

Statement by Hilary Thompson, Chairman of the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board

The Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board, comprised of all relevant agencies, would like to take this opportunity to express its sadness and sympathy at the tragic death of Khyra Ishaq.

Junaid Abuhamza and Angela Gordon have today been convicted for the killing of Khyra. It has taken two years for those responsible to be brought to justice.

During this time the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board have sought assurance that all agencies have been diligently focused on addressing any shortcomings and improving child protection systems.

Khyra Ishaq sadly died nearly two years ago and at that time agencies took immediate steps to ensure the safety and welfare of other children in the household.

The Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board then commissioned an independent Serious Case Review to maximise the opportunity for professionals to analysis practice and learn from this tragic case. Serious Case Reviews are not inquiries into how a child died or who is culpable.

These are matters for the coroners and criminal court, respectively to determine. The independent review has brought about major changes to operational practice and has sought to strengthen how agencies work together to protect Birmingham's children.

Now that the court case is over, we will begin to share with the public the issues of concern and the improvements we have made – something we were not able to do before.

Firstly, following Khyra's death, we immediately reviewed our procedures for home education. We also reviewed all the cases where children were being home educated.

Our findings informed our submission to the Government's National Review of Home Education and we will continue to work with the Government to ensure that children who are home educated are also being kept safe.

It is our view that the key authorities involved in the education and protection of children are hampered in their efforts by current legislation.

We also reviewed professional practices to strengthen the mechanisms by which all the safeguarding agencies share information, for what in instances may be viewed as low level concerns.

We have given a clear undertaking that as soon as the Serious Case Review has been completed we will be sharing with the public the executive summary, which details the key findings, on our website. The Serious Case Review can now be progressed and concluded as the trial has ended and learning from the court case can be included.

It is of serious concern that the police investigation identified at least 30 individuals out of a potential 90 witnesses scheduled to be called to give evidence against Khyra's killers who could have intervened and made a difference. It is alarming because it was clear to us that many people in the community had concerns but did not feel able to share them with the many agencies that are there to help.

The Government's Department for Children, Schools and Families recognises the important role of everyone in the community in keeping children safe. It is something that is promoted under the banner: 'Safeguarding is Everybody's Business'.

Getting this message across to the people of Birmingham is vitally important – and particularly difficult in a city where there are dozens of different cultural groups, speaking more than 50 languages.

With the court case now over, we plan to launch our own campaign to enlist the support of the many diverse communities in the city to help us to protect Birmingham's children. We can all work together to help protect children.

We are also keen to enlist the support of the media in promoting this high-profile campaign designed to ensure that local people contact the police, children's social care or voluntary agencies if they suspect a child in their neighbourhood is being neglected or abused.

Hilary Thompson says "Having taken up post as the independent Chair of the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board I am committed to working to improve child protection arrangements in Birmingham and learning lessons from such tragic events".

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