

## Audit Learning Log

### Children at risk of sexual exploitation (CSE)

April 2019

#### What did we do & why?

In 2018, the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board commissioned an independent auditor to undertake a review into the open cases of 8 children who were known to Children's Social Care and whom were considered to be at risk of CSE.

**Case profiles:** Of the 8 cases, 5 were girls, 3 boys, ranging in ages from 13 - 17 years. The families were all first known to Children's Social Care between 2009 - 2015, and were all open cases at the time of auditing.

The audit explored the following areas:

- ◆ How services are experienced by children and families.
- ◆ The quality of referral and assessments.
- ◆ What the current position is in relation to process.
- ◆ Appropriate application of thresholds.
- ◆ Confidence and competence of staff.

As part of the process, the auditor met with professionals from the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) team, First Response & Assessment Team and the Swan Unit (*now Child Exploitation Hub*), as well as a number of the children and parents / carers involved in the relevant cases.

#### How are services experienced by children and families?

##### The Voice of the Child (VoC)

*Of the cases reviewed, 4 out of 8 children agreed to speak with the auditor.*

When asked, all of the children struggled to confirm which services they were currently involved with; none of them felt supported by services in general.

3 of the 4 children were able to identify a particular named person or professional whom they found helpful; however the majority of the children were critical and/or dismissive of the social worker connected to their case.

The children felt that the following areas could have been better managed by professionals:

- ◆ Shorter time delays for putting services into place.
- ◆ Actively listening to the children and not making assumptions about them.

One particular child did not feel heard despite being spoken to by both the social worker and reviewing officer. They also felt that "it would be good to have an advocate in court."

*"It would be helpful to be able to write something for myself to say my views which could go to court with the other reports - especially if there are lies or mistakes in them."*

*"[Professionals should] Give help when they say they will - when my father died I was offered counselling, but didn't get it."*

*"At the child protection conference I spoke to the person running it and said what I thought, but in the meeting everyone disagreed with me and it wasn't written down. It felt as if they had already made up their minds...."*

## How are services experienced by children and families?

### Parents / Carers Views

*Of the cases reviewed, 5 out of 8 parents / carers agreed to speak with the auditor.*

There was a mixed response from parents / carers in terms of their ability to get initial support for their child or to know which service to approach; some found it easier than others to seek help, with the child's school or Children's Social Care being the first point of call in all cases.

All of the parents / carers were made aware of meetings and, for the most part, felt involved in the process.

The majority were able to tell the auditor which services were involved with their child, and were able to identify a particular worker they found helpful / unhelpful.

As with the children, a delay in getting services in place was the biggest area of concern noted for parents / carers, alongside frequent changes to social worker.

*"Our youth worker has been amazing. She visits him and has been the main one to get through to him."*

*"Overall social care were quite good, but it took a while to get services in place. It would have helped us if we didn't have to wait so long."*

*"I feel passionately that some many people have tried to help and support us - but there are lots of meetings with lots of people but no one seems to be able to move this forwards. It seems like sometimes we are going in circles and are right back at the beginning. I appreciate that X hasn't always engaged but there is also a high turnaround of professionals."*

## Areas of concern from audit

### Quality of referral and assessment:

The audit found no clear process of referral from front door services to the Swan Unit. It appeared that the team were allocated children at risk or with problematic behaviour but not necessarily at risk of CSE.

- ◆ No CSE flag on the home page of the case files to immediately identify this as a specific risk for the child.
- ◆ Of the 8 cases audited, only 1 had a safety plan on file.
- ◆ The quality of the assessments was poor in terms of highlighting CSE.
- ◆ The auditor felt that signs of CSE risk were often noted in assessments or case notes, but then not progressed as a risk or concern, which led to missed opportunities.
- ◆ Child In Need meetings are not consistently written up on case files / Child In Need plans are not consistently updated with each meeting.
- ◆ Attendees are not always defined on file.
- ◆ It is not clear that actions agreed from meetings were followed through - referrals agreed as meeting actions were often not completed by the next meeting.
- ◆ Missing episodes are not linked closely enough with risk of exploitation - the number of missing episodes is also not always recorded accurately on the case file.
- ◆ Limited evidence of direct work undertaken.

## Positive areas from audit

- ★ There is evidence of multi-agency working and contribution to professionals meetings.
  - ★ The child's voice is evident within the assessment  
Although being spoken to does not always mean being heard.
- ★ All children have an up-to-date Child and Family Assessment which acknowledges CSE risk.  
*(these assessments were written between December 2018 - March 2019)*
- ★ There is some evidence of direct work planned.      ★ There is evidence of one safety plan on file.

There are changes to processes in relation to exploitation of children (not solely CSE) which are currently taking place across the partnership. The changes proposed are outlined below

### Key areas of change since April 2018

- ◆ The development of the new Child Exploitation Indicator Tool
- ◆ The link between missing children and exploitation is moving forwards with the use of the ELPIS data system in Buckinghamshire County Council; it is widely agreed that there is a strong link between children missing and exploitation, as missing children are more likely to find themselves in vulnerable situations and at risk from those who would exploit that vulnerability.
- ◆ Swan Unit restructured into the Exploitation Hub.
- ◆ MACE (Multi-Agency Child Exploitation meetings) restructured.
- ◆ The definition of exploitation expanded to include all areas of exploitation to children (not only sexual).
- ◆ Professionals working as part of the new Exploitation Hub to deliver specific interventions.

Child Exploitation Indicator Tool has been designed to help practitioners focus on specific exploitation indicators and determine whether further investigations are required.

It can be used by any professional working with children under the age of 18 years, and should be attached to any referral made to Children's Social Care which is a potential case of exploitation.

The toolkit can be found at:

[www.bscb.procedures.org.uk/assets/clients/5/Exploitation%20Indicator%20Pathway%20-%20June%202019.pdf](http://www.bscb.procedures.org.uk/assets/clients/5/Exploitation%20Indicator%20Pathway%20-%20June%202019.pdf)

### What is the ELPIS data system?

Thames Valley Police's ELPIS system is a multi-agency system for the management of missing person's cases (and at the time of the audit was the only such system in the Country)

This web based application can be accessed by agencies which have a role in safeguarding missing persons, and aims to collect information on the persons missing episode, their background and vulnerabilities. In order to identify potential safeguarding concerns and opportunities for intervention.

Bucks Healthcare Trust (inc. sexual health provision) is now undertaking talks to join the ELPIS system, with the same opportunity being offered to additional universal services such as GPs, schools and hospital services.

### What is a MACE meeting?

These multi-agency child exploitation meetings are held every two weeks in Buckinghamshire.

Lead by Children's Social Care – with participation from partner agencies such as Thames Valley Police, Education, Health services, Barnardos, CAMHs and Youth Offending Service - the main purpose of the meetings is to ensure that any child deemed to be at risk of exploitation has a plan in place to reduce the risk and to support the child.

As part of the new exploitation hub, partners will complete an 8 week prevention plan with each child; this work will be designed to support the child in understanding healthy relationships, understand potential risks, support with any possible disclosures and to put into place the safety plan.

*There have also been significant changes made to the Swan Unit.....*

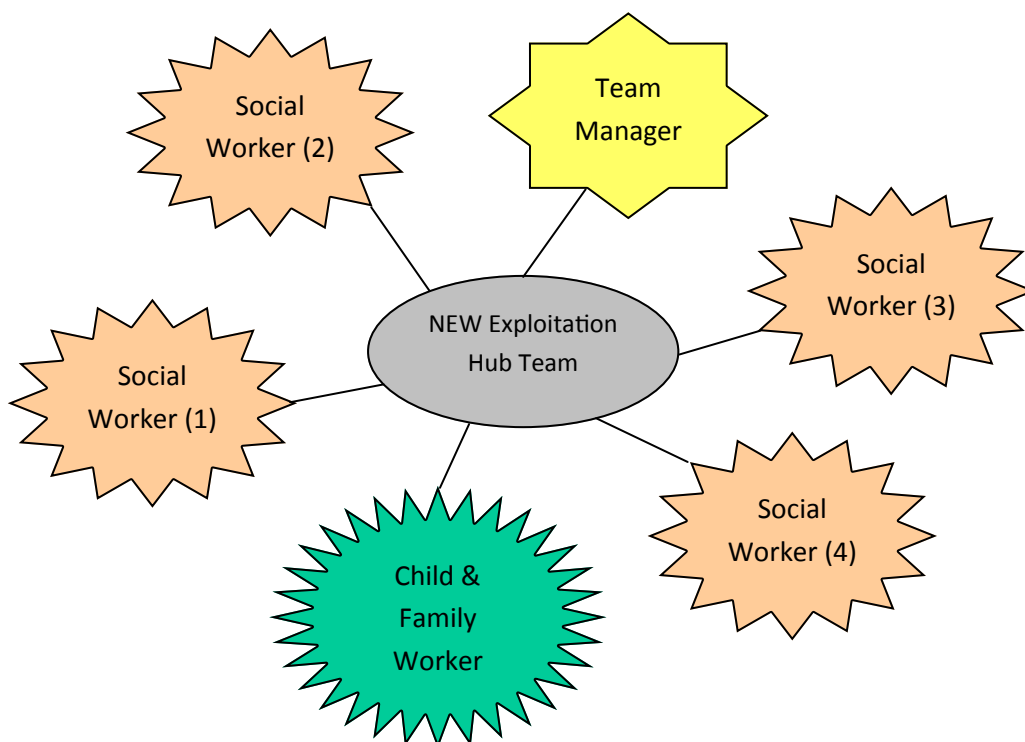
## Confidence and Competence of Staff

The audit identified that the previous structure of the Swan Unit was not set up to allow staff to use their skills in a productive way; when speaking to partners, the auditor noted that previously, none of the staff attached to the unit were able to work with their strengths or within their official remit.

- ⇒ Children's Social Care staff were case holding, when they should have been completing specific pieces of work to support the children at risk.
- ⇒ Thames Valley Police were finding themselves befriending and supporting the children, rather than being able to focus on disruption and arrests of perpetrators.
- ⇒ Staff had little opportunity to develop additional skills; although established as a 'specialist' unit, it appears to have functioned as another child protection team - and without a team manager in place, there was no clear direction.

### So, what's changed?

- ◆ A team manager post has been established; the practitioner, along with the new Child & Family Worker, will visit other projects across the country to identify best practice.
- ◆ A full staff structure has been agreed (*see illustration below*).
- ◆ Partnership roles are more definite in the Exploitation Hub (*see explanation below*).
- ◆ A multi-agency training plan is currently being reviewed by the BSCB Exploitation sub group.




The Swan Unit is being restructured into the Exploitation Hub; the Hub will work with vulnerable children and young people up to the age of 25 years, incorporating the most recent [Children Leaving Care Guidance](#); this will ensure that young people at risk of exploitation are not left vulnerable when they reach 18 years and are no longer eligible for services provided under the Children Act (1989).

The hub is also developing a support and information provision for parents and, in time, a survivors group.

Whilst it is still in its early stages, the Child Exploitation Hub staff have already adopted the tools and practices that are needed to move this forwards. The Hub will no longer be solely focused on children who are at risk of sexual exploitation; the remit will be widened to include all forms of exploitation and missing.

## Recommendations from Audit

Encourage children (of an age to understand) to write their views down, which gives them an opportunity to agree / disagree with professional reports....The children need to be given enough time to really be able to think about what they want to say.



Extend this opportunity to children within the court arena, as requested by one of the children spoken to within the audit process.

Provide an advocate in court to sit with the child and talk them through the processes / support their views.

Improve the pathway across commissioned and non-commissioned services to avoid delay for families.

Explore the development of peer advocacy / support for young survivors of exploitation, which can also inform practice.

Explore the development of a support group of parents / carers of children at risk - or survivors of - exploitation, which can also inform practice.

Discussions need to be had regarding information / data sharing and consent in terms of inputting into the ELPIS data system.

Data collection and sharing will identify what is working and what is not - all services need to be ready and willing to change what is not working.

Children and parent / carer feedback is essential in the development of service delivery. Their involvement will also serve to build trust and lead to better outcomes.

Support leaflets and relevant telephone numbers should be given to children and their parents / carers when they come to the attention of professionals as 'at risk'.

Decision to adapt services to need should be expedited through the management tiers to ensure progress without unnecessary delay.

Explore where early help fits into the continuum of indicators when children are first identified as vulnerable to exploitation and before it gets to need intervention by the Child Exploitation Hub.

Develop a programme of training to raise awareness across third sector providers in terms of early indicators of exploitation and services available.

## Further Information

For more information about the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board, please visit our website [www.bucks-lscb.org.uk](http://www.bucks-lscb.org.uk)