Serious Case Reviews

What is a Serious Case Review (SCR)?

The SCR process is defined by ‘Working Together to safeguard children’ – Chapter 8; this is part of the statutory guidance section of the UK document 2010, underpinned by Regulation 5 of the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (KSCB) Regulations 2006.

What about in Jersey?

In Jersey, the Jersey Child Protection Committee (JCPC) has been established to perform the functions of an LSCB. Whilst the Jersey Law does not currently define JCPC function, it is the declared intention of the Children’s Policy Group, agreed by Council of Ministers, that Jersey Law would be developed to clarify the responsibilities of the JCPC in a similar way to LSCBs in the UK.

When should SCRs be carried out?

Working Together is very specific about the situations in which a serious case review should be carried out; these can be summarised as cases in which:

- Abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected
- A child dies (including suicide)
- A child is seriously harmed

and there is cause for concern as to the way in which the authority or other relevant persons have worked together to safeguard the child.

What is the purpose or aim of SCRs?

The key purpose of a Serious Case Review is that agencies may learn lessons from experience, and improve the way they work to safeguard children. In order to achieve this, the SCR must be

- Timely
- Comprehensive
- Child focused

Where possible, the lessons should be acted upon quickly without necessarily waiting for the SCR to be completed.

It is not:

- An inquiry into how a child died or was seriously harmed
- An inquiry into who is responsible
- Part of a disciplinary process relating to individual practitioners.

These processes may be required but will be conducted separately from the SCR process by the appropriate agencies.

Who can make a referral for SCR?

Any professional or agency may refer a case to the JCPC if they believe that there are important lessons for intra- and/or interagency working to be learned from the case.

Any individual can refer matters of concern to the Independent Chair, which he may deem to merit review under SCR procedures.
Who leads the process?

The Independent Chair JCPC in Jersey; the LSBC Chair in the UK.

The Independent Chair is supported by a Serious Case Review sub-committee of the JCPC, whose role is to oversee and quality assures SCRs and advise the Chair as to whether SCR criteria have been met and a review should be conducted. The sub-committee reflects the cross agency membership of the JCPC. There are clearly defined JCPC procedures for conducting reviews, and the scope of any SCR is defined by agreed Terms of Reference.

What is the process?

Once it is known that a case is being considered for review, each agency involved should secure its records relating to the case and quickly begin to draw up a chronology of their involvement with the child and family undertaking an Individual Management Review (IMR) of their involvement within the timeframe defined by the specific Terms of Reference of the review. The aim of IMRs should be to look openly and critically at individual and organisational practice and at the context within which people were working, to see whether improvements could and should be made and to identify how this can be achieved by making recommendations.

What is the outcome?

The outcome of an SCR should be consolidated learning, leading to the development of action plans within specific timescales which will ensure that the learning is implemented within practice. The JCPC sub-committee retains oversight of the implementation of actions, and reports, through the Independent Chair, to the Minister and Children’s Policy Group.

Munro recommendations around SCRs

In June 2010 the UK Government commissioned an independent review of child protection by Professor Eileen Munro, including consideration of how SCRs could be strengthened.

Professor Munro recommended that the review process move towards ‘systems methodology’ when undertaking SCRs. This enables a better recognition of performance within context and recognises that people’s competence in carrying out tasks to a high standard is influenced by the whole system around them. It facilitates learning from incidents, looking not only at what professionals did in a case but also why they acted as they did. The aim is to improve learning whilst reducing bureaucracy, since in the UK Local Authorities have been overwhelmed by the current demands of the SCR process, particularly where they had to deal with several cases simultaneously. Pilot models are currently being conducted, and include interviews and reviews across several cases, considering recurrent themes.

Where to find out more....

1. Working together to safeguard children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (Chapter 8). Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF).
2. Local Safeguarding Boards Regulations 2006: Statutory Instrument no. 2006/90. (UK)
4. NSPCC serious Case review web pages
   http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourcesforprofessionals/serious_case_reviews_homepage_wda82779.html
   http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/downloads/8875_DfE_Munro_Report_TAGGED.pdf
6. JCPC Multi-Agency Child Protection Procedures
7. JCPC Serious Case Review Procedures (available from JCPC Office).

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