THE CHILD **SAFEGUARDING** PRACTICE REVIEW PANEL

7 MINUTE BRIEFING

LCSPR: ANNA

This case study is about a young person who died by suicide after accessing harmful online content.

November 2026

Safeguarding children from online harms

1 About the family

Anna was an eighteen-year-old care-experienced young person of Eastern European background who died by suicide.

Prior to entering care, Anna had lived with her family, who had been known to children's social care for eight years due to a range of safeguarding concerns.

These included a historical allegation of abuse that Anna disclosed, alongside increasing worries about her emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Anna entered care through a voluntary agreement between her parents and the local authority.

2 Background

Anna identified as non-binary and was neurodivergent, with a diagnosis of autism.

She experienced significant difficulties including anxiety, low mood, self-harm and recurring suicidal ideation.

Anna made some progress in a supportive residential placement and was preparing for adulthood.

This period, however, was marked by heightened anxiety linked to transitions in care, education and mental health services.

Sadly, Anna died following a period of vulnerability during these transitions, highlighting the complexity of her needs and the pressures she faced as she approached independence.

3 Patterns and practice

- Anna accessed harmful online content linked to self-harm and suicide, highlighting challenges in managing digital risks.
- Historical allegations of abuse and trauma were not fully explored, limiting how well services could respond to her emotional needs.
- Safety planning was collaborative and adapted to her needs (including managing online risks) but did not fully incorporate her trauma history.
- Anna's transition from CAMHS to adult services, alongside education and accommodation uncertainty, contributed to heightened anxiety and vulnerability.
- Late progress on EHCP and college placement contributed to uncertainty and stress during a critical period.

4 Acknowledging good

- Anna was in an appropriate and supportive residential placement, with staff demonstrating commitment and enabling some progress and increased independence.
- Anna was able to express when she felt overwhelmed, which supported engagement and informed care approaches.
- Placement staff were able to reduce risk through Wi-Fi restrictions and collaborative safety planning, but controls were limited by her independent access to mobile data.
- A positive, trusting relationship between Anna and staff enabled open discussion about online use and supported risk management.

5 Key learning

- Limited specialist placements and pressures on adult services reduced continuity and effectiveness of care.
- Practice highlighted the importance of proactive, earlier multi-agency planning to better support young people approaching adulthood.
- Practitioners could not fully determine the extent of Anna's engagement with harmful or trauma-related online communities, reflecting wider limitations in assessing digital risk.
- Even in structured placements, preventing access to harmful online material remains challenging, requiring ongoing, adaptive strategies.

6 Reflective questions

- How confident am I in identifying when a young person may be accessing online content that promotes self-harm or suicide?
- Do I routinely explore a young person's online activity as part of holistic risk assessment?
- How well do I understand the specific online platforms, trends, or communities that may influence vulnerable young people?
- What indicators might suggest that online content is affecting a young person's thoughts, feelings, or behaviours?
- Do safety plans meaningfully incorporate online risks, including access to harmful content outside of controlled environments (e.g. mobile data)?
- What are the limitations of current controls (e.g. Wi-Fi restrictions), and how do I plan for risks beyond these?
- How well do multi-agency partners share information and coordinate responses to online harm and suicide risk?

7 Useful resources

Find more information about safeguarding children from online harms on the Panel's new learning hub: Learning hub | Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel

Read the full Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review: Barnet Safeguarding Children Partnership - Local Learning Reviews

Further learning is available:

Growing up in the online world: a national consultation - GOV.UK

Online harms affecting children: Evidence Pack - Youth Justice Resource Hub

'What I wish my parents or carers knew…': A guide for parents and carers on managing children's digital lives | Children's Commissioner for England]