were not always in receipt of documentation or invited to attend multi-agency meetings, particularly GPs.

**Assessment & Planning:** In most cases WSCP Neglect Toolkit was not considered by agencies to recognise risk within assessment and planning where it appeared applicable to do so. In some instances, assessment was not always joined up.

**Planning & Intervention:** In some cases there was a disconnect between assessment, planning and intervention as families' needs changed. It was unclear within agency records as to how intervention delivered to families achieved change in some cases.

**Joint Working:** At non-statutory levels of intervention joint working was not as strong in terms of coordination between agencies in comparison to statutory levels.

**Impact & Outcomes:** In instances it was difficult to ascertain whether outcomes achieved by families was circumstantial or due to the impact of intervention delivered by agencies.

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### WHAT WILL WE DO WITH THESE FINDINGS?

WSCP will consider the key learning points from this audit:

- Services to ensure systems and processes are in place to consistently share and record documentation such as strategy / multi-agency meeting minutes, assessment, Child Protection Conference (CPC) reports with partner agencies.
- GPs are invited to all strategy / multi-agency meetings as a default process.
- WSCP to evaluate the WSCP Neglect Toolkit in order to increase professional's awareness and use of the tool within practice.
- When intervention makes impact services to ensure assessment is updated to reflect current needs for children and families.

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### NEXT STEPS

- All agencies involved in the audit will feedback specific good practice and areas for development identified for their service during the audit day discussion.
- The findings of the deep dive audit have been shared with the WSCP Safeguarding Effectiveness Group and key multi-agency actions have been identified for services to implement.

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### RESOURCES

There are a range of national and local resources and guidance which can support professionals in relation to supporting families with young babies. These include, but are not exclusive to:

- ICON
- The Lullaby Trust
- Wakefield Safer Sleep Standard
- Parent Infant Foundation