

# The case of Baby P

By Janade John



- **1 March 2006:** Baby Peter is born to Tracey Connelly.
- **June 2006:** Connelly begins a relationship with a new boyfriend Steven Barker.
- **November 2006:** Barker moves into Connelly's home.
- **December 2006:** Connelly is arrested after bruises are spotted on the boy's face and chest by a GP.
- **January 2007:** The boy is returned home five weeks after being put in the care of a family friend.
- **February 2007:** A whistle-blower, former social worker Nevres Kemal, sends a letter about her concerns over alleged failings in child protection in Haringey to the Department of Health.
- **12 March 2007:** Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) inspectors meet Haringey officials to discuss concerns raised by Ms Kemal in the letter sent by her lawyer, which was dated 16 February 2007.
- **April 2007:** Baby Peter is admitted to North Middlesex hospital with bruises, two black eyes and swelling on the left side of his head.
- **1 April 2007:** Ofsted takes over responsibility for inspecting children's services from the CSCI.
- **May 2007:** After seeing marks on the boy's face, a social worker sends Baby Peter to the North Middlesex where 12 areas of bruises and scratches are found. Connelly is re-arrested.
- **June 2007:** Barker's brother, Jason Owen, moves into the home with a 15-year-old girl.
- **30 July 2007:** Injuries to Baby Peter's face and hands are missed by a social worker after the boy is deliberately smeared with chocolate to hide them.
- **1 August 2007:** The boy is examined at a child development clinic.
- **2 August 2007:** Police tell Connelly she will not be prosecuted after her case is considered by the Crown Prosecution Service.
- **3 August 2007:** Baby Peter is found dead in his cot.

- **11 November 2008:** Owen, 36, from Bromley, and Barker, then 32, are found guilty of causing the death of Baby Peter. Connelly had pleaded guilty to the same charge.
- **13 November 2008:** Children's Minister Ed Balls orders an inquiry into the role of the local authority, the health authority and the police in the case of Baby Peter.
- **14 November 2008:** Downing Street denies accusations of "buck-passing" after details of whistle-blower Nevres Kemal's letter about Haringey's failings emerge.
- **1 December 2008:** Following a report into Haringey Children's Services, its leader George Meehan and cabinet member for children and young people Liz Santry resign. Sharon Shoemith is removed as the local authority's director of children's services.
- **8 December 2008:** Ms Shoemith is sacked by a panel of councillors with immediate effect.
- **7 February 2009:** Ms Shoemith says the way ministers handled the Baby Peter case was "breathtakingly reckless".
- **19 February 2009:** Dr Jerome Ikwueke, a GP who saw Baby Peter 14 times before his death, is suspended by the General Medical Council.
- **9 March 2009:** Ms Shoemith lodges an employment tribunal claim against Haringey Council.
- **15 March 2009:** A leaked report into the death of Baby Peter suggests there were further missed opportunities to save him from abuse.
- **29 April 2009:** Haringey Council dismisses a social worker and three managers for failings in the care of Baby Peter.
- **1 May 2009:** Barker is convicted of raping a two-year-old girl in north London. The crime came to light after he was arrested over Baby Peter's death. The Old Bailey jury cleared Connelly of cruelty to the girl. Baby Peter's name is revealed at the request of his family.

- **13 May 2009:** The NHS is criticised by the Care Quality Commission for failing in the care given to Baby Peter.
- **22 May 2009:** Connelly gets an indefinite jail term with a minimum term of five years for her part in her son's death. Barker is jailed for life with a minimum of 10 years for raping the two-year-old and given a 12-year term to run concurrently over his role in Baby Peter's death. Owen gets an indefinite sentence with a minimum term of three years.
- **3 July 2009:** Inspectors criticise Haringey Council, saying it has only made limited progress in tackling areas of weakness.
- **11 August 2009:** Connelly and Barker are named for the first time after the expiry of a court order.
- **15 September 2010:** Ms Shoesmith hits back over her sacking by Haringey Council, asking a Commons committee why the police and health services had not also been made to take responsibility.
- **21 September 2010:** Connelly and Barker are denied public funding to be represented at any resumed inquest into the child's death. A pre-inquest review was told they had not been given funds for legal representation. Baby Peter's father had said he wanted an inquest to take place.
- **22 October 2010:** Two social workers who dealt with Baby Peter, Gillie Christou and Maria Ward, lose their claim for unfair dismissal. They had argued they were sacked unfairly by Haringey Council following his death, but a tribunal found the authority acted reasonably because of failings in the care they provided.
- **26 October 2010:** The second serious case review - the official account of the agencies' failings over Peter - is published, after the first one was ruled "inadequate" by Ofsted.

- **27 May 2011:** The Court of Appeal rules in favour of Ms Shoemith, who claims former Children's Secretary Ed Balls and Haringey Council acted unlawfully by sacking her.
- **24 June 2011:** The Department for Education and Haringey Council confirm they will seek an appeal at the Supreme Court against the Court of Appeal's ruling that Sharon Shoemith was unfairly sacked.
- **2 August 2011:** The Supreme Court refuses to grant officials leave to appeal against the decision that Ms Shoemith was unfairly sacked.
- **5 August 2011:** Jason Owen, now 39, is released from prison after serving three years of a six-year sentence.
- **5 March 2012:** The natural father of Baby Peter, known as KC, is awarded £75,000 in damages after the publishers of The People wrongly accused him of being a sex offender.
- **25 May 2012:** Haringey Council workers Gillie Christou and Maria Ward lose their appeal against an employment tribunal ruling that they were fairly sacked.
- **29 May 2012:** The Chief Executive of Great Ormond Street Hospital Dr Jane Collins announces she is to stand down.
- **31 October 2012:** Baby P's natural father who was falsely accused of sex offences has his libel award of £75,000 cut to £50,000.
- **12 March 2013:** The Court of Appeal backs an employment tribunal ruling that Baby P's social workers were not sacked unfairly by Haringey Council.
- **12 April 2013:** Jason Owen is returned to prison for breaching conditions of his release.
- **8 October 2013:** The Parole Board says it has directed the release of the mother of Baby Peter, Tracey Connelly.

# Introduction

- Baby P a White child of Irish ethnic origin tragically died aged 17 months on August 3rd, 2007 following severe injuries inflicted whilst in the care of his mother Tracey Connelly, her partner Steven Barker and her lodger. His mother pleaded guilty to causing or allowing the death of a child, and the partner and lodger were found guilty of the same charge on 11th November.
- At the time of his death, Baby P was the subject of a multi-agency child protection plan, which had been put into place on 22nd December, 2006 and was known to have been seen in excess of 60 occasions by professionals.
- Haringey's Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) published their Serious Case Review (SCR) on 12th November, 2008, as required following the death of a child where abuse is known or suspected to be a factor. There has been significant and sustained media interest since then as well as a number of government led interventions/actions including commissioning Lord Laming to undertake a review of safeguarding arrangements on a national basis.

# Failings which contributed to death of Baby P

- Tracey Connelly had three other children - two of which were also placed on the "at risk" protection register by social services - but none was taken away from her until Baby Peter died.
- Social workers failed to realise that Steven Barker was secretly living with the family and abusing Baby Peter for nine months before his death, despite repeated visits from the authorities.
- The authorities also failed to notice when Barker's brother Jason Owen, a National Front member, moved in with his 15-year-old runaway girlfriend five weeks before Peter died.
- Peter was left in his cot for hours on end, was treated worse than a dog, had his fingertips sliced off with a Stanley knife, his nails pulled out with pliers and that every scrap of his clothing was covered in blood.
- Haringey Council tried to prevent Connelly and Barker from being named until 2026, but a High Court judge disagreed, saying the "boil must be lanced".
- In May, the NHS was criticised by the Care Quality Commission for "systemic failings" in the care given to Baby Peter before his death.
- It identified staff shortages, poor communication, insufficient training and failures to stick to correct procedures at Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust, Haringey Teaching Primary Care Trust and Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust.

- When Baby Peter underwent a paediatric assessment on Aug 1 2007 – two days before his death – there were just two consultants working at St Ann's Hospital in Tottenham which should have four in post. Due to staff shortages, the appointment had been delayed by 12 weeks.
- Baby Peter was taken to Whittington Hospital in Archway, north London, with bruises on his head, nose, chest and right shoulder in December 2006. Police arrested and interviewed Connelly on suspicion of assaulting him, something she denied. On December 22 Peter was placed on the child protection register.
- Maria Ward, a social worker with Haringey Council in north London, made a pre-arranged home visit in July 2007. She missed injuries on Peter's face and hands after he is deliberately smeared with chocolate to hide them. The following day police handed reports to the Crown Prosecution Service, including statements from two doctors saying Peter's bruising was suggestive of "non-accidental" injury. Prosecutors decided there was not enough evidence to bring a case.
- Peter was taken to a child development clinic at St Ann's Hospital in Tottenham, north London on August 1 2007. Paediatrician Dr Sabah Al-Zayyat decided she could not carry out a full check-up as the boy is "miserable and cranky". A post-mortem examination later revealed Peter had probably already suffered a broken back and fractured ribs by this point. The following day police tell Connelly she will not be prosecuted. That evening, the child received the fatal last blow to the mouth, knocking his tooth out.



# Reactions and Reviews of failings

- Baby Peter suffered as a result of incompetence on the part of almost every agency involved in his case, from social workers to doctors, lawyers and police, according to a previously secret official report disclosed for the first time today.
- The roles of two doctors Baby P saw before his death were separately examined by the General Medical Council — Dr. Jerome Ikwueke, a GP, and Dr. Sabah Al-Zayyat. Although Dr. Ikwueke had twice referred Peter to hospital specialists, the GMC's Interim Orders Panel suspended Dr. Ikwueke for 18 months. Dr. Al-Zayyat, who has been accused of failing to spot his injuries, was suspended pending an inquiry. Her contract with Great Ormond Street Hospital, responsible for child services in Haringey, has also been terminated.
- A serious case review found that the 17-month-old's death could and should have been prevented, and that if professionals had taken the right approach the case would have been "stopped in its tracks at the first serious incident". But the approach of the majority of staff who played a role was "completely inadequate", it said. The report – the first serious case review to be published in full, following a commitment from the coalition government – reveals that agencies consistently failed to work out that Connelly was in a relationship with Barker, whom she even named as her next of kin on an official form. An unrelated man joining a single-parent family where there are child protection issues would be a serious cause for concern.

- Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, ordered an external inquiry into Haringey Council Social Services. The inquiry was not to examine the 'Baby P' case explicitly, but look into whether Haringey Social Services were following correct procedures in general. This report was presented to ministers on 1 December 2008.
- The review found that the 17-month-old's death could and should have been prevented, and that if professionals had taken the right approach the case would have been "stopped in its tracks at the first serious incident". But the approach of the majority of staff who played a role was "completely inadequate", it said. The report – the first serious case review to be published in full, following a commitment from the coalition government – reveals that agencies consistently failed to work out that Connelly was in a relationship with Barker, whom she even named as her next of kin on an official form. An unrelated man joining a single-parent family where there are child protection issues would be a serious cause for concern.
- During a press conference Ed balls, in an unusual move, he had used special powers to remove Sharon Shoemith from her post of head of children's services at Haringey Council. She rejected calls for her resignation, saying that she wanted to continue to support her staff during the investigations, but was dismissed on 8 December 2008, by Haringey Council, without any compensation package although later this was deemed an 'un fair' move and she was awarded compensation.

# Aftermath of Baby P case

- The Baby Peter case is perceived as significant and responsible for both a marked decline in morale for social workers and those who work in child protection and increased communication of child protection concerns by the public and partner agencies.
- Figures published by Cafcass, the children's court advisory service, show that after the Baby P incident many children considered 'at risk' were placed into care as social workers respond to what they regarded as increasing neglect and emotional abuse of vulnerable youngsters. The rapid growth in Section 31 applications, or care orders, at this time were partly attributed to social workers being more prepared to intervene and protect young children from exposure to dangerous domestic environments, however, many argue that the increase in care orders was due to the "Baby Peter effect". After the death of Baby P in Haringey many local authorities lowered the risk threshold to remove a child, in the hope that this would reduce the chances of a high profile child death as seen in the Baby P case.

What is a Section 31 application?

Under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989, Local Authorities can apply for a care or supervision order for children believed to be suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm. Specifically, this must be in circumstances where:

- the harm is attributable to the care being given to the child not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give him

or

- the child is beyond parental control.

Care orders continue until the child is 18 years, unless discharged earlier, and can only be obtained on children under 17 years (or 16 if they are married). Supervision orders initially last for one year and can only be in place for a maximum of three years.

- *Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service*

- Figures published by Cafcass reveal a rapid and unexpected acceleration in court applications in the months following the death of Baby P, which has led to a steady rise over the last three years. Between April and August 2011 more than 4,000 care applications were made in England – nearly 9% up on the same period the previous year.
- Local authorities fear the rapid increase in children being taken into care is becoming financially unsustainable. Some councils have gone over budget on child protection this year as they are being forced to massive cuts.
- In 2008-09 there were 6,488 care applications. In 2010 there were 9,184. Almost all resulted in the child being taken into care.
- Cafcass chief executive Anthony Douglas said local authorities were right in taking more children at risk of significant harm into care. "This data represents children's lives, and the rise in numbers shows a greater awareness of the life-threatening situations some children live in, day-by-day, with no light on their horizon."

# Measures set up after Baby P case

- The government announced a new national child protection review, again headed by Lord Laming, which would look at current practice in implementing safeguarding procedures, inter-agency work, effective public accountability and “developing and deploying workforce capacity”.
- However some social workers felt that the procedural changes that had been put in place had actually made things worse. One worker commented: “It is ironic that the Laming enquiry set up procedures to protect children but in some respects these procedures are now harming children because the increased admin and paperwork have let crucial events slip by unnoticed or not acted upon due to lack of time with the families and children we are trying to protect. Less office-based work would mean that we can bring the “social” back into social work.”

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