

## **CABINET – 26 MAY 2015**

### **The council's response to the findings of the Serious Case Review of Children A-F and further action taken in response to Child Sexual Exploitation in Oxfordshire**

#### **Report by Director for Children's Services**

#### **Introduction**

- 1 Child sexual exploitation is among the most serious and challenging issues that Oxfordshire County Council has faced. This report sets out the council's response to the recommendations in the serious case review, and also provides a summary of the action that the council has taken since 2011 when Operation Bullfinch was launched.
- 2 Bullfinch was a joint police and council operation, concluding in May 2013 when seven men were found guilty of a total of 59 counts including rape and facilitating child prostitution. They were sentenced to a total of 95 years in in prison.
- 3 The Serious Case Review (SCR) of children A-F was commissioned by the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) following the conclusion of the trial. The review was published on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2015 and identifies that there was a systemic multi agency failure in the period before Operation Bullfinch.
- 4 The council accepts all recommendations from the review and takes full responsibility for its role in what went wrong.
- 5 The council has apologised to the victims and their families, and deeply regrets that the abuse was not stopped sooner.
- 6 The capability to tackle child sexual exploitation has been transformed in Oxfordshire since Operation Bullfinch. This has been made possible by a far greater understanding of this form of abuse, strong leadership and ensuring that resources have been made available to undertake the action that is required.
- 7 Action since 2011 is set out in detail in the report. in summary it includes:
  - Multi agency specialist team (Kingfisher) - social workers, police, health - low caseloads - preventing, protecting, disrupting, prosecuting. Active caseload of 70.
  - 10 trials leading to convictions
  - 60 disruption notices issued

- Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub - single front door for referrals to children's social care
- 7,500 front line multi-agency staff trained
- 18,000 children seen age-appropriate dramas in school since 2013 and further 12,000 planned for 2015
- Screening tool rolled out and in use by professionals - 300+ completed
- Investment - 80% real terms increase in investment in children's social care in past decade, council resourcing of Operation Bullfinch investigation cost £3m+
- Intensive approach to victim support
- Working closely with district councils, who have lead roles on licencing, housing, community safety, multi-agency patrols
- New approach to dealing with missing children
- New placement strategy - 4 new children's homes being built to keep most vulnerable children in county, ongoing recruitment of foster carers, multi-agency co-ordinated placement support tailored to CSE.

8 The council is not complacent. We know that there is still more to do and we will continue to develop our approach and learn as best practice is further developed. We are also keen to continue to share our experience and learning with other places, including those areas that do not think that they have a problem. Our experience has been that if you don't go looking for this abuse you will not find it.

### Scale and Context

9 Police and social workers have identified 373 Oxfordshire children who have been, or are strongly suspected of being, victims of child sexual exploitation over a 15 year period (1999 to 2014). This is not an estimated number. It relates to known children who have been interviewed as part of Operation Bullfinch, or the specialist Kingfisher team has worked with - or in some cases both.

10 The total number of children who have been worked with by Kingfisher since its start in November 2012 to December 2014 is 255. The majority are girls but increasingly more boys are being identified as victims of CSE. The total number of boys who have been worked with by the team is 43 (17%).

11 Kingfisher, our multi-agency specialist child sexual exploitation team is working with approximately 70 children at any one point. We are working with the police to tackle historic cases.

12 Since April 2013 closer partnership working has led to ten trials for child sexual exploitation in Oxfordshire, with 15 men being convicted of related crimes and sentenced to over 45 years in prison and more sentences pending:

3 victim witnesses,	1 defendant	found guilty and awaiting sentence
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6 victim witnesses	1 defendant,	pleaded guilty and sentenced to 10 years in prison
1 male victim witness	1 defendant	sentenced to 32 month in prison
2 victim witnesses	1 defendant,	sentenced to 8 years in prison
1 victim witness	2 defendants	each sentenced to 27 month in prison
1 victim witness,	1 defendant,	sentenced to 3 years in prison
1 victim witness	1 defendant	sentenced to 6 weeks in prison and financial compensation
1 victim witness	1 defendant (3 charged, 2 had charges withdrawn)	sentenced to 14 years in prison
1 victim witness	1 defendant	2 convictions, sentenced to 20 months in prison for each conviction
8 victim witnesses	7 defendants of whom 5 were convicted	16 convictions, awaiting sentence

- 13 A number of significant further investigations are also well underway that are expected to result in further arrests and charges shortly. Our work to date has involved victims from all geographic areas of the county; it is not limited to any one particular area.

### **Learning and Recommendations from the Serious Case Review**

- 14 The Council accepts all learning and recommendations from the review and takes full responsibility for its role in what went wrong. The council has apologised to the victims and their families, and deeply regrets that the abuse was not stopped sooner.
- 15 In 2014 the SCR panel members who were senior representatives from the agencies worked together for 3 days to glean the learning from the detailed analysis of each of the six girls (A-F) and their histories. This event exposed the underlying vulnerabilities of children to exploitation and the complexity of their needs in the looked after system. The learning has fed into a pilot programme to improve work with neglected children, the development of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the Placement Strategy.
- 16 At the beginning of January 2015, Children's Social Care staff and managers who had had historical involvement with the children at the centre of the SCR attended six workshops to review and learn from an independent appraisal of the practice in each case. These were attended by 60 people. These were challenging and reflective sessions which enabled staff to review the cultural

attitudes of the pre-Bullfinch period, their own practice and the systemic issues within the directorate at the time.

- 17 These were followed by 14 learning events in January and February for 400 staff and managers in Children's Social Care and Early Intervention covering the learning for children's services practitioners in the following core activities:
- Assessment, Decision-Making & Planning
  - Child Protection & Safeguarding
  - Looked After Children
  - Missing Children
  - Working with Children & Young People
  - Working Together
  - Leadership & Management
- 18 The Education & Learning (E&L) Service has led regular briefings for Chairs of Governors and Head Teachers and two joint learning sessions for E&L managers and Head Teachers reviewing the SCR findings and learning for schools and education services. This has led to greater understanding of the risks associated with school absence linked to exclusions and poor attendance. The E&L Service continues to challenge schools on their safeguarding of vulnerable children, particularly in regard to their management of emotional and behavioural issues. The council has also developed and promoted a model policy for schools on the management and transfer of records.
- 19 The SCR sets out a series of 'learning points' for all professionals in all agencies. The OSCB is holding two multi-agency large-scale learning events in March and May 2015. These will cover the key themes of:
- Missed opportunities
  - What was missing organisationally in Oxfordshire?
  - Knowledge
  - Escalation
  - Tolerance
  - Staff attitudes and rigour
  - Investigations
  - Going missing
  - Impact of ethnicity
- 20 The SCR makes a number of recommendations to the OSCB. These ask the OSCB to seek assurance from the agencies that they have implemented improvements and tested their impact. The OSCB has set timescales for the agencies to report their progress.
- 21 The recommendations are:  
The Board should (if it has not done so already):
- i. Ask each member agency to review its escalation procedures, and provide assurance to the Board that they are understood and complied with

- ii. Review the interrelationships with other multi-agency partnerships, such as District Community Safety Partnerships and the County Safer Community Partnership, to ensure there is mutual clarity about each other's roles and appropriate cross-representation
- iii. Ask each agency to provide evidence of its supervision policies and how the agencies ensure they are effective
- iv. Be assured that the lessons from this Review and IMRs are embedded in OSCB and single agency training
- v. Ensure that the messages from victims and their families given to this review are embedded in training
- vi. Seek evidence that minutes of multi-agency meetings are clear about ownership, have consistent titles, and can be seen by their content and appearance to be of high value
- vii. Seek assurance from TVP about progress on recording crime relating to sexual offences
- viii. Seek assurance from OCC that there is appropriate access to the necessary range of LAC placements
- ix. Ensure that reports on missing children statistics for the Board are fully interrogated to identify any emerging patterns
- x. Seek assurance from Oxfordshire County Council that there are good arrangements for the transfer of information between schools about child vulnerability, and that decisions around exclusion from school and its management (risk assessments and plans) take into account that the behaviour is or may be related to exploitation
- xi. Seek assurance from NHS bodies, including general practice, that staff include the consideration that consent has been eroded through exploitation when assessing a child's ability to consent to treatment and that referrals to statutory agencies will be made appropriately
- xii. Seek assurance from all member agencies that staff are aware of the guidance around consent to sexual activity, and relationships
- xiii. Continue to undertake rigorous multi-agency case audits where CSE is suspected

22 The Council accepts the recommendations and will report to Performance Scrutiny and Cabinet on their implementation as well as reporting to OSCB. The relevant County Council services which are working on the recommendations are Children's Social Care, Early Intervention, Education and Learning, Youth Offending Service, Adult Social Care, Public Health.

23 The serious case review sets out three recommendations for national consideration:

- i. The DfE should review 'Working Together' 2013 to ensure it gives sufficient weight to investigation and disruption aspect of safeguarding children at risk from CSE
- ii. Relevant government departments should consider the impact of current guidance on consent to ensure what seems to be the ever-lower age at which a child can be deemed to consent (for example to

treatment) and attitudes to underage sex are not making it easier for perpetrators to succeed

- iii. With a significant proportion of those found guilty nationally of group CSE being from a Pakistani and/or Muslim heritage, relevant government departments should research why this is the case, in order to guide prevention strategies.

The council agrees with the review author that child sexual exploitation is a national issue and these are crucially important issues and would welcome a national response to these issues.

## **Government response to the Serious Case Review**

- 24 On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2015, the Department for Education, the Home Office and the Department of Health sent a formal response to Maggie Blyth, the Independent Chair of OSCB.
- 25 The letter acknowledged the seriousness of the exploitation suffered by the children and their families and commended their bravery in contributing to the SCR.
- 26 The letter acknowledged the improvements made collectively and individually by the local authority, police and health services and the OSCB's role in co-ordinating.
- 27 The government has proposed that the OSCB leads a piece of work to assure the government and the public that the reforms to services are evidenced in good practice. This work will also be used to contribute to a centre of professional expertise on what works.
- 28 Sophie Humphreys has been appointed by the government to work alongside the OSCB to support this work.
- 29 The OSCB has worked with the County Council and Thames Valley Police to draw up the terms of reference and these were approved on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2015 at a meeting between Maggie Blyth and the Dept for Education.
- 30 This piece of work is called "*The Impact of Multi-Agency Work to Tackle CSE in Oxfordshire: the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board Stocktake.*"

## **Summary of Actions and Impact**

- 31 Although it has taken two years for the SCR to be published, the County Council and our partners have not waited for the outcome of the review before implementing improvements to services. A summary of developments and the impact they are having is set out as follows:

*Children's Voices: their views of whether services have changed*

- 32 Some of the girls working with the Kingfisher team helped make a DVD which was shared in September 2014 at a major event hosted by the County Council. A selection of their views of the services are transcribed below:
- 33 **On proactivity and support:** *“Someone was involved with CSE and she mentioned my name to them. So Kingfisher came and found me, they came and spoke to me and asked me some questions about certain people.”*
- 34 **On building trust to get special help, three views:** *“I started talking to my social worker more, started having 1-1 time with her and then I went on the Kingfisher team” ... “I got put in foster care and I quickly got close to my foster carer. Then I got closer to my social worker and I started telling her more on a 1-1 sort of thing” ... “I feel like they [Kingfisher] are my family and they like me for me. I just get on with everyone, it’s a nice environment and everyone is nice and stuff.”*
- 35 **On the skill needed to engage potential victims:** *“I got told it [the Kingfisher team] was for girls who were being exploited. I didn’t think I was being exploited. I thought I was in trouble for things I hadn’t done or anything and then the more they talked about things the more I realised I was in a wrong situation. The more they talked about it [exploitation] happening to other people the more I wanted to let them know that things were actually happening to me.”*
- 36 **On advice for social workers:** *“Just wait. Different people trust people quickly and others take long to trust people. Just wait until they get used to you. You shouldn’t just assume stuff.”*
- 37 And from another girl: *“This woman [a social worker] came to my house and talked to me for about ten minutes and asked lots of questions, then they talked to my parents a lot. The social worker came to see me at school. She kept asking me questions and trying to talk to me but at first I didn’t talk back. It was like she was talking to a brick wall at first. It was very hard because I wouldn’t give out any information about my friends.”* The girl went on to say, *“It was nice to have the company of the social worker, to have someone come and see me, to talk to me and be interested in what I was doing on a daily basis.”*
- 38 **On the balance between caring and controlling:** *“I just felt she [the social worker] was really there for me, as if she was a friend. It was like having a mum, a mum who cared... but someone who would leave you alone at the same time, someone that wasn’t in your face but was there.”*

#### *Effective joint working:*

- 39 **Kingfisher Team** was established in 2012 as a co-located multi agency team focusing on child sexual exploitation. It consists of social workers, police, Oxford City Council, local health services and other specialist workers including drugs and alcohol teams, the voluntary sector (Barnardo’s) and

others including those focusing on the BME community and working with parents. The team has worked with over 200 children and has an active caseload of around 70 at any one time, and prevents abuse through awareness raising and protecting children at risk, disruption and prosecution of perpetrators. Social workers have small caseloads enabling intensive and persistent work with children to build trusting relationships and support disclosure.

- 40 **The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub** was launched in 2014. It provides a single front door from universal services and the public for all referrals to children's social care. Includes children's social care, Thames Valley Police, city and district council staff and health professionals, enables sharing of information and more effective action at the point of referral. The team will also start handling referrals to adult social care in 2015, enabling further integration and intelligence sharing across this boundary. Over the first four months of operation the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub dealt with 4,592 enquiries of which 1,337 resulted in formal assessments.
- 41 **Work with Schools** has been intensive involving headteachers and chairs of governors, as well as children and teachers to help them understand this issue and what to do if they are worried. The Kingfisher team now leads monthly multi-agency discussions with schools and other agencies in their local areas to raise awareness and enable intelligence gathering on children of concern. We have recognised the risks that children face when they are not in school and have a new attendance and behaviour policy that strengthens our approach to children who are not attending school.
- 42 We have worked closely with **Oxford City Council and the other district councils in Oxfordshire**, including briefings for their members and management teams, and through regular meetings with their Chief Executives. These councils have a key role in alcohol licencing and taxi and private hire licencing, as well as being housing authorities and leading community safety activity at the local level.
- 43 We use **multi agency patrols** to identify people and premises of concern and disrupt activity creatively where child sexual exploitation evidence alone is not strong enough. For example we have used trading standards, health and safety and fire safety to close down premises (2 guesthouses and 1 pub), and undertaken raids for drugs and underage drinking. We also work with the police to use abduction notices and other tactics to disrupt activity. To date 60 abduction notices have been issued as part of disruption tactics.
- 44 We take a **strategically aligned approach** between the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board, Health and Wellbeing Board and Oxfordshire Safer Communities Partnership, Police and Crime Commissioner, city and district councils and community safety partnerships and others.
- 45 We are strengthening arrangements between the Safeguarding Children Board and Community Safety Partnerships, with children's social care managers now members of the community safety partnerships in their



respective District Council areas. We are developing a protocol in place to ensure that the Oxfordshire Safer Communities Partnership works effectively alongside the Safeguarding Children Board and are using both boards to deal with key issues such as child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and the 'Prevent' agenda, therefore gaining multi-agency co-operation.

### *Leadership:*

- 46 Oxfordshire has firm and committed political and managerial leadership with absolute determination to tackle this issue head on. No excuses.
- 47 There has been a cross party approach by senior politicians, with no political football.
- 48 Councillors, led by the Lead member for Children's services, have played a critical role in shaping and challenging our approach. This has included two major reports to the County Council Cabinet, regular discussion by Political Group Leaders, and several briefings for county and city and district councillors. Our main performance committee has also been involved, receiving the chair of the safeguarding board's annual report and developing appropriate performance metrics to hold services to account.
- 49 A cross party member group was established in 2013 and has tightened members' roles in relation to safeguarding assurance processes.
- 50 Elected members sit on the Corporate Parenting Panel which receives an annual report on the safeguarding of looked after children, listens to the Children In Care Council and visits residential children's homes.
- 51 Political decision making has supported increasing resourcing to children's social care despite major budget pressures.
- 52 Action has been driven by the Chief Executive and Director of Children's services.
- 53 We have taken every opportunity to share our learning with others, raising national issues that need national solutions, sharing what we have found works with other professionals and learning from them.
- 54 The serious case review identifies concerns about escalation processes within the council. We have significantly strengthened requirements for escalation, with a new 'Need to Know' policy and training for senior managers. A monthly 'Need to Know' report is collated and reviewed by the Lead member, Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services.

### *Resourcing:*

- 55 Tackling child sexual exploitation is expensive. We have faced a significant financial burden but resourcing of child protection is regarded as non-negotiable, with strong commitment from politicians across all parties.

- 56 The budget for children's social care has increased by over £20m over the last ten years, an increase of 80% in real terms, despite huge cuts in other areas.
- 57 The county council spent in excess of £3m during Operation Bullfinch on social work and other support to the investigation.
- 58 In 2013/14 county councillors agreed an additional £1.4m to enable the recruitment of an additional 21 child protection social workers. The costs of the Kingfisher team are now in our base budget.
- 59 We also face significant increased demand for child protection services - in 2014 there was a 24% increase in referrals; and a 10% increase in numbers of children on child protection plans and coming into care. In part these increases were due to increased awareness of child sexual exploitation and the legacy of abuse and neglect in making children vulnerable to exploitation.

*Professional practice:*

- 60 Through our contribution to the Serious Case Review we have identified a huge amount of learning for our managers and practitioners. Four hundred and fifty staff have been involved in fourteen learning events working on difference practice themes.
- 61 7,500 multi-agency front line staff have been trained to understand the warning signs and use new screening tools to identify children at risk, working with the Kingfisher team where they have concerns. By December 2014 327 screening tools have been completed and presented to the Kingfisher team by a wide range of agencies, including schools.
- 62 We spend a lot of time listening to victims and their families and learning what works best to help prevent, protect and disrupt, ensuring that our practice reflects what they tell us.
- 63 Highly intensive and proactive approach to victim support – e.g. getting disclosures from children working with the Kingfisher team can take 12 months of intensive work, for the Bullfinch trial we provided 24 hour a day 7 days a week support from one social worker for four months while the trial was underway.
- 64 Work with parents now has a greater focus through training of staff and supervisors and the deployment of dedicated staff to work with parents in the Kingfisher team. Tight agreements are struck with all parents to ensure missing episodes of children who are of concern are immediately reported to the police.
- 65 We have a new approach (with the police) to missing children - led by a senior manager and a new Missing Persons Panel that meets monthly to review all children who have gone missing more than twice in a 90 day period, and take

strong action as required. Multi-agency performance reporting on missing episodes has been improved and is scrutinised quarterly by the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board. In addition we have very high expectations of school attendance and attainment, ensuring that social workers are immediately aware if a child fails to attend school, and that immediate action is taken.

- 66 Adults and children's services are working closely together at a strategic level, including establishing a joint team in the on-going Bullfinch investigation to support now adult victims. A joint business unit for the adults and children's safeguarding boards is being set-up with a single strategic safeguarding partnerships manager post that will oversee the work of both boards and ensure common agendas are identified and acted on.
- 67 We have applied learning from tackling child sexual exploitation to other areas of our work – e.g. new models for children on the edge of care, a new placement strategy, a new approach to neglect and adolescence
- 68 We seek to avoid out of county placements for our most vulnerable children; Four new children's homes are being built in Oxfordshire, including one to support vulnerable girls facing child sexual exploitation. We are also improving the packages of support that are available to support children to keep their placements. This involves more integrated work with mental health, schools and youth offending services.
- 69 We recognise that many young people facing child sexual exploitation are affected by substance misuse problems, we have therefore focused on new drug and alcohol services education programmes for children and re-commissioned integrated services for adults
- 70 We are working across organisational boundaries with city and district councils on housing, guest houses, licensed premises, taxis. Safeguarding training and licensing requirements have been introduced. The county's local authority designated officer works closely with the city and district councils to ensure all concerns and allegations about taxi drivers and licensees are thoroughly investigated and licences are permanently revoked where appropriate.
- 71 Oxfordshire has been selected as one of the national pilot areas for 'See Me Hear Me' by the Office of the Children's Commissioner. This is a comprehensive strategic and practice framework for child sexual exploitation that places the child's voice at the heart of the work.
- 72 Oxfordshire is also a national pilot area for the Home Office's trafficking programme which entails the use of advocates from Barnardo's to support and maintain contact with children who are known or suspected to have been victims of trafficking.
- 73 The school health nursing service has been re-commissioned by Public Health and nurses are now in post in every secondary school. Together with pastoral teams and primary adolescent mental health services they are strengthening

the direct provision to children with emotional, behavioural and sexual health needs in secondary schools.

- 74 Public Health have re-commissioned sexual health services and have been robust in their contract monitoring requirements in respect of the safeguarding screening of children presenting for contraception and genito-urinary treatment.

### *Culture, attitude, beliefs*

- 75 In the past children were wrongly treated as wayward teenagers – now we know that persistence and relationship-building is what makes the difference. A thorough understanding of the impact of grooming permeates our whole approach, and is particularly evident in the Kingfisher team who will work relentlessly over many months with girls and boys to gain their trust.
- 76 In the period before 2010 the pull of grooming and the power of the abusers was not recognised and understood. Girls were seen as sexually active with “boyfriends” when they should have been seen as children unable to consent. Practice has changed. Children are treated as children and social workers know they must build trusted relationships and keep children engaged however challenging their behaviour.
- 77 We have run a series of learning events for staff, including addressing use of language and its importance in direct work with children and in the way it is recorded.
- 78 We have updated our practice guidance on consent and this is made available to all agencies and schools, making clear that children cannot consent and that children over the age of 16 who are groomed are not consenting to being exploited. We supported the 2013/14 campaign led by Oxford City Council, challenging young people to be clear about consent and sexual boundaries.
- 79 We have also worked with local health providers providing training and guidance for staff about sexual activity for children under 18.
- 80 We are also focusing on perpetrators and the need for a robust approach to safeguarding their families and children.

### *Awareness raising*

- 81 We now have awareness raising activity underway on a huge scale, covering children, parents, schools, front line professionals, communities, hotels, taxi drivers, housing associations and others.
- 82 Since 2013, 18,000 children have seen age-appropriate drama workshops, to help them understand the risks and know what to do if they are worried about themselves or friends. This is ‘Chelsea’s Choice’, shown to years 8 and 9 (13-14yrs). The third year of ‘Chelsea’s Choice’ is in schools and hubs across March and April 2015, bringing the total up to 27,000. ‘Somebody’s Sister,

Somebody's Daughter' is being rolled out to children in years 10 and above (15+yrs), from summer 2015; and the 'Values versus Violence' programme has been piloted in Oxford City schools for primary school aged children as part of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), and it will be extended across the county.

- 83 **'Everybody's business'** we know that professionals alone cannot stop child sexual exploitation. We need everyone to understand the signs of grooming and take action when they have concerns. We have worked with local councillors, the local media and other local stakeholders to roll out this message. In September 2014 we held an event with the police for 150 local community stakeholders including representatives from voluntary, community and faith groups and local councillors.

### *Community engagement*

- 84 Safeguarding guidance has been given to all parish, town, district and county councillors, encouraging them to be the 'eyes and ears' at a local level and know how to report concerns.
- 85 The serious case review makes clear that ethnicity was not a factor in the handling of children A-F, but we recognise that there are similarities with what appears to be a national pattern of street grooming cases disproportionately involving men of Pakistani heritage. We agree with the findings of the serious case review that urgent research is needed to understand why this is the case.
- 86 Whilst it is critically important that our work does not focus on only one community, we think that this pattern must be acknowledged and we are working with those affected communities to tackle this crime together. This is being done through on-going work with families, young people and faith groups, by ourselves, and through work led by the police and the voluntary sector. This is addressing issues that may contribute to involvement in criminal activity including sexual exploitation and other issues.
- 87 In October 2014 the county council and the police ran a Safeguarding Conference for the Oxford Pastors Forum which is the network for all the independent churches. This is predominantly Black Caribbean and African Churches. Muslim organisations were also invited and representatives attended. The conference focussed on trafficking and child sexual exploitation as well as other forms of abuse.
- 88 The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) has led work with the Oxfordshire Mosques and their linked Madrassas on safeguarding children and have worked to ensure safeguarding arrangements are in place including DBS checks, basic training and a safeguarding policy.

### *Independent accountability*

- 89 Ofsted inspection in 2014 rated the council's children's services as 'good' and referred to 'high quality' work by the Kingfisher Team on tackling child sexual

exploitation with consistently high use of the screening tool and 'excellent' awareness raising.

- 90 An independent child protection consultant produced a detailed and thorough Independent Management Report looking at all social care cases. Learning has been acted upon and this document has been made available to the Department for Education.
- 91 The handling of the Bullfinch cases by social workers have been reviewed for negligence or professional misconduct and independently reviewed by an employment barrister. A report on all practising social workers has been sent to the Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC) for verification.
- 92 The Kingfisher team were the 2014 winners of the outstanding achievements award for children's services by the Municipal Journal (MJ).

### *Sharing practice and supporting the development of national policy*

- 93 We have been on a steep learning curve, and have been keen to share our learning widely to help others tackle this issue effectively both nationally and at the local level.
- 94 In 2014 we held a learning event for 300 social workers and safeguarding practitioners from across the country and the police held a similar event for police and criminal justice professionals.

### **Broader Lessons and National Implications**

- 95 Key lessons that we have learnt are set out below. We are sharing these issues widely, attempting to help others tackle child sexual exploitation effectively.

### *Understanding the issue and having the right mindset*

- 96 Safeguarding is Everyone's Business - This means that keeping children safe is not just an issue for social workers and other front line workers but requires responsibility to be taken at a broader societal, managerial and political level. Public awareness, particularly about the signs of grooming, is critical and currently a gap. This mind set is also needed at the national level and across the country.
- 97 Understanding grooming - The abuse that was described in the Operation Bullfinch trial by the victims is known as 'street grooming'. This involves offenders deliberately targeting their young victims, often initially providing them with affection, alcohol, drugs and gifts before isolating them from existing friends and family networks and then subjecting them to extreme violence, sexual abuse and trafficking. Children often become 'trapped' by their abusers and can struggle to articulate what is happening to them.

- 98 Complexity – The nature of this type of grooming means that you can't 'just tackle it'. It takes immense time and skills to develop effective relationships with victims so that they are able to disclose what is happening and in addition these cases are often very complex, involving multiple victims and perpetrators in a tangled web that takes time to understand.
- 99 Child sexual exploitation is happening everywhere - If it isn't actively sought it will not be uncovered. This requires different skills – police officers to act more like social workers, social workers to act more like detectives. Local politicians and Police and Crime Commissioners to be questioning of children's services and police about missing children and ensuring that robust processes are in place locally.
- 100 Mainstream but get the balance right – Tackling child sexual exploitation is now a mainstream activity in Oxfordshire. The number of children subject to child protection plans has risen sharply in Oxfordshire, in keeping with a national trend. Neglect and emotional abuse are by far the biggest safeguarding issues for Oxfordshire's children. Getting the balance right in terms of resourcing and managerial attention is a challenge.

### *Multi agency working*

- 101 *Effective partnership working must become the norm* - In Oxfordshire we have established a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and have a specialist child sexual exploitation team known as Kingfisher. Both are joint teams with the police and other partners, and enable effective sharing of intelligence and information to protect children.

### *Resourcing*

- 102 *Pressures* - Tackling child sexual exploitation at a time where year on year demand for children's and adults' services has increased by over 20% whilst public sector spending is being severely reduced is a very serious challenge. Since 2010 the council has lost over 40% of the funding we get from government, and there are significant constraints on our ability to raise additional income.
- 103 The county council alone has spent over £8m+ on CSE since the start of Operation Bullfinch. We are fortunate that councillors of all political persuasions have prioritised children's services over other more universal services, and as a consequence the council has doubled its spend on children's services over the past seven years. Despite this, demand continues to outstrip available resourcing and we are currently forecasting an overspend in children's services of £7m this financial year.
- 104 *Complexity* - The complexity and entrenched nature of child sexual exploitation can mean that to keep victims safe they are placed for periods of a few months in secure units. We have had 3 such cases at a cost of over £1m per year.

- 105 *Historic cases* - Historic cases - The potential scale of tackling historic cases ('cold cases') presents a challenge to resources in both children and adult services. There are imperatives to this work linked to the possibility of current risks presented by former alleged abusers and the legacy of harm for former victims.

### **Next steps**

- 106 The key priorities further to the SCR are:
- To implement the recommendations in all relevant Council services and demonstrate good impact on safeguarding within the timescales set by the OSCB
  - To make further reports to Performance Scrutiny and Cabinet, as appropriate, which demonstrate that the recommendations have been implemented to good effect
  - To work together with the Independent Chair of the OSCB and Sophie Humphreys to produce the 'Stocktake' Report by June 2015 to the satisfaction of the government.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

- 107 The Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the Council's response to the findings of the Serious Case Review into Children A-F, published in March 2015; and the further actions in progress.**

JIM LEIVERS

Director for Children, Education and Families

Annex - At its meeting on 26 March 2015, the Performance Scrutiny Committee considered the report, and a note of their comments is attached

Contact Officer: Hannah Farncombe, Interim Head of Service, Safeguarding & YOS

March 2015