

7-minute Learning Summary

Safeguarding Adult Review – Hope



Case Summary

Hope was a 66-year-old woman living alone with long-term physical and mental health needs, including diabetes, chronic illness and anxiety. She experienced self-neglect, increasing isolation, and declining health over several years. Hope often did not engage with services – missing appointments and limiting contact to telephone or at the doorway. There was prolonged non-access to her home, with no professional entering the property for several years, meaning her living conditions were not seen. Multiple agencies were involved, but no single agency had a full picture of risk. Her situation involved cumulative risk over time rather than a single crisis, with deterioration in health, environment and engagement.

Hope valued her independence and privacy and experienced significant anxiety that shaped how she interacted with the world. People who knew her described her as polite, articulate, and able to form warm connections when she felt safe. Her home was central to her sense of safety and autonomy. Over time, her anxiety about intrusion and change increased, and she became more cautious about allowing others into her personal space. This preference for privacy was closely tied to her identity and autonomy.

Hope's life included periods of isolation, but also moments of connection with professionals who tried to engage her respectfully and at her pace. Understanding her wishes, fears and need for safety is key to understanding how safeguarding responses were experienced by her, and why proportionate, relationship-based approaches mattered.

This review does not reduce Hope's life to her vulnerabilities. She lived independently for many years, managed her own home, and engaged with services on her own terms. At the same time, her isolation, declining health and difficulty engaging with support meant that no single agency held a complete picture of her lived experience. Understanding this context is essential to making sense of practitioners' decisions and the system responses explored in the sections that follow.

Summary findings



1. Finding 1: Prolonged invisibility and non-access meant that self-neglect and environmental risk were normalised rather than escalated
2. Finding 2: A narrow and episodic focus on mental capacity, combined with anxiety and non-engagement, constrained professional curiosity and safeguarding escalation
3. Finding 3: Thresholds and escalation processes did not sufficiently respond to cumulative self-neglect, prolonged non-engagement, and systemic invisibility
4. Finding 4: Housing oversight and assurance were not sufficiently integrated into safeguarding responses, contributing to prolonged invisibility and unmanaged environmental risk
5. Finding 5: The absence of structured learning, review, and challenge mechanisms limited the system's ability to disrupt drift



Lessons

🏠 NON-ACCESS = RISK

Responding to invisibility

- 👁️ Lack of access to the home is a safeguarding concern
- ? *What don't we know because we haven't seen it?*
- 🚫 Phone calls or doorstep visits ≠ full assessment

📊 LOOK AT THE WHOLE STORY

Cumulative risk

- 🌱 Risks build over time—not just single events
- 🛡️ Share information across agencies
- 🔄 Revisit decisions as risk changes

🔄 NON-ENGAGEMENT ≠ LOW RISK

Reframing disengagement

- ⚠️ Non-engagement may indicate increased risk
- 🔍 Ask *why* (fear, trauma, anxiety, past experiences)
- 🕒 Stay curious, persistent, and professionally inquisitive

🏠 HOME = SAFETY CONTEXT

Housing & environmental risk

- 🏠 Housing is a key safeguarding partner
- 🔑 Access to property matters
- ⚠️ Environmental conditions are critical to understanding risk

🧠 CAPACITY IS NOT A STOP SIGN

Using mental capacity appropriately

- 🚫 Don't let capacity end safeguarding action
- ✅ Consider ability to *carry out* decisions
- 📉 Factor in anxiety, health and decline
- ➡️ Safeguarding must continue where risk

🕒 DON'T LET CASES DRIFT

Challenging drift

- 🕒 Use structured case reviews
- ? *Are we accepting this as "normal"?*
- 📌 Set clear actions, ownership and review points

⚖️ EQUITY & ANTI-RACIST PRACTICE

Seeing the unseen

- 🤔 Are we too quickly calling this "choice"?
- ⚖️ Would we respond differently to someone else?
- 👂 Use culturally informed, relationship-based approaches
- 👁️ Actively challenge invisibility