

## PRESS RELEASE

**STRICTLY EMBARGOED: 1100, 27 JULY 2017**

### **PUBLICATION OF SERIOUS CASE REVIEW INTO SIBLINGS 'W' & 'X'**

Brighton & Hove Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has today (27 July 2017) published the findings of a Serious Case Review (SCR), which evaluates multi-agency responses to vulnerable young people at risk of exploitation through radicalisation. It follows the deaths of two brothers, 'W' and 'X,' in Syria in 2014.

The two siblings, who originated from the MENA (Middle East/North Africa) region, received services from local agencies in the Brighton & Hove area before leaving the UK.

The brothers were believed to have been with the Al-Nusra Front, which pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda in 2013, when they died. 'W' was reported to have died soon after his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and his younger brother, 'X,' at the age of 17. They had gone to Syria with a friend to join an elder sibling, 'P.'

The LSCB is not aware of any subsequent cases of young people, under 18, leaving the Brighton & Hove area to fight overseas.

The Serious Case Review (SCR), led by independent reviewer Edi Carmi, examines multi-agency decision-making, assessments and interventions relating to 'W' and 'X' ahead of them departing the UK.

The review covers the period of January 2012 to October 2014 and was commissioned by the LSCB, which fully accepts the findings.

"The deaths of the two brothers were a tragedy and I would like to offer my sincere condolences to all those who knew and loved them. This case has had a major impact on our understanding of the risks posed to children of exploitation through radicalisation," said Graham Bartlett, Independent Chair of the Brighton & Hove LSCB.

"Whilst the mandatory criteria for a Serious Case Review were not fully met, I felt such an approach would provide a robust framework by which to maximise learning. It has been a complex and large-scale review and I thank all those who contributed," he continued.

"It is important to stress that this review has found that prior to the siblings travelling to Syria, the national intelligence and threat assessment did not suggest that young people were going abroad to fight. Locally, professionals had not identified that the brothers were at risk of radicalisation or at risk of fighting overseas. There was and remains no evidence to indicate how they were radicalised.

"As a result, many findings relate to the challenges for professionals in providing effective help and support to children who have suffered trauma in their early childhood, which can provide the context for children becoming vulnerable to exploitation."

The report identifies 13 key findings; some pose questions for consideration, while others highlight inconsistencies and the potential consequences of leaving them unaddressed. These include:

1. Professionals do not have effective ways to intervene in families who have suffered long-standing trauma and whose previous experience of intervention was not perceived positively
2. Does the recent expansion of child protection processes to cover adolescents at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation or exploitation into radicalisation, adequately cover other types of adolescent risk of harm, such as that associated with truancy and involvement in anti-social, criminal or risky behaviour?
3. The formulation of a child protection plan is not provided for those who are suspected of being abroad.
4. In working with adolescents there can be a pattern of reactive crisis management which limits professionals' ability to tackle the root causes of behaviours.

5. The systems of collecting and sharing data about young people who come to police attention do not consistently provide all relevant information to practitioners so as to assess, identify and address safeguarding needs
6. Do practitioners understand and know how young people are radicalised in Brighton & Hove, and how to counter the propaganda that influences them into extremist thinking?
7. Efforts to help and support children so they are less likely to become vulnerable to exploitation into radicalisation, do not seem to adequately address all the core issues, as perceived by community members
8. Professional responsibilities arising from the government's counter-terrorism strategy are new, not yet fully understood by all relevant staff and subject to ethical dilemmas
9. The lack of a well-established working relationship between counter-terrorism police officers and other agencies can lead to an atmosphere of suspicion between professionals of inappropriate confidentiality, which could compromise children's safeguarding
10. Does the timely and constructive response of Brighton & Hove to the newly identified safeguarding risks to children posed by radicalisation, represent a systems strength?
11. Does the multi-agency safeguarding system have the resources and strategies available to consistently help abused women and children from minority cultural backgrounds, if they fear that co-operating with statutory authorities could lead to the loss of support of their wider family and community?
12. Do practitioners have sufficient curiosity, knowledge, and skills to explore the role of culture, identity, religion, beliefs and potential divided loyalties experienced by some children and families?
13. Brighton & Hove statutory agencies have insufficient knowledge about, and understanding of, local minority ethnic and faith community groups and how best to work together to safeguard children, including those at risk of exploitation of local children into radicalisation.

The Serious Case Review examines the experiences of 'W' and 'X' and their family. This includes reports of racist and religiously motivated abuse and attacks, and alleged domestic and physical abuse in Brighton & Hove. It also looks at the involvement of the youngest four siblings' involvement in anti-social and suspected criminal activities.

Whilst professionals recognised that the siblings' behaviour was indicative of early trauma, and that they needed help to tackle the underlying root causes, they were unable to progress the necessary work and instead found themselves responding to constant incidents.

The Board understands that difficulties meeting with the siblings contributed to challenges in being able to develop a relationship-based intervention, as well as reflective thinking and analysis.

It is acknowledged that the way services were delivered to the family, involving many different agencies and practitioners, each responsible for a particular issue, or individual family member, unintentionally became an obstacle to developing a relationship with the family as a whole. The Board recognises that building relationships of trust is essential for successful intervention.

In 2015, the Children's Social Work at Brighton & Hove City Council introduced relationship-based practice as part of a whole-systems change. The key principles behind this model include continuity and consistency of relationships between social workers, teams and families.

As the report states, the dilemma around how to respond to the need to safeguard adolescents involved in risky behaviour is not restricted to Brighton & Hove, but is common in most geographical areas of the UK. The Board has reflected on whether current strategies for working with adolescents provide sufficient intervention to safeguard young people who maybe particularly vulnerable to exploitation, before it has been identified that they have been radicalised. We agree that the risk of harm for such adolescents is a clear safeguarding concern.

Since 2015, steps have been taken across the multi-agency partnership to improve responses to this. These include the establishment of clear pathways for children, identified as being at risk of exploitation into violent extremism, into the 'Front Door For Families' service (formerly Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, Early Help Hub and Family Information Service) and the Channel Panel.

- **Front Door For Families** is made up of professionals, such as social workers, police officers, education safeguarding officers and family coaches, who work together to coordinate how best to support children, young people and their families where there are concerns
- The **Channel Panel** is a multi-agency approach to supporting vulnerable individuals from being radicalised and drawn into extremist activity. Locally, this is chaired by the Head of Safeguarding, Children's Services, Brighton & Hove City Council. Statutory partners, such as housing, mental health, community representatives, social care and education, discuss an individual's safeguarding concerns

The review has benefited from the perceptions of representatives from Brighton & Hove's BAME (Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic) community about how children can be better protected from exploitation into radicalisation and the importance of early intervention in the incidence of racist and religiously motivated attacks. However, the report highlights that considerable work remains in developing more effective partnership working between statutory agencies and community representatives.

"The Board is clear that community groups should not just be consulted by policy-makers, but have other opportunities to have their views heard and acted upon," said Graham Bartlett.

"In collaboration with Brighton & Hove City Council's Community Safety Team, we are focusing our participation and engagement activities, on improving links with local minority ethnic and faith community groups. The involvement of community advocates is vital in developing dialogue, to help strengthen local arrangements for all children and families."

This Serious Case Review also questions the effectiveness of data-sharing about young people who come to police attention. This was attributed to a Sussex Police systems issue which, at the time under review, prevented the full details of police contact being fully shared. This led to professionals having different views and perceptions about the extent and range of the siblings' suspected criminality.

Information sharing systems within Sussex Police have since been reconfigured, but the Board continues to seek assurances that changes are embedded and have improved sharing capabilities between partner agencies.

The wider context of potential child neglect was evidently not considered. Had it have been, then it is possible that Children's Services may have been able to gain some further involvement or intervention with the family.

In addition, the review questions relationships between counter-terrorism police officers and other agencies. While it has not found any significant information sharing weaknesses in this case, it does stress that there is a perception that counter-terrorism police have insufficient understanding and experience of child safeguarding to know when to share. The LSCB is requesting a formal response from Counter Terrorism Policing South East, in particular around the resolution of potential conflicts relating to state security.

In relation to exploitation, the review emphasises an underlying challenge for practitioners and parents in identifying young people at risk of being exploited, and knowing how to counter the influence of propaganda on the internet and through social networks.

"We recognise that with the arrival of online risks, it's increasingly difficult for parents and professionals to keep track of what is influencing children. In response to this review, and others, the Board is creating training to develop understanding amongst professionals about the different elements of social media in terms of its impact, messages, sites and changing format," explained the LSCB's Graham Bartlett.

"We're also focusing on boosting awareness amongst children and young people about how to stay safe online. The Board is asking public health officials to undertake a city-wide campaign, highlighting the risk of exploitation and online grooming into radicalisation. We are also seeking the development of a drama-based production for high-school pupils in Brighton & Hove."

The review has also highlighted that children who go missing abroad are not subject to the same child protection processes as those who disappear in the UK, leaving the investigation entirely to the authorities

where the child is suspected of being. It is recognised that this could lead to a potential loss of both information and potential strategies to protect a child. The LSCB intends to contact Central Government to highlight this issue.

The review finds a 'striking' response following the discovery that the two siblings and another young person had gone missing. It speaks of very positive changes to processes, practice and working relationships to help protect other young people at risk of radicalisation. The Board is assured that this is a sign of how well services in Brighton & Hove come together when risks are identified.

Graham Bartlett said; "At the centre of this are two boys who were loved yet tragically died in what must have been terrible circumstances. The safeguarding risk of UK children going abroad to fight in a war was only recognised after these events, and the Board is faced with the task of establishing how best to help protect young people in this new global context – bearing in mind there is no single root of radicalisation.

"Whilst there have been considerable developments of children's social work services, including for adolescents in Brighton & Hove, I recognise there are still further improvements to be made. Some of these are set out as our Actions in the Board's response to this review.

"The Brighton & Hove Local Safeguarding Children Board is committed to taking the learning forward to safeguard children. I also hope the findings will inform policies and practices elsewhere in the UK."

Ends.

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**Full report available online at:**

[brightonandhovelscb.org.uk/serious-case-reviews-2/july-2017-siblings-wx](http://brightonandhovelscb.org.uk/serious-case-reviews-2/july-2017-siblings-wx)

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#### **Notes to Editors:**

Individuals and their families are not named in Serious Case Reviews. However, the LSCB is aware that names of individuals in this case are in the public domain.

**Brighton & Hove Local Safeguarding Children Board** is made up of statutory and voluntary partners, representatives from health, children's services, police, probation, the community and voluntary sector, as well as lay members. The Board's main role is to coordinate actions locally to protect and promote the welfare of children and young people and to monitor the effectiveness of those arrangements, to ensure better outcomes for children and young people.

**Graham Bartlett** is the Independent Chair of Brighton & Hove Local Safeguarding Children Board and East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Safeguarding Adults Boards. He undertakes Domestic Homicide Reviews, safeguarding in school audits and coaches prospective senior police officers. He is the author of the police and criminal justice briefing of the 2011-14 Serious Case Review Triennial Analysis. He is a published author and advisor to crime writers. Previously he was a police officer, retiring in the rank of Chief Supt.

**Edi Carmi** has been an independent child safeguarding consultant since 2000, following a career as a social work practitioner and manager in both local authority and voluntary sectors. She has chaired or written more than 50 Serious Case Reviews, as well as developing policies and procedures, undertaking audits and research, including leading the current Social Care Institute for Excellence's national audit of all dioceses in the Church of England.