

## Joint Serious Case Review Concerning Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adults with Needs for Care and Support in Newcastle-upon-Tyne

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This is a synopsis of a 150 page Thematic Serious Case Review carried out jointly by Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board and Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Board to consider and learn from sexual exploitation in Newcastle from 2007-2015 of girls and young women.

The report makes 33 recommendations - 18 for local agencies and 15 for Government, the NHS and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Sexual exploitation took place in commercial premises and privately rented premises.

The review reinforces the message to everyone that **if you do not recognise sexual exploitation of children and vulnerable adults in your area it is because you are not looking hard enough.**

### Background

Early in 2013 there was no significant concern about child sexual exploitation in Newcastle.

However, over Christmas 2013, a 21-year-old woman with a learning disability began to speak to her social worker about experiences of sexual exploitation over a long period. In January 2014 she gave a statement to the police in which she detailed her abuse and concerns about other children and young people. This account along with other intelligence suggested the extent of sexual exploitation was greater than previously identified and required a strategic, well-resourced, victim focussed multi-agency response.

As a result a police-led multi-agency investigation, **Operation Sanctuary**, was launched in January 2014. This led initially to arrests of over 30 men, accompanied by a publicity campaign. Two 19-year-old women in February 2014 reported to the police that they were victims of rape, sexual abuse and exploitation by a number of perpetrators over a period of years. Their accounts and subsequent inquiries confirmed that sexual exploitation was occurring in the Newcastle area on a much larger scale than previously recognised.

**The victims of exploitation were, as in high-profile cases elsewhere, young children but were also children approaching adulthood and adults with vulnerabilities.**

A picture emerged that suggested that over a period of years some perpetrators had abused hundreds of victims, some over many years during childhood and early adulthood. The cases involved different models of sexual exploitation.

Investigations led to successful prosecutions for sexual assaults, rapes, conspiracy and drug offences. Trials that concluded in September 2017 involved 25 defendants and 22 victims and resulted in substantial terms of imprisonment up to 28 years. The defendants included men aged between 34 and 47 years old.

## Findings in brief

Some of the main findings are:



- From early 2014, the response to victims was swift, determined and committed
- Decisions about taking action do not seem to have been influenced by lack of concern or interest, misplaced fears about political correctness or fear of being seen as racist
- Large numbers of perpetrators were disrupted, prosecuted and convicted
- Large numbers of victims were identified, supported and protected
- Innovative use of existing legislation led to victims being protected.

The report also found:



- Sexual exploitation of adults with vulnerabilities is likely to be occurring unrecognised
- Prevention depends on awareness and reporting by the public.
- Sexual exploitation of boys and men is complex and hidden with different models to those identified with female victims.

### Multi-agency working

- The significant issue that prevented interagency working from having the intended impact until 2014 was that perpetrators were insufficiently targeted
- While securing convictions is important, other steps should be taken immediately to interfere with and disrupt the activities of perpetrators without putting responsibility on victims
- Disruption is an inter-agency responsibility - pro-active disruption can have a very significant impact. The report, as a public document, has not set out in detail action which might be considered against actual or potential perpetrators or people associated with them.
- Some weaknesses in arrangements for accessing specialist advice and services for victims
- A weakness in licensing arrangements for individuals who have a licence to operate a taxi removed but may continue as a private operator of larger vehicles
- Interagency procedures and commissioning should address retention of records to include agencies to whom statutory requirements do not apply.
- The use of a trauma informed approach to recognise and address the impact on victims and their families is critical.

## Identification & Assessment

- Checklists and tools are helpful to identify actual or potential victims but all children and vulnerable adults are at risk; some will not fit the profile and others will do so but will never be exploited
- Potential victims may not appear vulnerable but something may happen - a change of school, lack of friends, bereavement or difficulties at home that creates vulnerability
- The application of the law and professional standards of practice relating to consent, capacity and the right to choose is complicated and uncertain. The presence of some form of exchange or benefit complicates assessments
- The early identification of victims or potential victims or activities of perpetrators depends on alert universal services, in particular education, health and community services
- Confidentiality in sexual health clinics made it difficult to identify & help victims

## Working with victims & perpetrators

- Victims found and continue to find giving evidence in court “abusive and destructive”
- Victims may, while needing protection themselves, become involved in recruiting other victims and facilitating abuse.
- A feature of a number of victims was early history of bereavement or loss which had not been addressed effectively
- Child victims are likely to require continuing services during adulthood.
- Processes for obtaining authority to restrict the liberty of suspected child victims is inflexible and costly.
- Perpetrators are arrogant, persistent and undeterred by police and agencies
- There is limited information available about likely profiles of perpetrators - what drives their activities, including the extent to which cultural values and attitudes are relevant
- Perpetrators will adopt cruel tactics and, being aware of agencies’ processes, become skilled at undermining attempts to safeguard victims
- Perpetrators have been empowered by technology which allows for unprecedented and easy access to sexually exploitative materials and provides increased opportunities for sexually exploitative acts or sexual offences
- Perpetrators demand extreme loyalties and create dependence so victims maintain links even after attempts to protect them and resent inquiry by agencies, actively mislead or avoid professional contacts

## What is Sexual Exploitation?

*“Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.”*

Advice, Child sexual exploitation: Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation. Department for Education. February 2017

The reviewer says that this and previous definitions have not described the sexual activity that actually takes place. His view is that practice suffers from a lack of vocabulary to properly describe what needs to be clearly understood if enquiries, investigations and conversations are to be carried out with a common understanding.

He says: *‘Sexual exploitation may involve horrific acts amounting to persistent inhuman and degrading treatment which most people are likely to consider depraved and not “normal” sexual activity. Victims may be repeatedly raped, forced to have sex, oral and vaginal simultaneously with different men, assaulted while under the influence of drugs or alcohol or while unconscious or asleep and usually contains elements of coercion and control. They may be trafficked locally or to other towns or cities. The arrangements might be well organised or ad hoc sessions at a variety of venues. Much of the detail has only become apparent from accounts given by victims in criminal proceedings.’*

**He concludes that there is a danger that unless the horror of what is experienced is fully understood, the need to act urgently on suspicions will not be appreciated.**

Victims told the review:

*“I never had sex when I was sober.”*

*“I saw her raped when she was unconscious.”*

*“I wanted to leave. I was given drink. I kept saying no and fighting them off. I was very tired and fell asleep. When I woke, I had been raped.”*

*“When I was asleep I was raped.”*

*“They gave it to the girls – M-Cat was cheap, makes you like a zombie and wanting to keep going. It’s addictive. It makes it easier for them to get what they want.”*

Early lack of understanding across the country contributed to victims being regarded as promiscuous, choosing to be involved, being described as having a sexual relationship, as being involved in underage sex, having a boyfriend or partner or being seduced and attending parties, all of which inhibited effective safeguarding action.

There is no national definition of sexual exploitation of adults in legislation or government guidance or advice. This is likely to contribute to a lack of public understanding, being informed largely by models of child sexual exploitation, and a reluctance of adult victims to speak out because they may think it only happens to children.

## Review recommendations

### For Boards

1. Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults Board should make arrangements to review the progress and impact of the actions taken and intended to be taken as a result of carrying out the Joint Serious Case Review.
2. A report should be made to Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults Board on the arrangements to take forward the initiative to establish a process for discussion with communities about the issues that have arisen from the Joint Serious Case Review.
3. Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults Board should continue to work with relevant partners to try and encourage conversations with perpetrators to better understand the local context of their offending.
4. When considering national guidance or advice Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults Board should ensure that expectations for engagement with a national agency that is not a local partner are addressed and kept under review.
5. Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults Board should identify services in the community that are not routinely involved with local safeguarding arrangements and consider how best to engage with them on safeguarding issues.
6. Safeguarding Children Board should arrange to carry out an audit of a sufficient number of cases to form a judgment about whether regulatory and guidance expectations concerning pupils who change educational settings are consistently followed.
7. Safeguarding Adults Board should carry out an audit of a sufficient number of cases to form a judgment about the effectiveness of arrangements to interview vulnerable adults following a period of missing.
8. The outcome of audits carried out locally to review the processes of assessment of capacity of patients to receive sexual health services should be reported to Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults Board.
9. Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults' Board should consider what arrangements can be made to monitor the numbers of patients who are identified as sexual exploitation victims and have received sexual health services
10. Safeguarding Children Board should arrange a forum for discussion about collaborative working between the school nursing service and teaching staff.
11. There should be reports made to Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults Board on the outcomes of the actions taken to improve information sharing in the region when vulnerable children or adults move administrative areas
12. Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults Board should consider how access for practitioners to advice on cultural attitudes when assessing and managing risks might be improved.
13. Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults Board should arrange for guidance to be issued to practitioners on the differences between learning disability and learning difficulties and the relevance for safeguarding judgments and services
14. Partner agencies should report to Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults Board on the arrangements for supervision of staff and how they measure the effectiveness and impact on outcomes.
15. Safeguarding Boards, involving the Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Crown Prosecution Service, should arrange for discussions to take place with local Crown Court to consider how practical arrangements at court can be improved to ensure protection of the interests of victims giving evidence.

#### **Crown Prosecution Service**

1. The Crown Prosecution Service should arrange for guidelines to be developed on involvement of the Service with Safeguarding Boards and other local safeguarding frameworks.

## The Government should:

1. Carry out a review of vehicle licensing for driving vehicles that transport members of the public, to include arrangements for private operators of larger vehicles, and taking account of the body of knowledge about sexual exploitation.
2. Urgently issue guidance or advice on addressing sexual exploitation of vulnerable adults.
3. Arrange for research to be undertaken concerning profiles, motivations and cultural and background influences of perpetrators of sexual exploitation of children and vulnerable adults and publish guidance for strategists and practitioners on the most effective way to reduce offending.
4. Ensure that when national guidance or advice requires involvement of a national agency or one which is not a statutory local partner with Safeguarding Boards or other local safeguarding frameworks, the documents include confirmation that the agency is aware of and has made arrangements for the expected involvement.
5. Consider which community services not routinely involved with local safeguarding frameworks have a contribution to make to early identification and prevention of sexual exploitation and make arrangements to ensure that their contribution is made and monitored through regulatory functions or otherwise.
6. Arrange for a review of the safeguarding implications for children educated otherwise than at school having regard particularly to the body of knowledge about sexual exploitation, issue guidance on safeguarding children educated otherwise than at school and consider the need for legislation to more effectively regulate this provision.
7. Arrange for national research to be carried out on the impact on sexual exploitation of Personal, Social, Health and Economic education programmes.
8. Consider whether Child Protection - Information Sharing Project arrangements should also apply to safeguarding adults systems and procedures.
9. Urgently arrange for the principles applied to confidentiality and safeguarding in sexual health settings to be reviewed having regard to the body of knowledge about sexual exploitation.
10. Address the need to improve national arrangements for facilitating transfer of data between social care authorities.
11. Review arrangements for obtaining authority to control or restrict the liberty of children and vulnerable adults at risk of sexual exploitation with a view to improving flexibility of provision and reducing costs and complexity of judicial overview.
12. Arrange for a review of the criminal law to ensure that it provides a range of criminal offences that reflect the body of knowledge about sexual exploitation more effectively address the behaviour and involvement of perpetrators and does not through terminology cause distress to victims.
13. Arrange for a review of the rules relating to the treatment of victims when giving evidence and the disclosure of records and their use in proceedings, including whether data subjects should be made aware of material disclosed.

### NHS England

1. National Health Service England should consider establishing a risk information sharing system for sexual health settings.

### For Local NHS

1. NHS Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group should arrange a forum for discussion about how potential and actual victims of grooming and sexual exploitation might be more likely to be identified in health settings and report to the Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board and Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Board.
2. Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust should report to Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board and Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Board on the arrangements being made for local delivery of the Government's ambition to improve access to Mental Health Services for all children and young people, including those sexually exploited.

## Reflecting on events in Newcastle: for team discussion / business meetings

'The public expects to be made aware of risks from perpetrators and how to minimise them. Sexual exploitation may impact on families and individuals who do not come to the attention of safeguarding agencies for any other reason.'

What more can you/your agency do to raise local awareness about what to look for and how to report concerns?

Are you aware of families that have connections to those you work with, which might have relevance in assessing ongoing risk/s?

'Sexual exploitation occurs in locations not usually frequented by safeguarding professionals and victims may not attract concerns of welfare agencies for any other reason. Indicators can be mistaken for normal adolescent behaviours. The abuse is hidden. Sophisticated grooming means victims may not recognise they are being abused and believe they are in control, in healthy consensual relationships. Apparent close relationships may develop to involve intimidation, threats and coercion.'

What locations do you think this abuse takes place in locally?

What does 'sophisticated grooming' look like to you, how would you support the young person in such a situation to recognise they are being abused?

What support /signposting is available locally to support victims/potential victims?

'The attitudes of children and young people to sexual relations and what they expect to happen are rapidly changing. Technology offers many positive opportunities for learning and social interaction but it also provides perpetrators with new opportunities and pathways to target potential victims'.

How confident are you in your understanding of how perpetrators use interactive media and technology to engage with and potentially exploit young people?

What advice would you give young people on staying safe online?

'It was assumed that sexual exploitation was an issue external to the family and lack of knowledge about family backgrounds led to both inappropriate reliance on the ability or interest to protect and overlooking potential for positive contributions.'

In your practice, how do you make use of the family background and composition?

Are there external elements or pressures on the family that you need to know to be able to adjust your practice decisions?

How do you involve the family in care and safety planning?

‘Social care services are responsible for ensuring safeguarding plans are in place but the development of and effectiveness of plans is an inter-agency issue. There was no evidence that any other agency commented or complained about the ineffectiveness of or criticised the adequacy of the implementation of plans.’

Do you personally understand the procedures to professionally challenge any decision or lack of action within a safeguarding plan?

And do you know how to follow this up, to gain a personal knowledge of the outcome, of any professional differences?

‘One of the strongest messages emerging from the review is the need to have a better understanding of perpetrators, not only in preventing their activities but also understanding their motivation.’

Are you personally familiar with information about patterns of offending?

The offending cycles used by perpetrators?

The social/personal indicators of what stops a person offending?

And an understanding of their impulse to commit offences against young people?

## Further reading & useful websites

- Read the [full SCR report](#) from Newcastle
- [Brighton & Hove Local Safeguarding Children Board \(LSCB\)](#)
- [Brighton & Hove Safeguarding Adults Board \(SAB\)](#)
- Pan Sussex Safeguarding & Child Protection Procedures: [Child Sexual Exploitation](#)
- Sussex YMCA Downslink Group: [The WISE Project](#)
- [NWG Network](#)

## Training

The LSCB provide two training courses looking at the exploitation of Children & Young People. The first [Preventing Exploitation of Children & Young People](#) looks at different ways that children & young people may be exploited by those who have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources.

The second day, [Working with Young People at Risk of Exploitation](#), explores ways of working directly with young people around exploitation in more detail and encourages familiarisation with the resources available, with an enhanced focus on online safety and police disruption techniques

Both days are facilitated in partnership with [The Wise Project](#) and you can book a place through the [Brighton & Hove Learning Gateway](#)