



**Redbridge Safeguarding Children Partnership
(RSCP)**

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review

"Zara"

October 2025

Independent Reviewer – Anna Berry

Acknowledgements

The Independent Reviewer and the Redbridge Safeguarding Children Partnership (RSCP) would firstly like to again offer sincere condolences to 'Zara's' family on their tragic and untimely loss, and to thank them for their engagement with the Review process. Their input has been invaluable and supported greater understanding of 'Zara' and her journey. 'Zara's' younger brother expresses the emotions of the whole family in his picture below.

Additionally, acknowledgement goes to those individuals and agencies that contributed to the Review and formed the Panel.

The RSCP is committed to learning from 'Zara's' situation and will be taking forward the [recommendations](#) via a formal Action Plan. The RSCP will also be inviting the Independent Reviewer back to Redbridge at a later date to review progress.



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1) Introduction

- 1.1. This Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) (*the Review*) was undertaken in order to consider learning through reflection on the multiagency practice and systems related to a 15-year-old girl who died in April 2024. The child will be referred to as Zara, a named chosen by her family which will provide anonymity. The Review will consider Zara's experiences at the centre of all those services who knew and worked with her, and her family, and will conclude with findings and recommendations for future practice.
- 1.2. At the time of her death, Zara was known to several agencies. She had a diagnosis of [hypothyroidism](#) and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). ASD is a neurological and developmental condition that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave. In particular, the two years leading up to her death demonstrate a number of difficulties and challenges in terms of Zara's emotional and mental health, her educational and social experiences and exploitation that she was experiencing online.
- 1.3. The circumstances of Zara's death and other/parallel processes will be defined in due course within the Review.

2) Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE)

- 2.1 The broad KLOE considered throughout this Review are as follows:
 - multiagency working across all agencies involved;
 - understanding ASD and responding to emerging presentations;
 - understanding the world through the child's lens and responding to the individual need; and
 - understanding family dynamics.

3) Process

- 3.1 The responsibilities for how the system learns from serious incidents is outlined in statutory guidance, [HM Government Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2023\)](#).
- 3.2 In accordance with the above guidance, the Local Authority, in consultation with the other statutory partners, notified the Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) Panel of Zara's death and conducted a Rapid Review (RR) of the circumstances. The RR recognised that there was additional learning and potential to improve the way agencies worked together to safeguard children, and

it recommended commissioning a local CSPR. The national CSPR Panel supported this course of action.

- 3.3 An Independent Reviewer (IR) was commissioned to work with a panel of local safeguarding professionals from the key agencies. The IR met with the family, facilitated a practitioner event, met with practitioners individually, analysed agency information and reports and drafted this Overview Report. Zara's siblings have also contributed to the Review with some written words and pictures. The IR and the Panel collaborated on identifying the learning and writing recommendations from this Review.
- 3.4 The RSCP provided the IR with a chronology of information and analysis of partner agencies involvement relating to the case. Additionally progress against various initiatives, pathways and integrated ways of working were provided throughout the Review process.
- 3.5 The Overview Report was presented to the RSCP in September 2025 and the recommendations accepted to form the basis of an action plan going forward.

4) About Zara

- 4.1. The person central to this review is Zara and the learning is focused on experiences through her lens, as far as possible. Zara was a 15-year-old girl who was in Year 10 at school at the time of her death. She lived at home with her mother, father and two younger brothers aged 12 and 6 years. Zara was British born with Bangladeshi heritage and the religion of her family is Muslim.
- 4.2. Zara was diagnosed with dyslexia, hypothyroidism and ASD (Hypothyroidism is a condition that results from an under-active thyroid that does not produce enough thyroid hormone). She was known to various services in the two years prior to her death including:
 - a Paediatrician for management of her hypothyroidism;
 - her school and associated support services it provided, including a mentor;
 - the school nursing service for her universal health care provision;
 - a GP as her primary care provider;
 - Child and Adolescent Mental health Services (CAMHS) including the Specialist Education and Training Support Service (SEaTSS) Worker, Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service (EWMHS) Team and Youth Justice and Targeted Prevention Service (YJTPS) allocated CAMHS practitioner;
 - Children's Social Care Services (Families Together Hub and the Children with Disabilities (CWD) Team);
 - Youth Justice and Targeted Prevention Service (YJTPS); and

- Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).

- 4.3. Zara's parents described her early years as happy and they have many fond memories of family days out, holidays and birthdays that Zara enjoyed with her cousins. They have these events catalogued with multiple photographs of Zara smiling into the camera with her brothers and cousins. Her parents describe her as creative and said she loved arts and crafts and story books.
- 4.4. However, during her early childhood her parents noticed that Zara presented "unusually" and provided examples of where she would react if something was taken away from her, or if a child had something she wanted, which on some occasions involved breaking or stealing an item. In retrospect, her parents realise that this is because Zara processed her feelings and responses differently to other children. The perception, however, in earlier years is that Zara was "naughty". Zara walked and talked quite early. In particular her parents talked about her lack of understanding of "danger", even in crossing the road safely and latterly about the dangers online.
- 4.5. Zara's parents observed that she found friendships in school difficult from a very early age and experienced bullying at primary school, however this was a smaller and less stressful environment than high school. Zara was diagnosed with dyslexia in Year Five. Her parents referenced that Zara found high school to be overwhelming in terms of "sensory overload". They said she did not like the noise, the light and she found lining up for lessons extremely stressful. It is noted that Zara attended a particularly large high school. Following enrolment, the high school identified the requirement for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and completed a comprehensive EHCP application in 2021 which was put into place on 27 May 2022. There had been no earlier review of Zara's behaviours or learning at her primary school.
- 4.6. Zara's eldest brother said that she was *"not just my sister – she was my friend"* and he describes how he thinks she was unheard and helpless and that he realises that the high school environment was a constant struggle for her. He also particularly mentions the death of his grandfather in December 2023 which he describes as a devastating time for the whole family and came at a particularly difficult point in Zara's life. Zara's youngest brother drew a picture of himself and Zara which said, *"I miss my sister"* and *"I want her back"* (see [Acknowledgements](#)).
- 4.7. Zara is reported by her family to have found most days of high school a challenge. She was stressed with the environment, the difficulties with friendships and they report her to have been persistently unhappy. In contrast, although the school acknowledge the difficulties in transition to high school, they report that Zara often said that she loved school, and she had formed good relationships with key staff.

Zara reported to other agencies such as the YJTPS that she disliked school, therefore it is difficult to get a definitive understanding of Zara's views and experiences.

- 4.8. The pattern of escalating worrying behaviour increased throughout her teenage years leading to assessment and diagnosis of ASD, implementation of an EHCP, ongoing safety planning in school, repeated multi agency referrals (MARFs) to Children Social Care (CSC) and ongoing involvement of CAMHS. The patterns of behaviour included online activity that would cause harm to Zara, unauthorised absence from lessons and school, challenging social interactions and a number of allegations about peers, parents and teachers. These worrying behaviours escalated to a point that the MPS and YJTPS became involved after Zara brought a knife into school in November 2023.
- 4.9. Latterly in the timeframe, some services record a variety of concerns that Zara expressed such as dissatisfaction with her appearance, her diagnosis of ASD, her culture, religion and gender and her views about sexuality. She also increasingly expressed concern about her family relationships, her future and anxiety about her exams.
- 4.10. In summary, in the two years leading up to Zara's death she encountered an increasing number of difficulties and challenges in terms of her emotional and mental health, coming to terms with her diagnosis of ASD, her educational and social experiences, her family relationships and exploitation that she was experiencing online. There were several key incidents and episodes that set Zara on a trajectory of difficult situations and the Review will examine these in due course. The IR and the panel identified missed opportunities for agencies to have worked differently together in November 2023 when Zara brought a knife into school, and on the 16 and 17 April 2024 when she was found to have a phone in school. On looking at the phone, school observed some explicit images and videos on a social media application. At the time of writing this Report, this matter is still under investigation by the police.
- 4.11. The following day, 18 April 2024, Zara was dropped off near school at approximately 08:20, she did not enter school and was not seen or heard of by her family, or the agencies working with her again. Her agreed safety plan at that time was for her to be dropped off at the school gates however on that morning she was dropped off nearby. Her mother contacted school at 10:20 when she noticed via the school app that Zara had been marked as absent and subsequently, she was reported as missing to the MPS. Zara's whereabouts are largely unknown throughout that day. However, she was retrospectively seen on CCTV at two different train stations, one at 08:33 and again when an unknown member of the public is seen to buy her a train ticket at 15:22. Zara is then seen on platform 2 at East Acton Station, on the

Central Line, at 21:08. Shortly after this, a collision was reported by a train driver and Zara was discovered on the track and tragically declared deceased at 21:48.

5) Family Involvement

- 5.1. The IR spent time with Zara's mother, father and uncle at the family home to understand their experiences, views and perspectives. Her brothers were also invited to contribute to the review, and this was facilitated by letter and pictures.
- 5.2. The family believe that Zara's life and experiences can help to identify learning to improve future practice. Zara's death is a tragedy to them, and their contributions have been provided in the midst of their bereavement, trauma and whilst coping with parallel proceedings (see [Acknowledgements](#)).

6) Parallel Processes

- 6.1. A number of other processes may take place alongside a local CSPR and have not, in this case, delayed the process of the Review. To note, a local CSPR is not an inquiry into how a child has died, this is for the Coroner to investigate. It is also not a criminal investigation which is for the police to determine. Lastly, it is not a complaint or a disciplinary investigation. Where necessary, that is for individual agencies to undertake or respond to. It is, however, helpful to be cited on parallel processes which, where relevant may be referenced throughout this Report.
- 6.2. The coronial inquest into Zara's death is pending and this Review will be shared with the Coroner. For reference, inquests are legal inquiries into the cause and circumstances of a death, and are limited, fact-finding inquiries. This Review will set out the involvement of services and agencies in the last two years of Zara's life and will not make reference to, or inference of a cause of death.
- 6.3. The MPS are undertaking an internal review of their contacts with Zara, which includes conduct and complaints investigations being carried out by the Department for Professional Standards (DPS). Additionally, the investigation into the content of her phone is ongoing and British Transport Police (BTP) are investigating Zara's death on behalf of the coroner.

7) Summary of timeline

- 7.1. For ease of reference for the analysis, [Appendix 1](#) presents a table to broadly outline significant incidents, summary of agencies involved and primary concerns that agencies had about Zara. This does not contain each and every contact or conversation and is intended to act as a visual journey. The table includes her ASD diagnosis which was made prior to the timeframe of this Review, and references

safety planning from 2021 (also prior to the timeframe). Analysis will refer to episodes within this timeline.

8) Overarching Learning

- 8.1. The Review has identified learning following consideration of the following areas of practice that were identified as part of the Rapid Review, highlighted within the agency reports, panel discussions, family discussions and discussed at the Practitioner Consultation Event.

Areas of learning
Multi-agency working methods and lead professional role
Digging deeper- collective professional challenge and joint management of risk, professional curiosity
Understanding the specific risk indicators relating to ASD
Compassionate and curious understanding of family dynamics
The voice and daily lived experience of the child

9) Key findings and Thematic Analysis

9.1. Multiagency ways of working and Lead Professional role

Key finding 1:

Multi-agency responses to Zara's needs were not sufficiently coordinated or led, meaning that harm and risk was not fully explored or understood by the multiagency network. As a result, there were knowledge deficits across the services involved with Zara resulting in ambiguity about risk, case ownership, roles, responsibilities and communication.

Key finding 2:

There was not a clearly identified lead professional, meaning that there were multiple single strands of services and support, but they did not come together to improve Zara's experiences. Therefore, the help provided to her was not as effective as it could have been.

- 9.1.1. We can see through the table ([Appendix 1](#)) that Zara was a child that was well known to services, and agencies showed tenacity in trying to address her needs and provide support where they felt it was required. However, specifically observed is that there was not a single point of time where all agencies came together to jointly consider Zara and there was not a clearly identified lead agency throughout the timeframe of the review.
- 9.1.2. The Review has discovered that the agencies often responded to individual incidents and there was a lack of coordinated planning beyond the safety plan developed by the school. Examples include the following of processes to make a MARF when harm/risk seemingly escalated, but an absence of follow through or escalation to understand those risk indicators in their entirety, together with Zara and her family. The table in [Appendix 1](#) demonstrates positive action that was taken on a number of occasions when agencies submitted a MARF.
- 9.1.3. In return, decisions were made from receipt of the MARF and sometimes following a child and family assessment (CAFA) that did not include consultation with the full range of services. In short, the safeguarding system didn't come together and develop a coherent view about the level of risk. This approach would have helped to inform her EHCP, her safety plan, to understand the family's understanding of concerns and to collectively work out what was effective for Zara.
- 9.1.4. Across all agencies, there is evidence of some transactional practice, such as practitioners sharing information via telephone or email with each other at different times or informing one or other parent about a particular incident. Therefore "transactional" in terms of "the information was often shared", but not meaningful or effective because there was no resulting outcome from this type of communication, and an absence of escalation when agencies were concerned about the response. In November 2023, there was a particular opportunity for agencies take stock, reflect on what had not worked so well for Zara and plan a way forward together.
- 9.1.5. It can be seen that there was a steady increase in concerns for Zara that sharply escalated in November 2023 with a variety of factors involved. In November 2023,

Zara's phone was confiscated by her parents. Zara took a knife into school the following day and alleged that her father had threatened to take her to Bangladesh for an arranged marriage. This started a trajectory of activity including a MARF, a police notification, allocation of a CAMHS worker and subsequently consideration of a change of placement to a specialist provider.

- 9.1.6. The actions taken did not work effectively to bring all agencies together and to identify a clear lead. Significantly there was also a bereavement in December 2023 which impacted on the whole family and reduced their resilience and coping mechanisms.
- 9.1.7. There is little evidence of formal escalation in this case, meaning that at the time agencies did not recognise that the collective oversight was insufficient. Therefore, the effectiveness of practice was reduced, with a lack of ownership and coordination. For reference, the RSCP has a well-established [Escalation and Resolution Policy](#), which is regularly promoted and reviewed. There is evidence that it is well used by services when it is recognised that there is a challenge with the "system" or "agency" response.
- 9.1.8. There is positive practice seen in this Review in terms of the ongoing safety plan, continued support via the EHCP in school, the recognition that there was risk present, referrals made and the restorative work through the YJTPS towards the end. In particular the ECHP document reflected the range of support that was implemented in school to support Zara.
- 9.1.9. In particular, despite MARFs from school including concerns about emotional abuse and online exploitation, concerns were not managed within the Redbridge multi- agency child sexual exploitation prevention and intervention strategy. Additionally, allegations of emotional abuse that Zara made about her family were not fully explored or understood. We can see concerns raised as early as July 2021 and in the context of ASD, increased difficulties coping in school, increased activity to gain access to devices, poor social interactions and an increasing preoccupation with identity related issues, this should have raised more red flags than it did. To note, examination of Zara's mobile device is still an active investigation with the MPS, but the early indicators are that online exploitation was a significant issue at the time of her death.
- 9.1.10. Additionally, there were increased instances where Zara's parents were reporting that she had expressed suicidal thoughts, either verbally or in her diary. Quite rightly this prompted a re-allocation of a CAMHS practitioner at different times, but it also highlighted times of drift and delay in her risk assessment and care plan.

- 9.1.11. Let us consider the event of Zara's last 48 hours. On 16 April 2024, school were informed via the CAMHS practitioner within the YJTPS that Zara had disclosed that she was making money by completing homework for other students and creating henna designs. As a result, she was asked about this, her bag was checked for fliers, and a phone was discovered in her pocket. Zara was not supposed to have a phone due to previous concern about online safety, and she was asked to hand it over, which she did but refused to say where it had come from. Zara walked away from her mentor and said, *"watch what happens tomorrow"*, she then left the school site and was missing for approximately two hours before her father found her.
- 9.1.12. To set the scene on the statutory duties and responsibilities for schools, the Department for Education (DfE) provides statutory guidance on online safety in schools through documents like "Keeping Children Safe in Education" (KCSIE) and "Teaching Online Safety in Schools". These documents emphasise the importance of embedding online safety in school culture, providing staff training, and teaching children about online safety risks and behaviours. Local school policies and procedures reflect this guidance in turn. For reference, at the time of Zara's death this was KCSIE (2023) and this has since been superseded by KCSIE (2024). It was confirmed by Zara's school that they worked in line with both statutory guidance and their own policies and procedures.
- 9.1.13. In addition, the UKCIS (UK Council for Internet Safety) guidance for schools primarily focuses on online safety education and digital literacy for children and young people. It provides resources and frameworks to help schools develop robust online safety policies and practices, focusing on protecting students from online harms like cyberbullying, sexting, and exposure to harmful content.
- 9.1.14. With reference to Zara, and with regard to the national guidance and its translation into local policy and procedure, this means that schools in England can examine the content of student phones in certain circumstances, based on a "good reason". This includes if there's a reasonable suspicion the phone contains harmful, illegal, or undesirable material, or if it could be used to cause harm, undermine the school environment, or commit an offense.
- 9.1.15. In Zara's case there was not an immediate indication of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) at this stage, but after her phone was found, it was kept because the school mobile device policy requires phones to be kept off and in school bags, and because of the previous harm Zara had been exposed to online. Zara's mother was contacted and said that they (parents) were not aware of Zara having possession of a phone. School report that mother asked them to keep hold of the phone to *"avoid any arguments at home"* whilst they could try and identify where

the phone had come from. Parents report that this caused distress to Zara, and they wanted the phone to be returned the following day. School report that they made plans with parents to review the safety plan together with Zara the following day.

- 9.1.16. On 17 April 2024, Zara disclosed that she had bought the phone from a retail shop in March 2024. School report that Zara was asked for the PIN to her phone as they had decided to check her phone to see if she was keeping herself safe online. The school explained for the purpose of this review that there was a safeguarding concern due to Zara previously emailing strangers, using various apps and sharing her personal details. Zara refused to share the PIN in the morning and again in the afternoon but later unlocked the phone herself. Whilst checking through the phone, the DSL observed nude images and sexually explicit videos on a social media application and the search was stopped. It is observed by school that Zara did not react at the discovery and refused to give any details of who she was in contact with but said that they were “under 18”.
- 9.1.17. The DSL and mentor met with mother and Zara at the end of the school day, and a discussion took place with Zara about why they were worried, to explain that she needed to be kept safe. Zara and her mother were informed that the MPS and Children’s Social Care were to be notified.
- 9.1.18. Views from the school have been sought in terms of how the matter was approached at that meeting and how Zara was spoken with and supported. It is the observation of the school that on 17 April 2024, Zara did not appear to be distressed or upset that the phone had been taken off her, or by what staff saw when she unlocked it. School report that next steps were discussed carefully and in the presence of her mother, she was offered support and was given the opportunity to ask questions. In addition, Zara’s mentor, with whom she had a positive relationship with was present. This was to help Zara understand the reasons why school were worried and had taken the actions they did.
- 9.1.19. Her parents are of the view that if there was a rationale for the phone to be kept and looked at, this could have been managed in a more controlled multi-agency way. In particular, they report that she was distressed on the evening on 17 April about the events of the day and told them that she had been “forced” to unlock the phone.
- 9.1.20. The IR has discovered that the recollections of 16 and 17 April in terms of Zara’s reaction, and in terms of what the parents report they understood of the concerns and plans differ from the school recordings. In particular with the following issues:

- The parents report Zara was upset and distressed on 16 April and 17 April, however the school did not see any evidence of this.
- Zara's parents report that they planned to attend school to look at and collect the phone on 17 April and they were not aware that Zara would be asked for her PIN or to unlock the phone.
- School report that they communicated their plan to Zara's mother on 16 and 17 April.

9.1.21. With reference to the difference of opinion in terms of whether Zara was upset or distressed on 16 and 17 April, the IR has considered her previous emotional reactions to other situations, the fact that she ran away from school on 16 April, and her statement "*watch what happens tomorrow*", and concludes that there was reasonable evidence that Zara was likely to be emotionally affected by the events of the previous day. Additionally, although Zara may not have outwardly shown a reaction to the explicit images being viewed by school staff, on the balance of probabilities she may have been likely to have formed a view on the consequences of the discovery, both from her parents, school and police, and may have been upset, embarrassed and worried (emotions not exhaustive).

9.1.22. The Review finds that the action taken by school to keep the phone on 16 April and subsequently look at the phone on 17 April were within the parameters of school policy and procedure, and statutory guidance to safeguard Zara. However, there could have been a more collaborative safeguarding approach within the system, where parents and wider agencies come together to consider the possibility of harm on the phone, the potential impact on Zara's wellbeing, and the best way of exploring potential risks online in a less immediate or upsetting way for her. This does not mean that Zara should have had her phone returned to her, but that the unlocking and viewing of the contents of the phone may have been managed differently together with other agencies.

9.1.23. Relating to the above point, we have already discovered that previous concerns were not managed within the Redbridge multi-agency child sexual exploitation prevention and intervention strategy and there was an opportunity on 16 and 17 April to escalate the need for that if there was a concern that Zara may not be keeping herself online.

9.1.24. Overall, through the timeframe, there was an absence of a coordinated and joint risk management approach to safeguard and understand Zara despite there being several opportunities to do so. A multi-agency meeting could have been coordinated by any one of the agencies involved, in particular the occasions where MARFs were completed by school and/or CAMHS were at times when concerns had escalated, which would have offered opportunity for agencies to

listen to each other's insights and to understand coherently what was happening at school and at home.

9.1.25. It is noteworthy that there are significant changes in how agencies work together in Redbridge both in terms of family help, and in the CAMHS risk assessment processes. These will be carefully considered in terms of recommendations against the findings above.

Recommendation 1

Through examination of the new practice model (Families First for Children) launched in Redbridge as one of the DfE pathfinders, there is some assurance that the family help teams seek to address deficits in practice such as multiagency working and ensuring a coordinated and coherent approach.

- The RSCP should seek further assurance that the arrangements are clear enough for a child who has multiple complex needs at different times.
- The RSCP should seek assurance that the new model in Redbridge is understood by frontline practitioners from all services and that they understand their role within the practice model.
- The RSCP should design/commission multiagency training on the Lead Professional role.

9.2. Digging deeper- collective professional challenge and application of professional curiosity

Key finding 3:

Despite the increasing types of concerns about Zara (online safety, emotional and mental wellbeing, family relationships and manifestation of behaviours) there was not a thoroughly explored and common understanding of Zara's situation. Decisions were made in the absence of facts and therefore strategies could not be effective.

9.2.1. Articulated in the table ([Appendix 1](#)) are a number of presentations and actions including (not exhaustive):

- Concerns about Zara such as online exploitation, the way she expressed herself in behaviours, allegations that she made about her family and regular concerns about suicidal ideation.

- MARFs that were made to CSC due to a combination of the issues above.
- Concerns that agencies had about how well Zara and her family understood and accepted ASD.
- A requirement for a safety plan that was coordinated by school
- Persistent concerns about how Zara “reacted” or “retaliated” when an incident occurred.
- A serious incident where a knife was taken into school.
- Knowledge that Zara went to great lengths to interact online, including concealing a phone, taking money from her father to buy a phone, using her school account and experiencing distress when she did not have a phone.
- Acknowledgement of the school that they could no longer meet Zara’s needs and were actively exploring a change of placement to a specialist provider.

9.2.2. The process of this review has exposed absence of multiagency working which should have acted as the foundation or linchpin. Therefore, different services all do their own parts of a plan for a child. This also means that different agencies will all have slightly differing views or accounts of a whole situation. For example:

- **Children’s social care** would undertake child and family assessments leading (in Zara’s case) to the offer of early intervention support. On occasions in this case these assessments were undertaken by the child with disability team.
- **Education** would coordinate the EHCP, the support required via that plan and in this case, the safety planning that was done in partnership with parents to manage Zara’s risks e.g. online activity, emotional and mental wellbeing
- **Health** is multi-component and, in this instance, Zara was in receipt of CAMHS services as well as the universal services such as primary care and school nursing. This is how Zara was diagnosed with ASD and subsequently received CAMHS services due to concerns about suicidal ideation and certain behaviours.
- **Police** were involved primarily in response to Zara bringing a knife into school and the Safer Schools Police Officer also had contact with her.
- **The Youth Justice and Targeted Prevention Service** were involved from a voluntary targeted prevention perspective in response to the incident with a knife.

9.2.3. It is easy to see that there were lots of different pieces of information, different perspectives and professional opinions. Thus, as we already explored it is about the interrelationship between sectors in decision making and risk formulation processes. This is how agencies start to piece together a whole situation and explore all of the different elements. This is being collectively professionally curious.

9.2.4. Let us briefly consider what this means. Professional curiosity is where a practitioner seeks to explore and understand what is happening in someone’s life, rather than making assumptions or accepting what they are told at face value. It

involves looking out for signs that things are not right and seeking out the evidence of what is really happening. It is a combination of looking, listening, asking direct questions, checking out and reflecting on all the information you receive.

- 9.2.5. Zara's father reflected on his view that *"no one knew what was going on in Zara's head"*. This is an area that could have been explored more coherently and with greater depth through multi-agency working.
- 9.2.6. Let us consider the different recorded or expressed views, there are opinions expressed such as that Zara's parents didn't accept or understand ASD, there are other views that Zara was happy in school, whereas some accounts say that she was not. There are recorded and verbalised views about parents "lack of engagement" with early intervention services that were offered with a contrasting view that her mother and father express that they were overwhelmed with services, teams and offers of courses that they didn't always understand.
- 9.2.7. In particular there is a view which was supported by parents and school alike that Zara would often respond to stressful or serious situations by retaliating with actions such as making an allegation or stealing or lying. However, there are instances where this was accepted more readily than others. To demonstrate this, Zara made an allegation against a teacher and later retracted what she had said, this situation resulted in a five-day suspension that was briefly paused due to the death of her paternal grandfather. It was generally accepted that Zara had made up these allegations in response to a minor infraction in school. Other examples include times when she made allegations against her parents and brother of emotional abuse such as name calling, physical abuse and an occasion when Zara alleged her father threatened to send her to Bangladesh for an arranged marriage. This was the day before she brought a knife into school on 10 November 2023. Out of all of the things we know Zara reported at different times, we can see that overall, there was a varied formula to understand what was true and what was not and this required a more robust multi agency exploration.
- 9.2.8. To summarise, it enables a practitioner to have a holistic view and understanding of what is happening within a family, what life is like for a child or young person and fully assess potential risks. In contrast, a lack of professional curiosity can lead to missed opportunities to identify less obvious indicators of vulnerability or significant harm.
- 9.2.9. There were a number of times when Zara made allegations about her parents and although the agency records show that parents were often informed, there is a lack of evidence that this was explored together with agencies, the family and Zara. This means that there was not a full exploration and/or assessment of

allegations that Zara made that should have informed an understanding of her experiences and the subsequent interventions that may have been required.

9.2.10. The incident when Zara brought a knife into school offered an opportunity for agencies to really pull together and consider the preceding issues, the whole situation, the family views. There is a general view that Zara brought the knife into school in response to a situation at home where her phone was confiscated and she reported that her father threatened to take her to Bangladesh for an arranged marriage. She initially said she brought the knife to school to harm herself. She later reported that she brought the knife as she was intending to run away, and she wanted to protect herself. We also know that concerns about Zara increased after this time and she had specific anxieties, and although we can see a positive set of interventions offered via school, CAMHS and YJTPS, it did not fundamentally change the multi-agency safeguarding approaches to Zara.

9.2.11. In this case there was an EHCP, a safety plan, MARFs submitted by school, a CAMHS risk assessment plus various processes and assessments being carried out by Police, CAMHS, YJTPS. This review refers to the absence of a WHOLE multiagency plan for the child's future to which everyone is working, including the child, the whole team around the child and the family. An effective plan would include a child's health, education, emotional and behavioural development, identity, family and social relationships and social presentation.

9.2.12. In summary there was not an accurate factually informed understanding of Zara or her family, or a multi-agency plan to support identified needs.

9.2.13. It is timely to consider the overall offer of support to families when a threshold for statutory intervention is not reached. Translating that to Zara's case, this means that her assessments indicated that the level of need and support should be early intervention services.

9.2.14. This Review will highlight a significant shift in Redbridge in terms of its new approaches and will not labour the points already made about the system at the time.

9.2.15. By way of background, significant national reforms to CSC began in 2024 and are set out in [DfE Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive – Breaking down barriers to opportunity, November 2024](#) and the subsequent [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#), currently progressing through Parliament. Some elements of the reforms were tested out in [Families First for Children \(FFC\)](#) "pathfinder" areas and Redbridge is one of those. This means that Redbridge is one of the areas to have already implemented new models of working and their family help hubs were launched in April 2025.

9.2.16. The reforms establish changes which are significant to the findings highlighted thus far in Zara's case such as working in partnership with parents to address difficulties they face, and to keep children and young people safe inside and outside their home, including online harm. Specifically, the principle of the family help model is intended to ensure a lead practitioner would coordinate the assessment of need, the multiagency support and delivery of consistent relationship-based support.

9.2.17. In terms of key findings 1,2 and 3 there is a significant change already implemented in multiagency practice in Redbridge and the recommendations reflect that.

9.3. Understanding the specific risk indicators relating to ASD

Key finding 4:

Whilst there was a great deal of expertise and experience across agencies in working with young people with ASD, the approaches to Zara were not as risk aware as they could have been despite risk indicators being present

9.3.1. Zara received a diagnosis of ASD in 2021 and had experienced related difficulties throughout her school career. Her parents describe their worries about social isolation, Zara's difficulties in maintaining friendships and regulating her behaviour. These observations are all supported by the agencies who knew her.

9.3.2. The agencies involved all voiced that both Zara and her parents struggled to accept the ASD diagnosis and Zara regularly expressed that she wished she was like her peers.

9.3.3. Zara expressed herself through behaviours in school and at home and these sometimes translated as safeguarding concerns due to a number of factors such as worrying online activity. Other behaviours included "defiant" behaviour, missing school, stealing, allegations made about peers, staff and parents. In school Zara had an EHCP and provision of support and mentorship, she also had a safety plan that was frequently reviewed with Zara and her parents. In addition to the EHCP plan, school provided ELSA support.

9.3.4. In the most basic terms, this review finds that for all the reasons outlined in key findings 1,2 and 3 there was not a collective response that reflected a clear understanding that the way Zara behaved provided significant insight into the risk factors that were impacting on her emotional and mental wellbeing, not to

mention the harm she was experiencing (but not recognising) online. In the context of her ASD diagnosis, it was essential for agencies to bring together their expertise, as well as seek to understand Zara's individual nuances to understand risk and to formulate a risk aware response for her needs.

- 9.3.5. As a result of how her behaviours manifested, the IR feels that Zara may have felt like she was in trouble frequently due to school sanctions or actions at home such as isolation internal exclusions and confiscation of equipment. Also referred to multiple times is the pattern that Zara would "react" or "retaliate" when a consequence was applied. It is difficult to get a sense of what Zara understood from this cycle of her outward behaviour and adult based decisions about consequences.
- 9.3.6. We know that agencies frequently expressed that her parents did not understand ASD and therefore this perceived lack of knowledge could have been a risk. Following her diagnosis, services were offered to parents, and some were taken up to gain more understanding of ASD but as the situation escalated this was not revisited. This is relevant because Zara told people that her father and brother called her names relating to her disability. However, as this was not always explored collectively and robustly with her parents this potential risk to her emotional wellbeing was not mitigated.
- 9.3.7. We know that there was a consistent concern about online activity and that Zara was generally thought to be oblivious to the risk associated and that was related to her ASD, but there was not a collective assessment and response and therefore that risk was not mitigated. We have already discussed the multiple MARFs, the absence of escalation or management within the Redbridge multi- agency child sexual exploitation prevention and intervention strategy. In addition, there are references within agency reports to "*risky behaviour*" or Zara "*putting herself at risk*" when in fact there were several red flags in terms of significant online exploitation, and she required a safeguarding response.
- 9.3.8. According to the National Autistic Society being autistic increases the risk of online exploitation.ⁱ This was a significant issue for Zara as she found social media to be the least anxiety provoking means of social communication due to difficulties she experienced within social relationships. Therefore, ASD created a specific risk of harm. The concerns about her online activity, and the loss she felt when she did not have access to social media could have formed a significant safeguarding response and multiagency safety plan and interventions to keep her safe. Zara's father reflects that removal of her phone and banning her from social media was not the solution and in fact posed a risk of a significant reaction. He feels that her response to having her phone confiscated in November 2023 should have

informed future actions such as removal and search of her phone in the 48 hours prior to her death. The school believe that the incident in November 2023 was also due to her home situation, namely emotional abuse and the incident where Zara reported that her father threatened to send her to Bangladesh for an arranged marriage thus prompting school to make a MARF.

9.3.9. We know that there was a consistent concern about her emotional and mental wellbeing with frequent expressions of suicidal ideation. Zara's mother informed different professionals of her concerns on multiple occasions. There was some drift in the CAMHS service from October 2022 to November 2023 in terms of follow-up and risk assessment, however Zara was re-allocated a practitioner following the incident with the knife in November 2023.

9.3.10. This assessment explored concerns and risks regarding Zara's physical health, emotional dysregulation, and anxiety, which were noted to be predisposing factors related to her ASD. However, the assessment did not reflect the common risks of suicide among young people with ASD, indicated in the [National Suicide Prevention Strategy for England \(2023- 2028\)](#) , the Redbridge suicide prevention strategy (2023-2028) and the NELFT suicide prevention strategy (2021-2024). In terms of the local strategy Zara's presentation had high risk indicators in view of the following factors:

- Emotional Abuse described by Zara from father and younger sibling
- Bullying (physical and virtual)
- Academic pressures, especially related to exams
- Body image "imperfections", and sexual identity problems

9.3.11. Given Zara's ASD diagnosis, the repeated reports of suicidal ideation and low mood and her physical health diagnosis of hyperthyroidism, which can also impact on mental health it would have been pertinent to arrange an assessment with the CAMHS medical team.

9.3.12. To summarise, despite the number of professionals involved, the specific risk indicators, the ECHP and the school's safety plan, the multiagency response taken in the timeframe of this review were largely reactive and not informed by a risk aware response to what was known of Zara as an autistic child.

Recommendation 2

Safeguarding partners should seek to strengthen their arrangements for how well ASD is understood and planned for across the RSCP. This should include learning activity to enhance practitioners' knowledge of the unique nature of ASD, to be alert to specific area of risk such as online exploitation and emotional and mental wellbeing.

- The RSCP should explore the development of an integrated neuro-developmental toolkit to aid practitioners in practice.
- The RSCP should explore the role of ASD advocates within their arrangements

9.4. The voice and daily lived experience of Zara

Key finding 5:

The way Zara behaved was often seen as a problem rather than a form of communication. The way agencies worked together, communicated and shared information about Zara should have informed a more robust understating of Zara's life experiences.

- 9.4.1. Listening to and capturing the voice of the child is essential for effective safeguarding practice. It helps professionals to understand children's lived experiences, hear their views about their lives and circumstances, and take effective action to support or safeguard them. However, case reviews highlight that professionals often face challenges around hearing and acting upon what children are telling them.
- 9.4.2. As Autism is a spectrum condition, is important to note that that people's individual experience of autism differs. The presentation of autism can vary significantly from person to person, and each individual will have varying support needs, with some autistic people requiring full time care and others, whose disability may be hidden, seemingly able to live independent lives.ⁱⁱ
- 9.4.3. On that basis, having knowledge about autism didn't necessarily mean an automatic understanding of Zara, what her life was like, or what she understood or interpreted. Organisational and partnership policies, procedures and protocol of course must be applied but perhaps they didn't always work for Zara's unique needs – one size doesn't always fit all for an autistic child.

- 9.4.4. With any child and particularly a child with autism, “behavioural problems” are a form of communication. Largely because she spent the majority of her week in school, the set of behaviours tended to manifest themselves in that environment. In terms of the difficulties Zara encountered in the school environment it is likely that she used different behaviours to gain control of situations that she was struggling with such as trying to sustain friendships and impress peers.
- 9.4.5. It was difficult to gain a sense of Zara’s view of her world from agency reports and conversations. Often there was a focus on behaviours or incidents, however practitioners who knew Zara well spoke very fondly about her. Her vivacious and chatty personality was described, her enthusiasm for specific things and some of her plans for the future came across as well as her anxieties. In the latter stage of the timeframe, we start to see that she was talking about some very specific anxieties and insecurities about image and these included the way she looked, her culture, religion and gender. We have also identified that all of these issues could have been explored through a robust multiagency plan.
- 9.4.6. Her family describe a happy little girl in her early years who enjoyed being with her cousins and they recounted many fond memories of days out and birthdays. They also described their constant worry for her which started in primary school when they realised she was struggling with friendships and the general school environment. They described the things she enjoyed such as arts and crafts and reading and how particular she was with her presentation and handwriting. What is apparent from family and professionals is that she found the high school environment stressful. She struggled with the noise, the lights, the rules and restrictions as well as friendships and social interactions. Zara’s father feels very traumatised when he recalls her experiences and considers how she must have frequently felt. In contrast, school report that Zara loved school and there is evidence of positive relationships with some school staff.
- 9.4.7. Her teachers report that she worked hard in her lessons, and she particularly liked her health and social care course. She willingly talked to staff and engaged with them regularly. She worked hard with the staff who were allocated to support her, and she shared anxieties such as her mixed feelings about her heritage including when she reported that she wanted to be “white”, and when she said she didn’t want to be Muslim, she wanted to be Christian. She expressed other internal challenges such as feeling limited by her gender, she wanted to have a successful future but felt that because she was a girl this would restrict her.
- 9.4.8. We have already found that the various reports and ways she expressed herself were not explored collectively by the agencies therefore there was never a whole, or helicopter view of all of the different things that Zara told people. It is interesting

that her YJTPS practitioner reports that Zara was reluctant for information to be shared with school because she felt that the school would say “horrible things” about her. School report that they were not aware that Zara felt this way and this adds credence to the importance of multiagency working to enable meaningful and collective sharing of information to inform a plan.

- 9.4.9. Zara tended to be very trusting and when there was consistency, practitioners were able to build a good rapport with her. She responded well to her school mentor and to the YJTPS Practitioner who spent time with the whole family. It was acknowledged by the Panel and practitioners that there was inconsistency of workers, and this was unsettling for Zara. Her relationship with adults varied and it appears that regular and consistent contact was more meaningful for her.
- 9.4.10. Her family report that she placed great importance on the relationships with key workers, mentors and so on and so forth, so much so that she referred to some people as her “friends”. Her father described an incident shortly prior to her death when there was an outing planned with a practitioner to a local fast food restaurant. Zara had been looking forward to it and had planned her outfit and her make-up. Unfortunately, the visit did not go ahead as planned and Zara was taken for a walk instead. This may sound insignificant but as her father explained, decisions and issues that may seem commonplace or “no big deal” to others, were very important for Zara.
- 9.4.11. Zara was a child who would openly speak to people who worked with her, and she is reported to have had a positive relationship with her mentor and key worker in school. The school documents reflect that she talked with her mentor about how she was feeling and the challenges she was experiencing at school and at home. Zara is recorded to have shared notes and letters with her mentor commenting on how much she cared for her. Evidenced are times where the mentor would help Zara managing her menstrual period which is a matter to be handled with sensitivity. The mentor also regularly talked to mother and felt that this reflected a good relationship.
- 9.4.12. The Review has talked about the incident in November 2023 when Zara brought a knife into school after her parent has confiscated her phone. She also told school that her father threatened to take her to Bangladesh for an arranged marriage, this was discussed with her mother who told school that it had been said during an argument but was not meant. There followed a plethora of activity including referral to CSC and CAMHS, police involvement, these actions were an appropriate response to the incident and to the allegation. .

- 9.4.13. Zara's parents express that following this incident Zara felt out of control, frightened and rejected. This of course was not the intention of any agency however we do know that Zara was frightened about the police involvement and did not understand the reason for their involvement, this is referenced several times. Zara's parents were also fearful of the repercussions of police involvement and actions. It appears that the impact of the perceived "threat" of police action may not have been understood by agencies and could have been managed and communicated in a timelier and more controlled way.
- 9.4.14. There were a number of incidents in school which resulted in a five day period in the reflection room, during which time her grandfather died. To note, this sanction was paused, and it is recorded within school records that Zara was offered bereavement support which was declined. Parents do not recall this offer of support.
- 9.4.15. Shortly after this, school started to explore a move to a specialist education provider because they were of the view Zara required greater support, and the transfer would have assisted her in planning for her future after high school. Zara and her parents were not in support of this course of action.
- 9.4.16. November 2023 and the months that followed offered significant opportunity for her voice to be heard, listened to carefully and a plan put into place. This does not mean that individually people did not listen to her, this refers to the overarching multiagency approach. The reviewer has examined this incident, other incidents and responses and concludes that Zara's own perceptions of her daily life were not always at the centre of decision making about her. We will not repeat the findings around practice models, multi-agency working and professional curiosity, but we can say that if all those things had been in place and a robust multiagency trauma informed plan had been in place for Zara it may have changed subsequent responses and actions.
- 9.4.17. Research suggests that a relational-based practice model should be used with young people within the framework of a trauma informed approach. A trauma informed approach understands, recognises and responds to the effects of all types of trauma and central to this approach is relationship centred practice which provides an opportunity to support children and adults in forming and sustaining quality relationships.ⁱⁱⁱ In Zara's case her parents and some agencies that worked with her such as the YJTPS and CAMHS express that there was a cumulative trauma from her experiences of high school, her understanding of serious safeguarding incidents, her confusion about identity, her acceptance of ASD, her disclosures about her family life and her fear of the consequences of taking the knife into school.

- 9.4.18. The evidence that Zara's voice influenced the way services worked with her is not as clear as it could be. In particular the way she expressed herself through behaviours, and the challenges she voiced in terms of identity, culture and gender should have influenced overall approaches.

Recommendation 3

The RSCP should consider the extent to which a child's unique needs influence decisions about the allocation of professionals working with them. In addition, the RSCP should issue practice guidance and review its offer on delivering local multi-agency training aimed at understanding and listening to the experiences of children.

9.5. Compassionate understanding of family dynamics

Key finding 6:

There were assumptions and judgements made about the family that were not explored or balanced out by fact. There was opportunity to explore the family's experiences, gain valuable insight into their views and apply whole family support.

- 9.5.1. Time spent with family provided a very personal insight into their homelife and how that changed over the last five years of Zara's life. Coming to terms with a diagnosis of ASD, sometimes feeling judged and criticised, fearful for your child's future and navigating the daily difficulties in the right way is undoubtedly a challenge. It is emotionally very challenging and dealing with bias or judgement from peers, relatives, professionals and even the general public is especially difficult. No child comes with a handbook and especially not a child with neurodiversity.
- 9.5.2. Zara's parents acknowledge all these difficulties and understood that she needed additional support and that they too needed support. However, as described by them, their experience is that they felt overwhelmed by services offered, they didn't always know what the services were, and they didn't feel as consulted with as they might have liked. How can parents who have little experience of the health and social care system be reasonably expected to understand the complexities and nuances of services? Certainly, they were told certain things and kept up to date with day-to-day issues and referrals. However, they didn't get a sense that their views and well as Zara's were integral to any planning. This may be reflected in the

instances outlined in this report when they have a different understanding or perception of an incident or situation than that of the agency

- 9.5.3. The family also expressed that the death of paternal grandfather had a profound impact on the family and came at a time that Zara was particularly distressed with events. It also reduced their resilience in managing Zara and dealing with professionals. This raises the question of whether anyone stopped to have a kind and compassionate conversation with parents about how difficult it is to parent a child with autism and what life might be like for them.
- 9.5.4. The challenges that parents of children with autism face are not well researched, however one such study identified a recurring theme that parents felt judged by other adults, this included professionals and members of the public.^{iv}
- 9.5.5. There are references within the agency information and taken from practitioner conversations about parents “not engaging” with early intervention services. There is a recorded comment that father had asked if there was a “tablet to fix it” [ASD], and there was a perception that mother was more involved than father. There are also the allegations that Zara frequently made about name calling and physical abuse at home as well as the instance where she reported that her father had threatened to take her to Bangladesh for an arranged marriage. From exploring the information available, there is an absence of through exploration of these themes as a multiagency safeguarding system through professional curiosity and courageous conversations with parents.
- 9.5.6. There is the fact that Zara’s parents were faced with a set of circumstances that they did not know how to deal with, understanding her was as hard for parents as it was for professionals and they struggled to know what do for the best, to have the right boundaries and to help Zara in the best possible way.
- 9.5.7. In general terms, instead of simply stating or deciding that parents “won’t engage”, consideration of the barriers to engagement are more helpful. These barriers may include concerns about interference with family life, shame or embarrassment or feeling overwhelmed by services they may not understand. This can lead to assumptions about families without considering whether they understood what they needed to do, what a plan meant for their child, for example the safety plan and risk, or the EHCP, and what support they needed to achieve the agreed outcomes.
- 9.5.8. The NSPCC (2025) outlines crucial components for agencies to strengthen approaches which mirror the findings in this case, such as professional curiosity and reflective thinking, good training and support for professionals, making good

assessments, robust multiagency collaboration and information sharing, building relationships and engaging with parents, and being child centred.^v

9.5.9. Ludlow et al (2012)^{vi} found that professionals and service provider blame included three distinct expressions:

- Poor parenting accusations or criticisms
- Professional disbelief of or not listening to parents
- Accusations of abuse

9.5.10. Parents being repeatedly judged or blamed for behaviours has resulted in parents blaming themselves and often seeking a cure, rather than inclusion and acceptance.^{vii} A BBC news article draws attention to parents of autistic children being referred inappropriately to parenting courses to help parents manage their autistic children's behaviour. The article attributes these referrals to poor professional understanding about autistic presentation. Parents interviewed for the report described being fearful that their parenting and their children will be misunderstood.^{viii} This draws parallels with the reflections of Zara's parents, and the views of the parents that have been recorded and expressed by agencies.

9.5.11. There is evidence of multiple occasions where parents shared information, raised concerns, reported the knife incident, contacted school and tried to implement boundaries and consequences. Enthusiastically working in partnership with parents should be a commitment from all health, social care and education providers. The review finds that there was disparity with parents sitting on one side of the (metaphorical) room and agencies on the other. Giving information to parents is not the same as meaningfully seeking to explore their understanding of a given situation.

9.5.12. Parents of autistic children and young people frequently feel their parenting ability is called into question by professionals particularly when their child presents with behaviour that is disruptive or that others find challenging. The perception is, that it is the parents who have caused the undesirable behaviour and that parents can change their child's behaviour through the use of parenting strategies.^{ix} Parents describe how these strategies often don't work for their autistic children and in some cases do more harm than good.

9.5.13. Father put forward examples of this in terms of the sanctions that were applied in school which he believed Zara didn't always understand. He also reflects that the strategy to keep Zara safe by banning access to social media and taking away her phone/devices caused emotional harm and trauma to Zara and in hindsight he would not have taken this action.

- 9.5.14. This brings us to consideration of how well services included both parents. Mother was generally the point of contact because she was more available during the working day. Hidden men and invisible fathers are terms frequently used in response to the idea that male caregivers in a child's life can sometimes be excluded from services or overlooked by professionals working with children and their families.
- 9.5.15. Learning has been identified nationally about the requirement for meaningful involvement with fathers by professionals working with children. Analysis of case reviews found that services relied on the mother to provide information on their child's life, when there were male caregivers with knowledge or concerns to share.^x
- 9.5.16. In Zara's case there is mixed evidence that agencies worked with father in a significant way. Exploration of this may have provided good insight into Zara's experiences and may have yielded information to inform the right support for the family as a whole.
- 9.5.17. The RSCP, alongside the Redbridge Safeguarding Adult Board (RSAB) is promoting the 'Think Family' approach which has been a theme of learning from recent Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs). Consideration is due to be given in 2025 – 2026 to the development of a 'model' and the RSCP is already delivering briefings on 'Think Family'.
- 9.5.18. There is not an absence of specialist services in Redbridge to work with autistic children and their families. However, as a whole system, services historically have not been specifically designed to support neurodiversity. As the numbers of autistic people increase through better awareness and diagnosis, services need to shift their design to address a broader range of approaches.

Recommendation 4

The RSCP should develop a toolkit or resource to encourage non-judgemental and collaborative approaches which are designed to meet the needs of autistic people and work in supportive ways with them and their families.

It is recommended that the RSCP applies the learning from this review to its consideration of the "Think Family" approach which works to safeguard and support the whole family.

10) Progress against areas of learning

- 10.1. Throughout the process of this Review new ways of working have already been implemented against some of the key findings.

- 10.2. **Escalation:** The RSCP has an [Escalation and Resolution Policy](#) which is reported to be well embedded and used by services. In this case the learning is around the recognition that escalation may have been beneficial.
- 10.3. **Families First for children pathfinder programme – family help teams:** Redbridge is bringing together its early help and statutory services to deliver on the Pathfinders' objectives, through five new Family Help teams
- 10.4. **CAMHS risk model: Transition to New Risk Model:** NELFT have moved away from a traditional risk management model (Risk Stratification), where risks are categorised as low, medium, or high. Instead, they are adopting a more person-centred approach known as risk formulation. This new approach emphasises a holistic, individualised assessment of risk, taking into account how risks are influenced by a person's unique life experiences and circumstances. The focus will be on a more nuanced and individualised risk assessment, formulation, and safety planning model. This shift reflects an understanding that risk is not static and that it varies over time based on a person's experiences.
- 10.5. **Responses to missing episodes–** MPS have undertaken a London wide review of "missing" responses and will be implementing local missing hubs (LMH) from June 2025. This development is in response to the recommendations made by His Majesty's Inspectorate Constabulary Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The ambition is to provide more missing officers, specialist training and better access to the MPS proactive tools and tactics.

11) Conclusions

- 11.1. There is learning within this case about the important of all agencies contributing to a multiagency plan and applying their knowledge, experience and expertise together to formulate a good understanding of risk. This should be underpinned by the child's own voice and in partnership with the parents. There is also learning about recognising the time to use escalation processes when one or more agencies feel that a situation is not improving the experiences of a child.
- 11.2. Throughout the timeframe of this review there is evidence of multiple interventions and efforts of agencies to work with Zara, however the way that help was planned and delivered did little to improve Zara's circumstance. Conversely as the situation escalated, the approaches to Zara were more fragmented, her level of comprehension was not known, and her parents were not brought into a supportive fold. Overall, the multiagency practice, coordination and depth of understanding of Zara was not as evident as it should have been. As a result,

single agency decisions were made that were not risk aware and the safeguarding responses to concerns about emotional and mental wellbeing, emotional abuse and online exploitation were not coherent or collaborative enough.

- 11.2 Zara was a 15-year-old who had future aspirations, she wanted to be happy and healthy and to have a job and relationships. It is not possible to conclude without hindsight bias whether Zara's outcome would have been different but certainly her experiences and views of the world around her could and should have been more positive.
- 11.3 There are four recommendations made to the Partnership where assurance is required, or developments indicated. The purpose of providing recommendations is to ensure that the Partnership are confident that any areas identified as being of particular concern are addressed.

12) Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Through examination of the new practice model (Families First for Children) launched in Redbridge, there is some assurance that the family help teams seek to address deficits in practice such as multiagency working and ensuring a coordinated and coherent approach.

- The RSCP should seek further assurance that the arrangements are clear enough for a child who has multiple complex needs at different times.
- The RSCP should seek assurance that the new model in Redbridge is understood by frontline practitioners from all services and that they understand their role within the practice model.
- The RSCP should design/commission multiagency training on the Lead Professional role.

Recommendation 2

Safeguarding partners should seek to strengthen their arrangements for how well ASD is understood and planned for across the RSCP. This should include learning activity to enhance practitioners' knowledge of the unique nature of ASD, to be alert to specific area of risk such as online exploitation and emotional and mental wellbeing.

- The RSCP should explore the development of an integrated neuro-developmental toolkit to aid practitioners in practice.
- The RSCP should explore the role of ASD advocates within their arrangements

Recommendation 3

The RSCP should consider the extent to which a child's unique needs influence decisions about the allocation of professionals working with them. In addition, the RSCP should issue practice guidance and review its offer on delivering local multi-agency training aimed at understanding and listening to the experiences of children.

Recommendation 4

The RSCP should develop a toolkit or resource to encourage non-judgemental and collaborative approaches which are designed to meet the needs of autistic people and work in supportive ways with them and their families.

It is recommended that the RSCP applies the learning from this review to its consideration of the "Think Family" approach which works to safeguard and support the whole family.

APPENDIX 1: EPISODES, SUMMARY OF SERVICE INVOLVEMENT AND PRIMARY CONCERNS

Primary concerns:	MARFs (within last two years):	Recorded meetings:	Recorded activity:
Suicidal ideation recorded from 2022: February 2022 Zara was taken to the ED at BHRUT due to expressing suicidal thoughts. September 2022 Zara disclosed that she had suicidal thoughts and had been thinking of saving up tablets. Her safety plan updated to ensure medication was locked away at home. October 2022 Zara's mother found a suicide note and informed the school, advice was sought from CAMHS and it was recommended that Zara attend A&E Early November 2023 Zara expressed suicidal thoughts during a significant incident where she had taken a knife into school. Late November 2023 Zara told staff in school that she'd had suicidal thoughts during the previous week and cited bullying as the reason. February 2024 Zara disclosed suicidal through to her Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) mentor in school and stated she was very anxious about a police interview regarding the knife incident in Nov 2023. Family relationships: There are specific dates where action was taken by agencies to make referrals to Children's Services and other agencies, however there is a consistent theme throughout the agency information that Zara would tell professionals that she was unhappy at home, she made some specific allegations of emotional abuse including name calling relating to her diagnosis of ASD. Zara also made allegations of physical abuse relating to her parents. Online Safety: September 2023 School inform mother that Zara has sent "inappropriate emails" to three unknown people. She has shared "provocative" images of an unknown female and had received images of teenage boys. A MARF was completed by school. September 2023 SEATTS commence a course of mentoring sessions to focus on online safety as well as other things. October 2023 Mentoring sessions were held with Zara's mentor focusing on online safety. November 2023 Zara told a TA that she has a 41-year-old boyfriend online. Parents report that she has no phone or access to device at home. She is found to have a phone three days later which was confiscated by parents. Late November 2023 CAMHS record that there are issues with online safety.	February 2022 Referral made from BHRUT after attending ED with suicidal ideation. July 2022 Referral made from CAMHS due to concern about social relationships in school, and family relationships at home. Zara had disclosed that her father and brother had been calling her names. November 2022 Referral made by school after Zara alleged that her father was calling her names and had punched her leg and grabbed her brother by the neck. A CAFA was completed by the CWD team and a referral made to the Early Help team. September 2023 School make referral due to concerns about online activity. Zara had sent "inappropriate" emails via her school email account to unknown people. She had shared "provocative images" of an unknown female and received images of a male in return. This was referred on to the CWD and Targeted Youth Team. 10 November 2023 School make referral after Zara brought a knife into school. Mother had noticed a knife missing and informed school. Zara reported that she had brought the knife to harm herself after her father threatened to send her to Bangladesh for an arranged marriage. Zara's mother informed school that the comment had been made but not intended. School requested in the MAFA that alternative arrangements could be	- February 2022- meeting held in school with mother and father about Zara's suicidal ideation and problems in school. - May 2022- reintegration meeting in school - July 2022- reintegration meeting in school - August 2022- Professionals meeting between Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service (EWMHS)/CAMHS and school. - September 2022- professionals meeting between EWMHS and school to discuss "<i>risk taking behaviour</i>" and difficulties with friendships. - October 2022- professionals meeting between school and EWMHS. - November 2022- Parents meet with school after Zara made allegations that father has punched her leg and called her names. Parents inform school that Zara had her Nintendo Switch confiscated and was upset with father. MARF had been done. - March 2023- annual EHCP meeting - September 2023- meeting between school and mother due to concerns about online activity. MARF had been done. - 3 November 2023- reintegration meeting between school and mum after internal suspension. - 10 November 2023- meeting with school and mother after the incident with the knife. MARF had been done. - 29 November 2023- Specialist Education and Training Support Service (SEATTS) review meeting with mentor and key worker at school. - 12th December 2023- reintegration meeting - 13 December 2023- meeting between mother, Headteacher, Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) after an	School Safety planning: A safety plan was put into place as early as March 2021 in school. This was reviewed in school and shared with parents and EWMHS/CAMHS. The safety plan was reviewed and updated 21 times between March 2021 and March 2024. CAMHS activity: Episode 1: Zara became known to the service in 2020 due to increasing issues with behaviour and social interactions. She was diagnosed with ASD in September 2021 and discharged in December 2021. Episode 2: Zara was assessed by CAMHS in February 2022 after her mother took her to the ED due to expressing suicidal thoughts. A risk assessment was completed at this point as "low". From October 2022 to July 2023 there was no direct work with Zara. Episode 3: From July 2023 Zara was referred back to CAMHS due to escalating concerns about behaviour and increased episodes of suicidal ideation. Zara was allocated a CAMHS practitioner following the incident with the knife. Her risk assessment was reviewed as "medium" initially, and reassessed as "low" in December 2023, and she commenced a programme of 10 brief interventions sessions. Zara attended 8 of the sessions and was

December 2023 School implemented a risk assessment regarding online safety. Concerns were also raised as part of the School’s EHCP support request for Zara. January 2024 School met with the YJTPS practitioner to discuss its concerns including over online safety. 17th April 2024 Zara is found to have a phone in school which, when unlocked raises significant concern about online sexual exploitation after Zara is seen to have shared images of herself. How Zara expressed herself: There is a consistent theme throughout the agency information of Zara displaying concerning behaviours at school. Zara had difficulties at school in terms of social interactions and is described to often “retaliate” if she was stressed or felt that injustice had been done to her. This is supported by family who describe examples from early years onwards. These behavioural presentations include: - Unauthorised absence from lessons/school - Shoplifting - Allegations about people (school staff, parents, other students) some of which are later retracted - Difficulty in maintaining friendships - Online activity “<i>Defiant</i>” and “<i>threatening</i>” behaviour towards school staff - Instances of homophobic comments towards other students - Zara expressed unhappiness about a number of identity related issues including gender, religion and culture	made for Zara over the weekend however this was not able to be accommodated. The Safer Schools Police officer was informed and a subsequent referral to the YJTPS A CAFA was completed resulting in a referral to early Intervention for targeted work with parents. 17 November 2023 Referral from CAMHS after case discussion with the NELFT safeguarding team. Concern raised that Zara had gone missing for 1.5 hours after school after the incident with the knife. 18 April 2024 A referral is made by school after Zara was found the previous day to have a phone in school and upon unlocking the phone, explicit images were observed on a social media platform. Police were also informed. This referral was made prior to Zara being noted as missing.	incident where a note had been found stating that a member of staff is a “paedophile”, Zara has also shared a 2-year-old online petition about the teacher. Zara admitted these actions and stated that she had not experienced any abuse from the teacher but that the teacher had reprimanded her about her uniform. She also stated that other students told her that there has been abuse, school were not able to identify the other students. This meeting advised mother that the school were exploring the option of moving Zara to a different school (a specialist provider) due to escalating behaviour and challenges in supporting her needs in the current environment. - 12 January 2024- meeting between school and YJTPS practitioner. - 19 January 2024- EHCP meeting between SEATTS and Special Educational Need Co-ordinator (SENCO). - 23 January 2024- EHCP review meeting - 9 February 2024- meeting in school with Zara, Safer Schools Police Officer and SENCO to discuss the incident with the knife. - 17 April 2024 – Meeting after school with mother and Zara. She was found to have a phone the previous day on which explicit images were observed. MARF had been done and Police informed. In addition to these meetings there are multiple telephone conversations recorded between CAMHS, School, parents and children’s services at different times.	closed to the brief intervention team in February 2024. Episode 4: From February 2024 to the time of her death Zara was open to the CAMHS service within the YJTPS and was seen on four occasions. Note: Zara was never referred to the CAMHS medical (psychiatry) team. Services involved in timeframe: - School - ELSA (school) - Key worker and mentor (school) - Education Psychologist - SENCO (school) - ELSA mentoring (school) - SEATTS (EHCP service) - TA support (school) - Children’s Services (social worker and family early help) - School Nurse - CAMHS - YJTPS practitioner - CAMHS within YJTPS - MPS (Safer Schools Officer)
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ⁱ [Autism and the internet: risks and benefits](#)

ⁱⁱ [autism-and-parental-blame-literature-review-final-version-feb-2024.pdf](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Trauma-informed responses in relationship-based practice D. Taggart Research in Practice 2018

^{iv} Challenges faced by parents of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (Ludlow, Skelly, Rohleder 2012)

^v [‘Disguised compliance’: learning from case reviews](#)

^{vi} Challenges faced by parents of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (Ludlow, Skelly, Rohleder 2012)

^{vii} Waltz, M.M., 2015. Mothers and autism: the evolution of a discourse of blame. *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 17(4), pp.353-358. doi:10.1001/journalofethics.2015.17.4.mhst1-1504

^{viii} Rees, J., 2017. ‘Parents ‘blamed’ for children with autism’s behaviour’. BBC. [online]: Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-40717652>

^{ix} Mitra, B., 2022. It’s not Autism. It’s Your Parenting. An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Relationships Between Professionals and Parents of an Autistic Child in the UK. *OUGHT: The journal of autistic culture*, 3(2), p.6. doi:10.9707/2833-1508.1091

^x [Unseen men: learning from case reviews | NSPCC Learning](#)