

Polly – DHR - Summary, Key Issues and Recommendations

Polly, aged 34, tragically died in a deliberately set house fire in March 2024. She was in a controlling and abusive relationship with John, who isolated her, made threats (including to burn down her home), and committed multiple acts of violence. Alcohol was a contributing factor in the escalation of abuse. Polly had frequent hospital visits for suicidal ideation but lacked a coordinated care plan.

Key Issues

- **Domestic Abuse:** Coercive control, physical violence, and threats from partner.
- **Mental Health:** Repeated suicidal ideation; no joined-up care.
- **Agency Failures:** Missed opportunities for intervention.
- **Poor Communication:** Inconsistent safeguarding and information sharing.
- **Family Concerns:** Lack of support and poor communication after Polly's death.

Recommendations

Police - Improve Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) processes. Ensure safe release procedures for vulnerable individuals. Strengthen communication between custody, mental health, and frontline staff.

Probation - Conduct ongoing risk assessments in domestic abuse cases. Reinstate home visits for high-risk individuals. Enhance engagement with MARAC and safeguarding forums.

Children's Social Care - Escalate repeated concerns to child protection sooner. Provide trauma-informed support to mothers post-child removal. Train staff on coercive control and domestic abuse impacts.

Health Services - Improve follow-up and care planning for individuals presenting with suicidal ideation, especially when linked to domestic abuse. Develop better pathways for individuals with both mental health and substance misuse issues. Ensure that safeguarding concerns are consistently shared across services.

Housing and Fire Services - Improve information sharing when threats (e.g. arson) are made, so housing and fire services can assess and mitigate risks. Increase use of Safe and Well visits for vulnerable individuals, especially those at risk of domestic abuse.

All agency recommendations - Embed trauma-informed approaches across all services. Ensure the voice of the victim is central in all safeguarding and support planning. Use this case to inform wider training and policy development across the partnership.