

This learning brief (and linked reports) contains details and information of a highly sensitive nature including acts of physical and emotional abuse, substance use, self-harm and suicide that may be distressing to read.

BACKGROUND

This Domestic Abuse Related Death Review (DARDR) relates to Jenny* who was a 62-year-old, white, British female living in Bracknell Forest at the time of her death. Jenny died by suicide in June 2022.

At the time of her death, Jenny had been married to Max (age 67 years) for 25 years. Max had moved into supported living due to a brain injury caused by a suicide attempt which had taken place approximately 18 months prior to Jenny's suicide. Jenny had 3 adult sons, her middle son lived in another part of the country, her eldest son (Chris) lived in the Bracknell Forest area and stayed with her occasionally, and her youngest son (Seth) who lived with her. Chris had a history of perpetrating domestic abuse against a previous intimate partner.

Jenny had made allegations of abuse from Max and Chris in the years leading up to her death. Max had made allegations of abuse from Jenny. Jenny had also made previous suicide attempts. Jenny's religious beliefs were identified as a barrier in her accessing support / leaving. In the days before she died, Jenny alleged she had been assaulted by Chris resulting in Police involvement. On the day of the suicide, Jenny called Seth to say "goodbye". Due to his concerns (he was not at the family home at the time), he called for an ambulance. Jenny was found at the family home having taken an overdose and sadly passed away in hospital later that evening.

DOMESTIC ABUSE RELATED DEATH REVIEWS (DARDRs)

Domestic abuse was identified as a factor for concern relating to Jenny's suicide (familial abuse and intimate partner abuse) which led to the Bracknell Forest Community Safety Partnership (CSP) commissioning a DARDR in December 2022.

The Bracknell Forest CSP is a statutory, multi-agency partnership made up of 'responsible authorities': Bracknell Forest Council, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFPS), Thames Valley Police, National Probation Service, NHS Frimley Integrated Care Board. Agencies work together to create a plan to reduce crime and disorder in their area.

Under Section 9 (1) of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004, there is a requirement for the Bracknell Forest CSP to undertake a Domestic Abuse Related Death Review (DARDR) where there is a "death of a person age 16 or over that has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by a person to whom they were related or with whom they were, or had been, in an intimate personal relationship, or a member of the same household as themselves...Where a victim took their own life (suicide) and the circumstances give rise to concern, for example it emerges that there has been coercive controlling behaviour in the relationship, a review should be undertaken, even if a suspect is not charged with an offence or they are tried and acquitted. Reviews are not about who is culpable".

DARDRs are undertaken in order to enable lessons to be learned from such deaths. "In order for these lessons to be learned as widely and thoroughly as possible, professionals need to be able to understand fully what happened in each homicide (or suicide), and most importantly, what needs to change in order to reduce the risk of such tragedies happening in the future".

LINK TO REPORT

The DARDR was published in February 2025. This learning brief should be read in conjunction with the Executive Summary and Overview Report, both of which are published on the Bracknell Forest Council [website](#) and the national [Domestic Homicide Review Library](#).

Bracknell Forest CSP are committed to sharing recommendations and lessons learnt from this review. All our partners are encouraged to read the review and see what recommendations / lessons learnt can be implemented within their own organisation. For further information about domestic abuse services in Bracknell Forest please visit www.itsneverok.co.uk

RECOMMENDATIONS

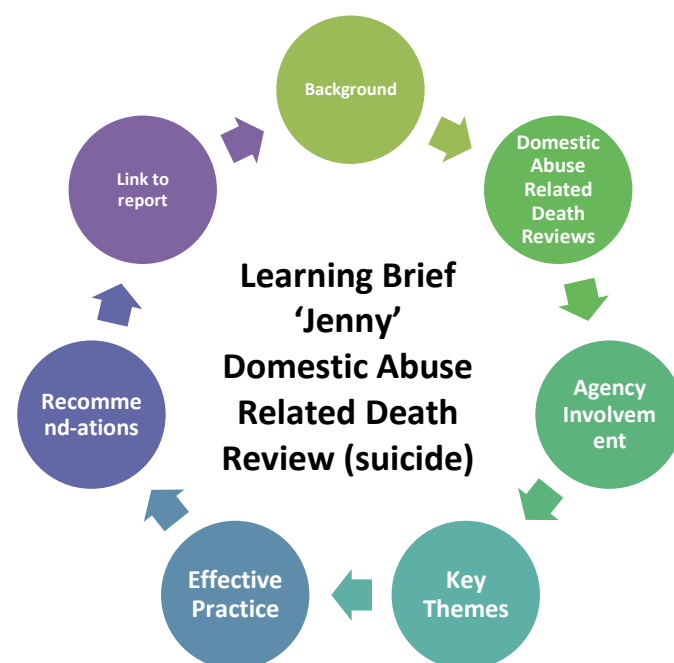
The Review Panel agreed 20 recommendations (3 overarching and 17 single agency). These recommendations have been formulated into an action plan for them to be developed, implemented, and monitored. The Bracknell Forest CSP, along with the Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Executive Group (sub group of the CSP) will maintain oversight of the DARDR and ensure learning and lessons from the review into Jenny's death is disseminated amongst partner agencies.

Key learning identified included:

- Lack of professional curiosity
- Counter allegations – *how agencies can identify, appropriately risk assess and safeguard*
- Insufficient record keeping
- Missed opportunities to share information with wider partner agencies
- Domestic Abuse being lost amongst the other presenting factors
- Incidents being dealt with in isolation
- Inexperienced staff and the lack of senior management oversight of cases

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

The Review Panel identified examples of effective practice including proactive information sharing, multi-agency meetings (Complex Case Forum, professionals meeting) and referrals between agencies; repeated attempts to engage with and support Chris, support for Chris' ex-partner, and agencies recognition of the risk Max posed to Jenny should he return home.



KEY THEMES

- The complexities of abusive relationships where there is both intimate partner abuse and familial abuse taking place.
- There appears to have been coercive controlling behaviour, isolation and threats of suicide as well as physical abuse.
- Chris was identified as having been abusive towards his ex-partner.
- The relationship between Max and Chris involved resentment towards each other as Chris alleged, he and his brothers witnessed Max abuse Jenny.
- Max took an intentional overdose, resulting in a brain injury and him moving to supported living.
- The 'trio of vulnerability' was present – domestic abuse, mental ill health and substance misuse.
- It is unclear whether Jenny recognised Chris's behaviours as being abusive. The dynamics of familial abuse often means that many parents do not recognise this as abuse, and/or do not want to criminalise their children therefore agency intervention can be difficult.
- At times agencies appeared to believe Max was the victim of abuse from Jenny and Chris creating confusion regarding intervention and support.

AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

- There was limited information regarding Jenny held by agencies, however, significant information on both Chris and Max.
- Agencies involved with Jenny and members of the family included: Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (BHFT), Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust (hospital), Primary Care (GP), New Hope (Drug & Alcohol Action Team), Probation, Silva Homes, South Central Ambulance (SCAS) and Thames Valley Police (TVP).
- Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA), Hourglass and Bracknell Forest Council Adult Social Care were also involved in the review either as subject matter experts and/or involvement in other ways with the family.
- Jenny was never identified as being a 'high risk' victim of domestic abuse and therefore was never discussed at MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference).
- Both Chris and Max had Care Coordinators due to their mental health.
- Max was subject of a Complex Case Forum attended by partner agencies to discuss and agree his care pathway and interventions.
- Chris was the subject of a professionals meeting to discuss his access to services (housing etc).