

From Paul Hanson
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On behalf of the North Tyneside Safeguarding Adults Board

Publication of the Serious Care Review in respect of the death of Miss Cynthia Barrass

The facts of the case

Following a 999 call on 9th February 2010 Cynthia Barrass was admitted to North Tyneside General Hospital. She was suffering from hypothermia and a range of other health concerns. It was clear to the rapid response crew who attended her that the conditions in which she was living had caused her critical state. Sadly, despite the efforts of the team, she died early the next day.

Following a Police investigation, John Barrass, Miss Barrass's brother, was charged and then prosecuted for manslaughter. He was jailed for two years and eight months.

North Tyneside Safeguarding Adults Board established a Serious Case Review led by an independent report author and chaired by an independent and experienced individual.

Serious Case Reviews are conducted in order to understand the circumstances of a case and what might be learned for the future.

The Serious Case Review was concluded, shared with everyone involved and an Action Plan agreed upon and completed.

Publication

The law around safeguarding adults is not codified in the same way as arrangements made to protect children and young people.

In the meantime it is left to individual Safeguarding Adults Boards and the organisations that lead this work to establish the best way forward.

In the case of Miss Barrass, North Tyneside Safeguarding Adults Board prepared to publish a summary of the report once the Review was complete.

However, that changed. In preparing for publication the Independent Author and the Council approached the wider family to discuss what might happen. It was very clear that the Court Case and attendant publicity had been very harmful in the community and was putting some family members themselves at risk.

Based on these discussions and judgement of the risk, the Safeguarding Adults Board decided against publication.

In the latter part of 2011, the Board was asked to reconsider this approach. Requests for information put the Safeguarding Adults Board and the Council in a difficult position. As a consequence North Tyneside Council referred the matter to the Information Commissioner for advice. The Commissioner and his team worked with us to find an approach to make the findings public in a way that went some way to protecting the family.

As a consequence we are making an edited version of the report publicly available with the witness statements of family members redacted. We do this while asking readers and commentators to remember that there are real people at the heart of this story with real and complex lives.

Conclusions on the Serious Case Review

As we said at the time of the trial of John Barrass this is a very, very sad case.

That one of our residents could be criminally neglected out of sight of her family, her neighbours and all the people who could have helped her shocked everyone involved.

It made the Serious Case Review deeply important to all of those, including the SAB, engaged in trying to safeguard vulnerable adults in North Tyneside.

In Tom Wood (Independent Author) and Dr Sue Ross (Independent Chair) the SAB secured experienced people with integrity and an unflinching eye. They helped all of us look carefully at what more could have been done and what more we could do to make sure something like this does not happen again.

Notwithstanding the Judge's thoughtful words about the help that was available and the neglect Miss Barrass suffered, we have looked long and hard at what else we might have done and are determined to make a difference in the future.

First of all we accepted all of the recommendations of the Serious Case Review and ensured they were agreed at the most senior levels. We then went on to deliver the Action Plan and made the suggested changes to procedures and the way we work together.

But we wanted to do more.

And so we worked hard to look for more opportunities to spot the kind of neglect from which Cynthia suffered.

We have sought the help of our communities, publicising what to look for and what to do about it if North Tynesiders are worried about what they are seeing.

We spent time with our front line teams, working with refuse crews, benefit advisors, librarians and sport and leisure professionals in order to enlist their help to look for signs that somebody is at risk.

We have continued to invest in expert support and have doubled our Adult Protection Team from 5 to 10.

In particular, as highlighted in the Serious Case Review, the Council looked at what more its housing service could do in the critical opportunities they have to see some of our more vulnerable residents. Two years later they have a whole team approach that has made a real difference.

We were all deeply saddened by Miss Barrass's death. The best legacy we could think of is preventing something like this happening again.

Over the last two years we have seen lots of examples of the difference we have made. They include

- Intervening in the life of a resident whose health and home were deteriorating in a manner not dissimilar to that of Miss Barrass, helping them sort their life out and keeping them safe
- Spotting a resident who was not at their usual window as the refuse crew visited and taking action to ensure their safety
- Making sure that, as a landlord, our gas service checks are not just up to date but also involve follow up checks on welfare and home safety.

We publish this Serious Case Review to help people understand what happened and in the hope that makes as many people as possible appreciate that looking out for vulnerable adults is everyone's job.