During 2016, the BSCB Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Sub Group raised concerns around the following areas:

1. Whether there is sufficient support in place for children who have suffered CSE once they turn 18. At this point they will cease to become eligible for support through Children’s Social Care and a number of other services that are provided for children.

2. Whether we have a sufficient local response in place for victims of CSE who have learning disabilities. Recent research has highlighted this as a particular vulnerability. (For example: Franklin, A., Raws, P. and Smeaton, E., September 2015, *Unprotected, Overprotected: meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, sexual exploitation*. Barnardos)

The BSCB Performance and Quality Assurance Sub Group (P&QA) proposed this audit to help the BSCB gather some specific evidence from children’s journeys around whether any transition planning is taking place for victims of CSE as they approach 18, and whether appropriate services are available and provided once they turn 18. We also wanted to include in the audit sample a journey where the child was known to have a learning disability to see if this impacted on the support provided both before and after transition.

**Methodology**

A non-random sample of 5 was selected for this audit. 3 children approaching the age of 18 were identified by Children’s Social Care, including one where there was known to be a learning disability. 2 adults who had engaged with services as children in relation to CSE were identified by Barnardos RU Safe? There were a number of challenges involved in identifying individuals over the age of 18 who could be included in the sample, as the forward journeys for children after they turned 18 were not always clear.

The audit was conducted by members of the P&QA Sub Group, with practitioners from a number of other agencies invited to attend for the discussion around children / adults known to them.

**Lines of Enquiry**

1. **Transition Planning**
   - Was a transition plan made for the child?
   - At what age was the transition plan made? Was this early enough for effective arrangements to be put into place?
   - Which agencies were involved in creating the transition plan? Who was it shared with?
   - To what extent was the child involved in planning transition arrangements? How did their involvement impact on the plan and on any interventions that were put in place?
   - Was the plan implemented?
   - What impact did the plan have on the outcomes for the adult?
   - If no transitions plan was made, is there evidence of single or multi-agency discussions on how the needs of the child would continue to be met once they became an adult?

2. **Disability**
   - Did the child have a learning disability?
   - How did this impact on transition planning?
   - How did this impact on the provision of ongoing services?

3. **Thresholds**
   - Are threshold decisions along the individuals journey appropriate (as a child and through transition)?

4. **Partnership Working, Challenge and Escalation**
   - How effective is partnership working, including between services provided for children and those provided for adults?
   - Where relevant, did partners effectively challenge where they had concerns about what was in the best interests of the child?
Young Person A

Young Person A is 17 years old. He has attended a special school since the age of 7 and has only recently been diagnosed with Asperger's and Autistic Spectrum Disorder. A lives with his mother who is a single parent. He has very infrequent contact with his dad, who is an alcoholic. He has an older brother who is aggressive towards him and has drug problems. A also acts as a young carer for his mother who has a range of serious physical and mental health needs.

A worries about what will happen to his mother and there is no extended family who can help. Both A and his mother have a high level of distrust for services. The mother has been reluctant for A’s needs to be assessed.

In 2015, A started to engage in risky online behaviour. He was unsure about his sexuality and started to explore this online. The Police were involved in investigating and explicit messages and images were found on his computer and phone. They decided not to proceed with any charges.

A range of services have been involved with A and more recently a strategy meeting has been held and it was agreed that this would be taken forward to ICPI (Initial Child Protection Conference).

The school is A’s only form of stability and is very worried about what will happen to A when he turns 18.

Young Person B

Young Person B is 19 years old. In 2014 she took an overdose and whilst she was in hospital her grandmother found a diary which described how she was being groomed by groups of males, including making pornographic videos in hotels. R U Safe? started working with her because of missing episodes, but were not aware of concerns about CSE.

B’s mother is an alcoholic and B spent time living at her grandmother’s house. In late 2014 she decided she did not want to live with her grandmother any more, but her mum had taken an overdose. It is not clear who was looking after her at this point.

For much of 2015, B was a looked after child. Her referral to Children’s Social Care was late, and only just in time for her to qualify for aftercare services. She is currently receiving these and they will continue until she is 21.

In the first half of 2016, B had a baby with her boyfriend. Initially the baby was placed on a Child Protection Plan. This was subsequently reduced a Child in Need Plan and the child is now closed to Children’s Social Care. B is receiving support from the Family Nurse Partnership which will continue until the child is 2 years old.

Young Person C

Young Person C is 20 years old. The Police referred him to R U Safe? in 2010 when he was 13 because they were concerned about him contacting males via the phone book and social media. He had met one of the men face to face and the mother had reported this to the Police and Children’s Social Care. C had come out as gay to his family but not to his peers. The Police investigated and reported his online activity to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) but there was not enough evidence to take the case forward.

C lived at home with his mother and 3 younger brothers. As a single parent of 4 young children, his mother tried to put boundaries in place but struggled. There was no contact with C’s father.

R U Safe? worked with C around internet safety, how to recognise the grooming process, healthy relationships, drugs and alcohol. C was also supported by a youth counselling service and an LGBT support group.

In 2011, when C was 15, a member of the public reported that C was being abused by an older man. The Police were involved but C did not consent to a medical assessment and there was not enough evidence to progress to trial. In 2013 a referral was made to CAMHS due to C suffering anxiety as a result of assault and homophobic bullying.

C has now moved out of the area.

Young Person D

Young Person D is 16. A referral was made to Children’s Social Care by a sexual health service in 2015 because D had disclosed she had been in a relationship with an older male for 14 months. The male was someone who had come into the schools to provide information and advice, but she stated that this relationship was not sexual.

A second referral was made from the same service when D requested emergency contraception after spending the night in a hotel with the same older male. D was made subject to a Child in Need plan in 2016 and work was done by a Swan Unit worker around healthy relationships. The assessment by the Social Worker was that the relationship was not exploitative. D’s mother is an alcoholic, and attended talking therapy around her relationship with D.

No contact was made with the Police other than to check the male. The case is now closed to Social Care.
Vignettes

Young Person E

Young Person E is thought to be 17 although it is possible that she is as old as 19. She was trafficked to the north of the UK from Romania at a young age into an illegal adoption.

When she was 11 she was married to an 18 year old. She ran away and was placed in foster care for a while but was then placed back with her carers. She disclosed that she had been raped, drugged and forced into prostitution. She first became pregnant at 14 and had no anti-natal care. At 16 she met an older man who she planned to marry. This was an abusive relationship. She became pregnant again, but not by her partner. She went briefly into a mother and baby unit before returning to foster care. She subsequently had a third child.

As a child in the north of the UK she was not registered with a GP and had no access to healthcare. She attended school for a 2 year period only.

It is unclear when she entered Bucks. However, her children are all now in our care. E wanted support with her children but she would not leave her abusive partner and was told she would need to do this before having her children back. Her partner recently claimed the relationship was over and reported E to the police for harassment.

She has been referred to both CAMHS and R U Safe? although there are challenges around engagement with both services. R U Safe? believe she has a global learning difficulty which is not just due to her lack of education.

Common Themes

The only criteria used to identify the sample for this audit were age, and that one child should have a learning difficulty. Some of the common themes across these journeys are therefore of note:

- 4 of the 5 cases involve single parent families, with a father who was completely absent or where contact was infrequent. In the 5th, child E had been trafficked and therefore separated from her birth parents.
- In 2 of the cases the mother was an alcoholic and in a third the father was an alcoholic. Substance misuse is also evident across other family members including the children themselves and other siblings.
- Although we had sought one journey where the child had a learning difficulty, this was also present for a second child in the audit sample.
- Both males in the sample were gay and had sought to explore their sexuality through risky online behaviour.
- Domestic abuse was explicit in one journey, and there was a risk that child to adult domestic abuse would occur in one other journey (young person A) unless action was taken to reduce the level of risk.

Findings

Transition Planning: In the audit of these five journeys, there was no transition planning for any of these children as they approached 18. At the same time, there is a drop off in services at 18, with much higher thresholds for adult services.

Neither of the young people with learning disabilities were likely to meet the threshold for adult social care services. Adult Mental Health Services were considered an option for both of these young people. However, this posed challenges because in both case it was not clear whether consent for services would be provided by the children once they turned 18. In both cases there was also concern that mental health services would not be effective unless other work was also done with the young people to try and respond to some of the other challenges they were facing. However, it was not clear what services would be able to provide this support.

Learning Disability: Learning disability can add to a young persons vulnerability to exploitation and whilst it does mean that support is available for longer via Children’s Service's (until 21 years), this can just postpone the drop off in services. Where a learning disability is undiagnosed (e.g. young person E) this may impact on the continued availability of services.

Thresholds: The main challenge identified was the difference in thresholds for children and adults. It was clear that available services were fewer post-18, with adult services more geared towards older people, or those with much higher levels of vulnerability.

Whilst the two young people with disabilities were likely to be able to receive support for longer through R U Safe?, there was concern that the drop off in services was just being postponed. The possible impact for both is that they remain vulnerable, with young person A potentially becoming criminalised and young person E remaining a victim of exploitative relationships. There is an additional concern that young person A’s mother will also be left at risk of harm from her son.

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Findings

Partnership Working, Challenge and Escalation: The journeys presented some areas of concern around partnership working, communication and information sharing including agencies not all having the same information about a young person. However, some good practice was also evident. Of particular note is young person A, where the school has been extremely proactive in providing support over a long period of time, and in seeking to draw in appropriate additional support through persistent contact with other agencies.

Other Findings

- A dedicated adult exploitation service is missing in Buckinghamshire. Currently Adult Mental Health Services may end up as the only available route for continued support, but this may not be the most appropriate route.
- Support for young people identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender (LGBT) is missing in Bucks. It was notable that the two males in this audit both identified as gay, and engaged in risky online behaviour in order to explore their emerging sexuality (one accessed a service in the past that is no longer available).
- Where more than one local authority is involved this to make effective partnership working more difficult.
- For young person B, it appeared that after she had a child, Children’s Social Care focused on the needs of the baby rather than the mother, which reflects a key finding from the recent BSCB pre-birth audit.
- There were some findings that highlight the improvement in the local response to CSE, in particular over the last 2-3 years. For example after B’s diary was seized in 2014 no disruption activity was undertaken by the Police because B denied there were any issues. There would now be clear disruption activity undertaken in such a situation. In the case of C, no further action was taken by the Police in 2011 after it was alleged that he had been abused by an older man, but refused a medical examination. Again much stronger investigation would now take place in relation to the alleged perpetrator, even without the medical evidence. This more recent strengthening of our approach is consistent with findings from the recent CSE Serious Case Review.

Recommendations

A small number of immediate actions were identified in relation to young person A, young person B and young person D to ensure that their needs were effectively being met through services.

The following broader recommendations were also made:

1. Partners from children’s and adult services to work together to consider whether there needs to be a multi-agency referral forum to discuss transitional issues for exploited children, for example, through extending the remit of existing forums such as M-SERAC (Missing & Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Conference)
2. In the absence of local provision to support LGBT young people, the BSCB to collate information on national level organisations who can provide information, support or advice. This to be made available to young people via the BSCB website and to practitioners to help them signpost young people to support. This work will include surveying Board partners on any useful resources or sources of support that they are currently using, and on any particular challenges they are facing in providing the right support for LGBT young people.
3. BSCB to share the learning from this audit with the Safer, Stronger Bucks Partnership Board to inform their work around an adult exploitation service
4. BSCB to share the learning from this audit with the Safeguarding Adults Board to inform discussions around any opportunities for stronger joint working at the point of transition.
5. The CSE Sub Group to use the learning from this audit to feed into a scheduled discussion around a possible widening of their terms of reference to cover other forms of exploitation.
6. Learning from this audit to feed into the workshop sessions for 2 planned Exploitation half day events.
7. All Board partners are asked to reflect on their own single agency procedures in relation to transitions in the light of the findings form this audit, and assure themselves that they have effective transitions arrangements in place, and in particular that these take account of the need for strong multi-agency working.

Next Steps & Further Information

The action plan will now be monitored via the BSCB Performance & Quality Assurance Sub Group and reported to the Board. Professionals are asked to share and disseminate learning within colleagues in their agency.

Further information: For further information on this, or other BSCB audits contact bscb@buckscc.gov.uk

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