



# A review of historic sexual abuse



city & hackney  
safeguarding  
children board

*"children should be seen, heard and helped"*

# Background

- Between September 2013 and November 2014, the CHSCB conducted a SCR into the sexual abuse of a number of children by two men.
- One was an approved foster carer, the other a member of his family.
- The abuse was known to have taken place between 1999 and 2008.

# Scope & Methodology of SCR

- Followed principles in *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015)*
- Lead Reviewer & Review Team
- Multi-agency chronology & IMRs
- Conversations with practitioners
- Conversations with adult victims and carers
- Final report produced

# Key events

- Between 1997 and 2011, a married couple (living in another local authority area) were approved foster carers for Hackney Council.
- They fostered over thirty children

# Key events

- Between 1998 and 2008, five girls of primary school age were sexually abused in the foster home.
- In 2012, one of the victims made an allegation to the police.
- In 2013, the male foster carer was convicted of over twenty sexual offences against the five girls including rape, sexual assault and acts of indecency.

# Key events

- He was also convicted of offences against another local child and admitted offences against an unidentified young person 30 years prior.
- A second male member of the foster family was convicted of sexual offences against one child.

# Key events

- The female foster carer was alleged to have known that the children were at risk of abuse.
- She was involved in sexual activity (not involving children) in the home which would have led to deregistration as a carer.
- **Both carers had strong motivations to hide household secrets.**

# Disclosure

- No evidence to indicate that any professional was aware of the abuse at the time.
- The young people did not confide in anyone for many years; when they did it was to those in their private lives.
- Other victims did not speak to anyone until approached by the police.
- One victim mentioned her experience to a counsellor years after.



# Missed opportunities

- In 1999, the MPS received an anonymous allegation that the male foster carer had shown 'child pornography' on his computer to children in the neighbourhood.
- The caller stated that the perpetrator was a foster carer.
- This pre-dated by months the first episode of sexual abuse in the home.

# Missed opportunities

- The MPS failed to investigate but kept the 'soft' intelligence.
- No information was provided to the local authority where the foster carer lived, Hackney CSC or MPS CAIT.
- This soft intelligence was reviewed on four occasions (2001-2010) when the MPS Character Enquiry Centre responded to CRB and DBS checks for him as a foster carer.

# Missed opportunities

- On each occasion a decision was made not to share the information.
- Decision weighted on duties under the Police Act 1997, subsequent ACPO and Home Office guidance and case law.
- **MPS have escalated this matter to the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC).**

# Missed opportunities

- A further opportunity to intervene at an earlier stage was missed following a disclosure by a young survivor to a counsellor in 2010.
- The SCR provides details of the Health response to this issue.
- **Mandatory reporting?**

# Response to Sexualised Behaviour

- Although no allegations of abuse were made at the time, a number of concerns were noted about very sexualised behavior in one child.
- Explanations were accepted from the female foster carer that this was learnt from the birth mother, although no evidence to support this.
- Concern was later lost as professionals focused on wider developmental and behavioural concerns.

# Concerns around quality of care

- Between 2003 and 2006, a number of workers recorded the following concerns:
  - Overcrowding in the home
  - Bedroom too small
  - Standard of physical and emotional care
  - Possible neglect
  - Female foster carer unprofessional and uncooperative

# Concerns around quality of care

- **Concerns were not addressed as a uncritical and unhealthy relationship had developed with the foster carers:**
  - They were seen as flexible, child centred and happy to assist (in contrast to others).
  - The recruiting social worker then became their supervising social worker and team manager of the fostering service.

# Grooming of professionals

- The foster carers did this by:
  - Behaving differently to different professionals
  - Presenting themselves as experts
  - Downplaying the needs of the children
  - Providing false reassurance that needs were being met and no need for additional help
  - Limiting the number of eyes and ears around the children



# Grooming of professionals

- At times being openly hostile/difficult to work with (especially with those critical of their work)
  - Repeatedly and openly criticising professionals to undermine them in front of colleagues
  - Refusing to operate within procedures e.g. not attending supervision or training.
- 
- **Due to their good reputation – no challenge**

# The role of partner agencies

- Health and education services played a limited role as children's needs minimised.
- Gaps in provision of health services – few LAC assessments and arrangements for coordinating care for LAC living at a distance from Hackney was weak.

# Progress

“We can say with confidence that services for looked after children have been positively transformed over the last ten years.”

Jim Gamble, Independent Chair, CHSCB

CYPS & Health

# SCR Recommendations

- MPS
- Health
- Hackney Council
- CHSCB

# Summary of learning

- There will always be individuals who seek positions of trust to abuse children
- Don't automatically assume children in care are safe
- Maintain professional curiosity and remain vigilant
- Recognise signs and symptoms of sexual abuse in children and young people

# Summary of learning

- Recognise tactics employed by individuals who seek to abuse children
- Act on safeguarding disclosures from children, young people and historic disclosures from adults
- Recognise the importance of direct contact with children
- Listen and hear what children are saying about their experiences.

# Summary of learning

- Recognise the importance of reliability
- Note and escalate concerns around quality of care / neglect
- Recognise relationship with parents / foster carers which detract from the needs of the child
- 'Hear' concerns raised by other professionals

# Welcome to the City of London & Hackney Safeguarding Children Board



## News from the Board



### Seen, Heard & Helped?

The CHSCB is here to make a real different to safeguard & promote the welfare of children & young people in the City of London & Hackney. [Click here](#) to read more about us.

### Worried About a Child?

Please contact:

Hackney First Access Screening Team (FAST)



# Views of the Chair

“Sex offenders who target children will by their nature infiltrate all walks of life. When they occupy positions of trust they add insult to extreme injury by their association with good people, doing an important job for all the right reasons.

In Hackney and beyond I know that many young people benefit because of the individuals who commit to looking after them.”

# Questions and Comments



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Hackney Service Centre, 1 Hillman Street, London E8 1DY  
P\_020 8356 3661 F\_020 8356 4734  
[www.hackney.gov.uk/chscb.htm](http://www.hackney.gov.uk/chscb.htm)

Rory McCallum

Senior Professional Advisor

CHSCB

[rory.mccallum@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:rory.mccallum@hackney.gov.uk)

0208 356 4042

Follow us on Twitter: @LSCB\_CHSCB

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