

## Children ZZ and XXZ – 7 Minute Briefing

### Brief Summary

- In Sept 2024, ZZ and XXZ, with their father, found their mother had died by suicide. The children's mother had a history of chronic alcohol misuse history over several years and had recently undergone a major medical procedure.
- The children had been on a Child Protection Plan (CPP) for emotional abuse linked to maternal alcohol misuse since mid-2023. This traumatic event, combined with persistent neglect, is deemed likely to have caused long-term emotional harm. Both children are now with their father, remain on a CPP with a safety plan, and are receiving specialist counselling.

### Family Background

- ZZ & XXZ's Mother: Now deceased (50+ yrs), of White British-Polish heritage. The children's mother used multiple substances and had chronic alcohol dependence for several years with linked, significant medical conditions.
- Father: (50+ yrs) of White British-Polish heritage. The children's father had a history of mental health issues (including a suicide attempt several years earlier).
- Children: ZZ & XXZ, full siblings, of White British-Polish heritage.

### Intervention Time Line

- **2018:** Following a suicide attempt by the children's father, a s.47 enquiry commenced, however this was closed with undue optimism.
- **April 2019:** First Child In Need (CIN) Plan after an alcohol-related conviction for the children's mother. This CIN Plan was closed in Oct 2019.
- **Sept 2021-Sept 2022:** Second CIN Plan (maternal intoxication); closed.
- **April 2023:** CPP commenced due to children's mother's escalating alcohol misuse:
  - Cycles of maternal sobriety/heavy drinking exposed the children to neglect.
  - Father moved back into the family home in mid-2023 as a protective factor. This was a decision freighted with unwarranted optimism.
- **Dec 2023:** Agreed that the children's father needed separate accommodation.
- **May 2024:** Children's mother no longer participating in progressing the CP Plan. A Legal Planning Meeting was not convened, leading to "case drift."
- **June 2024:** Children's mother refused to leave the family home; father sought new housing.
- **September 2024:** Mother died at her residence, while ZZ and XXZ were away visiting this new home with their father.

### Children's Lived Experience

- ZZ & XXZ's school observed few outward signs of impact.
- ZZ & XXZ spoke about their mother's alcohol use and shouting, sometimes they denied their mother used alcohol, probably to protect her.
- ZZ & XXZ reported searching their mother's bags for alcohol and being sent to bed as early as 5pm, sometimes without food.
- XXZ was referred for mental health support (Harrow Horizons) in July 2024 due to feeling "low."
- Mother had made distressing threats of suicide to the children; XXZ reported taking a knife from her mother during one such threat.

### Key Learning Issues & Actions

#### Domestic Abuse (DA) Management:

- Gender bias evident; father's victimisation missed.
- Police 'Encompass' notifications initially missed by school.
- Police recorded coercive control against father without investigation/response, probably impacting his DBS.

**Action:** Local police to uphold father's data rights.

**Training needed on fathers as DA victims, DASH use and child benefit transfer.**

#### Parental Illness/Alcohol Misuse:

- Mother's severe liver disease not adequately considered.
- Too much "early optimism" about mother's protective capacity.

**Action:** Vigilance against minimising alcoholism's effects.

**New system for unborn babies. (Unborn Baby Panel)**

#### Inter-Agency Information Sharing:

- Information gaps due to consent misunderstandings;
- Inconsistent interpreter use.

**Action:** Harrow L&D Subgroup to provide information sharing/consent training.

#### Mental Health & Housing:

- Limited mental health service involvement for parents.
- Father's DA claims for housing not prioritised, delaying accommodation.

**Action:** Better "join up" between mental health/alcohol services. Housing staff training on DA identification and how to transfer child benefit.

#### Cultural Issues:

- Need to improve understanding of child protection systems among Polish and Jehovah's Witness communities.

**Action:** Consultation & Outreach Hub to address community understanding.