

Learning from practice briefing: Applying professional curiosity

The Learning and Review subgroup (LRS) review referrals for safeguarding adult reviews (SAR). Part of this remit includes identifying any other key learning and sharing this with partners.

LRS wish to highlight an example of when professional curiosity may have identified concerns and resulted in further support to safeguard an adult. 'Professional curiosity' is discussed frequently within SARs and it is hoped providing examples of this will help to apply professional curiosity in every day practice.

The circumstances:

The adult had care and support needs, including mental ill health. The adult had been in a relationship, and it was known to some agencies that there had been domestic abuse within the relationship. A large part of this was via coercive control. The relationship ended and the adult moved to their own private rented accommodation. The adult's mental health was further impacted as they were unable to have their dog living with them and they also struggled to pay the rent which put the tenancy at risk.

Very sadly, the adult experienced a mental health crisis and ended their life by suicide. During the information gathering process it was identified that the private landlord was the ex-partner of the adult. It appeared the coercive controlling behaviour may have continued. For example, Not allowing pets on the tenancy and setting the rent to an unaffordable level.

Professional curiosity:

Had the adult been asked more probing questions about who the private landlord was, why they signed a tenancy agreement that did not meet their needs or checking that the adult now felt safe and whether there was any further contact with the ex-partner, the situation may have been better understood and the concerns realised, resulting in actions to support and safeguard the adult.

Key messages:

1. Triangulate the information available to you, including history of abuse and neglect and considering the impact of any care and support needs.
2. Ask enquiring questions about the adults accommodation circumstances.
3. Seek advice from the local authority housing team as they may be able to offer further support and advice under housing legislation. For example:
 - The primary homelessness legislation is, Part VII, of the Housing Act 1996. This sets out the statutory framework for local authorities to support people that are at risk of homelessness or, who are homeless.
 - The [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) amended Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and introduced two new duties. The Prevention Duty and the Relief Duty. This allowed local authorities to intervene at an earlier stage, to prevent homelessness in their areas. It also places a duty on local authorities to provide homelessness services to all those affected by homelessness, not just to those who were deemed to have a 'priority need'. These include:
 1. (a) an enhanced prevention duty extending the period a household is threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, meaning that housing authorities are required to work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage; and
 2. (b) a new duty for those who are already homeless so that housing authorities will support households for 56 days to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation.
 - The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) amends Part 7 of the 1996 Act to strengthen the support available to victims of domestic abuse. The Act extends priority need to all eligible victims of domestic abuse who are homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse. The 2021 Act brings in a new definition of domestic abuse which housing authorities must follow to assess whether an applicant is homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse.

[Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities - Overview of the homelessness legislation - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Further information is available on the [Hampshire Safeguarding Adults Board practice guidance pages](#) including: Coercive Control, Domestic Abuse, Homelessness, Housing and Safeguarding and Raising Safeguarding Concerns.