

Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board: PRESS RELEASE

Review recommends improvements following death of Somerset resident

A series of recommendations have been in a report commissioned by the Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB) following the death of a Somerset of a resident in 2015.

These recommendations are shared today (31/03/2021) in a report that documents events leading up to Damien's (pseudonym), death in hospital in July 2015. Damien had been discharged from an acute mental health ward to a residential care home two weeks prior to his death.

Damien had diagnoses of Asperger's Syndrome and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). He had a learning difficulty, misused a variety of substances, and his vulnerability was exploited by others who stole from him and misused his home for their own purposes. Trying to meet the dual requirements of protecting both the public and Damien from harm, at the same time as allowing him to live his own life with as few restrictions as possible, tested services in Somerset. In the last fifteen months of his life he was detained under Section 2 of the Mental Health Act on three occasions.

While this report relates to events in 2015, it highlights the way organisations could have worked together better to support Damien, and makes various recommendations for the Board to ensure that the learning from this case is embedded in working practices, including:

- That the Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board seeks assurance from Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset West and Taunton District Council, South Somerset District Council, and Somerset County Council that there is a shared commitment to joint action across local government, health, social care and housing sectors in Somerset to support the needs of adults with autism.
- Written guidance is produced, or where already available reviewed, by Somerset County Council and Somerset NHS Somerset Foundation Trust for use by all staff tasked with finding appropriate accommodation for people with complex needs, and the required content of care plans in circumstances when an adult moves between different services.
- That decision-making processes for commissioning services for individual adults are reviewed by Somerset County Council, and Somerset NHS Foundation Trust to ensure that they produce timely decisions, and that the process is shared with the person themselves and, where applicable and appropriate, those who are important to them

- That all organisations involved in providing care and support to Damien ensure that Mental Capacity Act training of their staff addresses the influence of coercion and exploitation on people with complex needs, and that quality monitoring processes are used to test that it is being addressed in practice.
- All organisations involved in the care of Damien should review their risk assessment processes, and the training that their staff undertake in respect of risk assessment and management, to ensure that it addresses the issues identified in this review.

The learning from the review will be shared with all partners of the Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board, and also within national networks.

Keith Perkin, Independent Chair of the SSAB said:

“My first thoughts are with Damien’s family whose pain around his death will not have diminished over the 6 years since his untimely death. I would like to pay tribute in their tireless commitment in ensuring the learning from this tragic time in their lives will help others.

The Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board’s principle aim is to protect vulnerable people, and to make sure lessons are learned so that necessary improvements can be made. The events leading up to Damien’s death have highlighted that further work is required to ensure that people with autism are supported in the right way for them as individuals, and have access to accommodation in the community that does not increase their vulnerability. I am pleased to see that the organisations involved were open to these improvements, lessons have been learned, and I have committed to work with Damien’s family to ensure that the necessary changes are embedded and that the learning from his death will not be forgotten.”

The Safeguarding Somerset Adults Board is made up of all the organisations which have a role in preventing the neglect and abuse of adults, including: Somerset County Council, NHS Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group, Avon & Somerset Constabulary, Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset West and Taunton District Council, South Somerset District Council, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, Yeovil Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, National Probation Service, Registered Care Provider Association and Healthwatch Somerset.

For more information about the SSAB and a copy of the report visit www.ssab.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk

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Notes to editors