

Learning from Serious Case Reviews around child sexual exploitation, also drawing on the Rochdale Serious Case Review

(Published by **Rochdale LSCB** in December 2013)

Background to Rochdale Serious Case Review

In December 2010, a major police investigation, Operation Span, was instigated in relation to the sexual exploitation of a number of young people in the Rochdale Borough. A SCR was undertaken in relation to 6 young people whose experience was considered most likely to provide the fullest learning for agencies within the area. Another SCR was conducted for young person 7.

Both SCR's identified system-wide issues across local agencies, which did not sufficiently protect or prevent young people from being sexually exploited. In the SCR failings in key areas including inadequate policies and procedures and the absence of high quality supervision coupled with management failings were noted.

Victims and their families had considerable involvement with a very wide range of services in Rochdale. The young people came from three different families. They did not all know each other, but there were some links between them. All of the six young people experienced significant and serious sexual exploitation at some time during the period under consideration by a group of "Asian" men in Rochdale and elsewhere, who they met in takeaways and through contact with taxi firms.

The men, from Rochdale and Oldham were given sentences ranging from 4 to 19 years at Liverpool Crown Court after being found guilty of offences including rape.

Agencies involved in Rochdale SCR:

Individual agency recommendations from the Rochdale SCRs can be found on **page 119** of the report.

Action for Children * Barnardo's * CAFCASS * CONNEXIONS * Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) * Children's Social Care (Targeted Services) * Children's Social Care – Children's Safeguarding Unit * Early Break * Education Welfare Service * GP Services * Greater Manchester Police * Pennine Acute NHS Hospital's Trust * Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust * RMBC Homelessness Service/Rochdale Boroughwide Housing * Schools * Youth Service * Youth Offending Team (YOT) * Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale clinical commissioning group *

Inadequacies Identified

The Rochdale SCRs called for the prioritisation of CSE by the Rochdale Safeguarding Children Board, including tracking the link between strategic intentions and operational outcomes. The LSCB was required to review the current state of understanding, identification and practice regarding CSE across agencies, including the effectiveness of Child Protection processes for the victims of CSE.



In addition the reports identify inadequacies in the following areas:

- Policy and procedures either not available or poorly understood and implemented on the front line
- Absence of high quality supervision, challenge and line management oversight
- Resource pressures and high workloads in key agencies contributing to disorganisation and at times a sense of helplessness
- Policies, culture and attitudes within many of the agencies which were actively unhelpful when working with adolescents; and Performance Frameworks focussed on quantitative practice not on quality of practice or understanding the child's journey through services and outcomes.

System wide failures:

- Longstanding difficulties in achieving effective multi-agency working – both at senior level and in operational practice
- Failure by strategic managers to focus on routine safeguarding practice and to understand how it was delivered
- Lack of an evaluative culture focussed on the experience of young people, outcomes and effective interventions
- Under-resourcing resulting in high workloads, and decision making influenced significantly by budget to the detriment of practice which would meet children's needs.

Key learning points for improving practice - identified from Serious Case Reviews around child sexual exploitation

Identifying and assessing child sexual exploitation

- Practitioners must be aware of the **warning signs** of potential sexual exploitation and grooming, including: underage sexual activity; sexual health concerns; teenage pregnancy; getting involved in crime; concerning relationships, especially with unknown adults; alcohol and drug misuse; going missing from home or placement; truancy, exclusion and disengagement from school.
- Professionals providing sexual health services (including contraception) should consider the **child protection implications** of possible abuse or exploitation whenever they become aware of underage sexual activity.
- An early and **comprehensive assessment** should be carried out. Without a comprehensive assessment, practice becomes task focused so that individual incidents are addressed, for example sexual health concerns, but the bigger picture of child sexual exploitation is missed. Learning difficulties and disabilities can be a factor in a young person's vulnerability and should be included at an early stage in any assessment of need and risk.



- Assessment should draw on knowledge from different agencies so that a **complete picture** can be established in cases where sexual exploitation is suspected.
- Any assessment of child sexual exploitation must also include issues of '**capacity to consent**', taking into account the grooming process and issues of coercion which may be experienced by victims of child sexual exploitation.
- Professionals should receive specific learning and development on Child Sexual Exploitation. **Training** should be audited to ensure that outcomes of training are changing clinical practice.
- Staff in schools need to use the local policies and procedures to **challenge** decisions made where there are clear differences of opinion in safeguarding concerns and ensure that actions, outcomes and follow up around safeguarding concerns is a priority. The process by which concerns are escalated needs to be clear and concise and shared with schools.
- A recommendation of the Rochdale SCR was that the **Common Assessment Framework** tool should be more widely used in schools to address early signs of concerns and vulnerability and that further training, advice and support is made available to education settings in order to fully utilise the early assessment tool.

Interventions

- Client intervention notes and information received from/passed on to other agencies need to be thorough and detailed to ensure other workers that conduct future interventions have a clear **understanding** of clients' circumstances.
- It is vital that time is taken prior to an intervention to **read** previous contact details.
- Practitioners need to balance the young person's right to make their own decisions and assess their own risk, with the need to protect the young person from exploitation. Even when a young person is unaware or doesn't accept that they are at risk, or when risks to the young person's safety arise from their own behaviour and the decisions they make, professionals still need to **intervene to prevent exploitation**. A recommendation from the Rochdale SCR for the Children's Safeguarding Unit stated 'Children who have been or are being sexually exploited should be assessed as children in need or in need of protection and offered services to support them where appropriate'.
- Practitioners need perseverance and patience to help **disengaged young people** engage with and remain involved with services aimed at protecting and supporting them. A recommendation for the Rochdale SCR was that Child Protection Plans should not be discontinued at the first CP Review, or if the core assessment has not been completed, unless there are alternative legal plans in place to safeguard children.
- Services need to embed a **child-centred approach** where children at risk of exploitation are viewed as vulnerable children in need of protection. Children need to be listened to and their experiences accepted, so trust can develop and young people can feel supported and able to disclose their experiences. Arrangements should be made for young people to participate in the safeguarding process and their wishes and feelings ascertained in a timely manner.



- Victims of sexual exploitation may need **on-going support** to ensure they are protected from further exploitation in the future. There should be a clear distinction between safeguarding plans for young mothers who have been sexually exploited and CP Plans for their children.
- There should be a **protocol** for dealing with applications from self referring applicants where safeguarding/sexual exploitation issues are presented.
- In the Rochdale SCR a recommendation for Action for Children was to ensure that all services that provide supported lodgings, addresses young people who are missing in a way that is **consistent** with regulated services.

Information Sharing

- The Rochdale SCR indicated there was a far greater need for the agencies involved in child protection to **work together** and **share information**.
- Where information about a client is received from or passed on to another agency, a **key contact** from that agency should be identified and any information received/actions requires should be routinely followed up.
- The Rochdale SCR describes 'unhelpful policies, culture and attitudes that lacked a ... 'quality of practice or understanding of the child's journey through services and outcomes'.
- Child Protection Conferences should ensure that information about **historical abuse** is available to the Conference.
- Another recommendation from the Rochdale SCR was the development of **documentation proforma** and training, prompting assessment of social history.
- All agencies to comply with **record keeping practice** in relation to safeguarding children and/or legal/statutory requirements.

Identifying and dealing with perpetrators

- A recommendation from the Rochdale SCR for the CPS was that a national network of Child Sexual Abuse trained prosecutors was to be established with Nazir Afzal as the CPS Champion
- **Disclosure** from young people of underage sexual activity or sexual exploitation needs to be taken seriously and dealt with as a **crime**. Actions taken following disclosure should not depend on the victim's willingness to act as a witness in a criminal trial.
- Perpetrators need to be identified quickly and a case built against them by the police. They need to be **prosecuted** so that victims can feel safe, have trust in the authorities and feel confident that agencies can protect them.
- To reduce future exploitation, victim profiles should be compiled and collated. This information can be used to identify local '**hotspot**' locations or methods that are used to target potential victims. A recommendation from the Rochdale SCR was to consider MAPPA style approach to rehousing victims/perpetrators of sexual exploitation.

