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Background:

Bella is 26 years old. She is a very creative person who also has a love for animals and keeping fit. Bella has epilepsy, a brain injury, complex mental health needs and is autistic. Bella lives in supportive living accommodation with 24-hour support. She is very close to her family, especially her mother. Bella has received support from several organisations within Cheshire East including the local authority, mental health, housing, GP, hospital trusts, police and ambulance service. Plus, services out of area including mental health trusts, hospital trusts, a Private Health setting and British Transport Police. Bella's complex case includes incidents of self-harm, mental health crisis, risk taking behaviours and challenges associated with cross-border care provision. Bella's mental health declined in 2023 and in January 2024, she was missing from home on different occasions, each time, she was found near to train tracks. Sadly, in January 2024, Bella sustained life changing injuries when she was struck by a train. A Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) was initiated under Section 44 of the Care Act 2014 following this incident involving Bella, who meets the definition of an adult at risk under the Care Act 2014. The purpose of the SAR was to identify lessons for multi-agency working to enhance future safeguarding practice. Bella and her mother were involved throughout this review, this ensured their views, opinions and concerns informed the SAR.

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The Purpose of a Safeguarding Adults Review:

- Establish the facts that led to the serious injury and whether there are any lessons to be learned from the case about how professionals and agencies worked together to safeguard Bella
- Highlight areas of good practice to be shared
- Identify how and within what timescales any actions will be acted on, and what is expected to change.
- Contribute to a better understanding of the nature of Adult Safeguarding
- Ensure that the experiences of Bella and her family are heard regarding their lived experiences and the impact of mental health and autism on young adults with complex needs

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Key Themes:

Diagnosis of Autism and severe mental health – *recognised that Bella's needs plus her risk-taking made Bella's case extremely complex.*

Access to support – *out of hours, out of area*

Autism-informed care that recognises sensory, communication, and processing needs within all safeguarding and mental health responses.

Multi-agency collaboration that prioritises real-time information sharing, shared risk assessments, and collaborative care planning across agencies and regional boundaries.

Discharge planning processes that embed multi-agency challenge, person-centred risk management, and clear post-discharge oversight.

A consistent and legally literate approach to capacity assessments, restrictive practices, and lawful deprivation of liberty.

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Recommendations:

The SAR made the following recommendations:

Embedding Professional Curiosity and Assumption-Checking into Practice

Promotion of Autism and Trauma-Informed Care Frameworks

Importance of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Discharge Planning

Importance of timely documented Decision-Making and Governance oversight

Strengthen Safeguarding Responses to Exploitation and Complex Risk

Strengthen Legal Framework Use and Oversight (MCA, DOLs, CoP)

The value of Real-Time Learning and Assurance during and after Reviews

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Resources and further information:

[Safeguarding Adult Reviews in Cheshire East](#)

[Diagnostic overshadowing and how it impacts on people with a learning disability and autistic people | Local Government Association](#)

[Commissioning self-advocacy as a basis for effective co-production | Local Government Association](#)

[Best practice and insights report on improving housing choice for people with a learning disability | Local Government Association](#)

[What is professional curiosity? | Research in Practice](#)

[Professional curiosity in safeguarding adults: Strategic Briefing \(2020\) | Research in Practice](#)

<http://www.stopadultabuse.org.uk/pdf/one-minute-guides/omg-professional-curiosity-final.pdf>

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Implementing change:

Discuss the themes with your team or service and consider how they may affect your practice. Determine what you or your team could do to act on these and implement any necessary changes.

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Practice implications: Bella's complex mix of epilepsy, mental health problems, autistic spectrum condition and her use of risk-taking presented services with considerable challenges.

Staff have access to Legal Gateway Meetings/ Complex Safeguarding Meetings it is essential they utilise this if they need further advice/guidance. Information sharing and accurate record keeping is essential.

Professional curiosity is a term that describes the capacity and the skill to communication that allows a practitioner to explore and understand what is happening to a person or within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. It requires practitioners to think 'outside the box', perhaps beyond their usual professional role, and to consider families' circumstances holistically.

