

Oxford City Council's response to Child Sexual Exploitation in Oxfordshire

Background

A paper on Child Sexual Exploitation in Oxfordshire was considered by the County Council's Cabinet on November 26 2013. Local Authority Chief Executives in Oxfordshire agreed to report to their executive committees on the role their organisations play in responding to child sexual exploitation.

As highlighted in the Home Affairs Select Committee's second report into child sexual exploitation and response to localised grooming, district councils have an important role to play, particularly in terms of sharing information and concerns from frontline workers, and in their strategic roles as housing and licensing authorities. This report describes the activities Oxford City Council has undertaken in response to child sexual exploitation, within the wider context of activities led by Oxfordshire County, Thames Valley Police, Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and other partners.

Oxford City Council is a Responsible Authority on the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, a statutory partnership responsible for tackling Oxford's community safety priorities. In 2010, the partnership developed an action plan to respond to reports from front-line practitioners of child sexual exploitation in the city. The focus of the action plan centred on training and raising awareness for professionals, support for organisations that were dealing with potential victims and developing pathways for referrals. The investigation and enforcement activities that became Operation Bullfinch were kept out of the action plan and led by the police and social services.

The report covers four sections:

1. Child Sexual Exploitation in Oxfordshire and the national context.
2. Key areas of activity by Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxfordshire Children Safeguarding Board.
3. Oxford City Council's contribution to tackling child sexual exploitation in Oxfordshire.
4. Conclusion

For further information on the nature, extent and activities in response to child sexual exploitation, the Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet report can be found here:

<http://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=115&MIId=3571>

Section one: Child Sexual Exploitation in Oxfordshire and the national context

1. The 2013 Operation Bullfinch trial involving Oxfordshire victims of child sexual exploitation and defendants has been one of the most high profile of a series of similar recent cases across the country. In May 2013 seven men were found guilty of a total of 59 counts including rape, conspiracy to rape, rape of a child, sexual activity with a child, using an instrument to procure a miscarriage, facilitating child prostitution, conspiracy to facilitate child prostitution and supplying class A drugs. The men are now sentenced to a total of 95 years of imprisonment, including five life sentences.
2. The model used by the Operation Bullfinch perpetrators is known as 'street grooming'. This involves offenders deliberately targeting their young victims with affection, alcohol and drugs; isolating them from friends and family, and then subjecting them to extreme violence, sexual abuse and trafficking. The trial highlighted the local aspects of what is now recognised as a national issue and a not uncommon offence.
3. Operation Bullfinch has demonstrated that victims do not always understand that they are being exploited. Social workers and other staff had tried hard to address difficult behaviour. However the prevailing culture some five to six years ago meant that all agencies working with these children did not always understand the grooming process or recognise it as sexual abuse.
4. In recent years there has been a change in the understanding of, and response to child sexual exploitation, seeing the young people at the heart of the issue much more as victims rather than chaotic individuals who are difficult to manage. This paradigm shift has been central to the change in approach by social services and the police across the UK.
5. Child sexual exploitation is a national issue. Over the past few years there have been a number of high profile trials in the Midlands and north of England. In May an investigation by the Daily Mirror identified more than 50 active police investigations across the country and a number of trials underway.
6. In December 2010 a report was written by the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership on child sexual exploitation, based on a survey of 23 frontline practitioners. The report contained 13 recommendations to address the four initial findings of the survey:
 - No data collection of children and young people who are 'at risk' or who are affected by sexual exploitation
 - No specific child sexual exploitation training for professionals
 - Care pathways are generic and do not address specific concerns for children and young people who are being sexual exploited
 - No specialist service which can offer support to those at risk, victims and/or parents/carers.
7. The report was sent to Facelt managers within Oxfordshire County Council Children and Young People Service, to ensure their staff were aware of the challenges of child sexual exploitation. The Oxford Safer Communities Partnership continued to deliver their action plan based on the findings of the report.

Section two: Key areas of activity by Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxfordshire Children Safeguarding Board.

Serious Case Review

8. The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board has commissioned a Serious Case Review that will examine the robustness of the professional responses and whether appropriate local and national policies and professional standards were followed. The serious case review is unlikely to be completed before the end of 2014.

The Kingfisher Team

9. In November 2012, Oxfordshire County Council, Children's Social Care and Thames Valley Police set up a special joint team called Kingfisher, with support from the local health service and other statutory and voluntary agencies, to prevent, protect and prosecute cases of child sexual exploitation. A peer review of the early impact of the Kingfisher team by the Local Government Association in March 2013 identified it as good practice. The review also commented on strong co-operation between Kingfisher and secondary schools.
10. We are building on the work of the Kingfisher team to develop a new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) - one of the recommendations of the Home Affairs Select Committee report into child sexual exploitation.
11. Since September 2012, Oxford City Council's Human Exploitation Coordinator has been working with the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board to support their work on tackling child sexual exploitation. The officer spends one day per week working with the Kingfisher team and developing and delivering training sessions on behalf of the Board.

Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board Strategy

12. The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board is responsible for the co-ordination of the work of agencies responsible for safeguarding children. Its role is not operational but is about assurance that all agencies have appropriate arrangements in place and work together effectively. It is an independent body, with an Independent Chair.
13. The Board has produced a strategy for tackling child sexual exploitation that seeks to outline a tailored response to different models of exploitation and protect all young people. The strategy has five key strands; Oxford City Council is mostly involved in the first, third and fifth strands:
 - Raising awareness to improve early identification of sexual exploitation
 - Improve statutory responses and the provision of services
 - Improve the evidence base
 - Improve prosecution procedures
 - Disruption activity
14. Awareness-raising amongst professionals of the "warning signs" of child sexual exploitation is a critical area for the Board, who have responded with a new screening tool.

15. Child protection training for staff working with children now includes a designated section on spotting the signs of, and responding to, child sexual exploitation. To date this training has been delivered to more than 3,500 multi-agency staff in Oxfordshire, including all frontline staff working with children.
16. Oxford City Council and the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership activities to tackle child sexual exploitation contribute to the OSCB overarching strategy.

Securing resources to tackle child sexual exploitation

17. Oxfordshire County Council has increased its children's social care budget from £24m in 2006/7 to £48m in 2013/14, an increase of 80% in real terms. The county council spent in excess of £3m during Operation Bullfinch on social work and other support to the investigation. In 2013-14 county councillors agreed to provide an additional £1.4m to enable the recruitment of an additional 21 child protection social workers.
18. The county council has committed to building four new children's homes in the county to keep children closer to home.
19. Thames Valley Police has also invested substantial additional resources and money into safeguarding children in the Child Abuse Investigation Units.

Absconding and placements

20. Actions to prevent absconding include strong management oversight and 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.
21. The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board Inter-agency Procedure for Children Missing from Home or Care has been updated to reflect the latest guidance. The monthly Missing Persons Panel tracks and monitors all young people at highest risk within the county.
22. The county council is also seeking to improve the packages of support that are available to support children to keep their placements. This involves more integrated work with mental health and youth offending services.

Work with schools

23. The county council has briefed head teachers and chairs of governors across the county on child sexual exploitation.
24. The Kingfisher team has developed a model for regular multi-agency forums on child sexual exploitation which have a dual function: awareness raising and practice development of all agencies, including schools; and intelligence gathering on children of concern.

Improving behaviour and attendance include:

25. Notifying carers of looked-after children immediately if the child fails to turn up for school.
26. Ensuring that looked-after children who are placed in Oxfordshire from outside the county are immediately placed on a school roll at the County Council's Pupil Referral Unit and provided with tutor support.

27. Work with schools to help children understand the risks that they may face and alert them to the types of child sexual exploitation. Earlier in 2013 all Oxfordshire state school year 8 and 9 children saw a play about sexual exploitation called Chelsea's Choice. It has now been seen by around 12,000 secondary school children in Oxfordshire. This was complemented by a letter and leaflet for parents.
28. A youth mentoring project is in development focused on preventing young men from getting involved in sexual offending. A parents' worker post is being created within a local voluntary sector organisation to support parents whose children are or have been at risk of sexual exploitation.
29. Foster carers have also received targeted training on identifying potential warning signs of child sexual exploitation.

Working with communities

30. The county council is working closely with the police to liaise with community leaders and faith groups and taking action as needed. For example, work focused on families of potential perpetrators and targeted youth mentoring projects.
31. Multi-agency funding has been secured to employ a national charity, Street UK, to identify young people and their families 'at risk' in hard to engage communities in relation to child sexual exploitation.

Working with partners

32. Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board has included tackling child sexual exploitation as a priority in the new Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
33. The Oxfordshire Safer Communities Partnership (OSCP) and the District Community Safety Partnership (CSPs) are bringing together key players to share intelligence and take appropriate actions to prevent and tackle child sexual exploitation.
34. Police and Crime Commissioner funding will be used to raise awareness about how to recognise the signs of potential abuse.
35. The health service has a key role to play in terms of identifying potential victims of this abuse and supporting their health needs, which can often be complex.
36. There is support within the criminal justice system for the introduction of specialist child sexual abuse courts and further protection and support for victims, including offering video-recorded cross examination, and for the recommendation to limit repeated cross-examination by multiple defence barristers when witnesses give evidence.
37. The county council has reviewed its approach to commissioning housing services for children, families and vulnerable adults to ensure that risks are minimised.

Section Three: Oxford City council's response to CSE

38. Oxford City Council has played an active role in raising the profile of and development of services to prevent and support victims of child sexual exploitation principally as a key member of the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership.
39. The council's recent external review of our Section 11, Children Act 2004 requirements found that the city council, as a second tier local authority, has a robust response to safeguarding.
40. The review demonstrates that Oxford City Council has responded effectively to the findings of the Home Affairs Select Committee's second report into child sexual exploitation and response to localised grooming. The report states that district councils have an important role to play in tackling child sexual exploitation, particularly in terms of sharing information and concerns from frontline workers, and in their strategic roles as housing and licensing authorities.
41. Oxford City Council has contributed through management reviews and a number of current and former staff have been interviewed as part of the process to the Serious Case Review of Operation Bullfinch, instigated by the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board. The publication of the review is due in summer 2014.

Governance and accountability

42. Oxford City Council's Executive Director, Community Services, chairs the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership. The partnership has funded a Human Exploitation Coordinator to lead on the local response to child sexual exploitation since 2009. The officer is a member of the Oxford City Council Community Safety Team, works to the partnership's action plan and is the principal professional advisor to Oxford City Council and partners.
43. The Oxford Safer Communities Partnership is accountable to the Oxford Strategic Partnership, delivering on its aim to tackle people's concerns about crime, and to reduce crime and prevent people becoming victims of crime
44. The Director and the Board Member for Education, Crime and Community Safety, are both members of the Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnership. This board coordinates community safety activities that cross district council boundaries and comprises representatives from Oxfordshire's four district Community Safety Partnerships.
45. This approach is supported by the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board who encouraged all community safety partnerships in Oxfordshire to raise awareness among its membership about how it plans to prevent child sexual exploitation. The Oxford Community Safety Team was asked to present their action plan to the other Oxfordshire CSPs, and to encourage them to adopt relevant actions. This was completed and child sexual exploitation is now on the agenda of all community safety partnerships in Oxfordshire.
46. The Director is Oxford City Council's strategic lead for safeguarding and plays a key role embedding safeguarding responsibilities across the organisation.
47. Oxford City Council's representation on the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board is the Partnerships Manager within Policy, Culture and Communications.

Training and awareness-raising

48. In the autumn of 2010, the Human Exploitation Coordinator became a member of the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People. The network of 109 projects/organisations is UK wide and includes practitioners, policy makers and researchers working with children and young people who are at risk of, or who experience, sexual exploitation.
49. In January 2011, the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership presented a child sexual exploitation scoping report to the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board, summarising the findings of a survey of frontline practitioners. The Board welcomed the report and asked their Oxfordshire Sexual Violence Strategy Group to lead on the issue.
50. In September 2011, members of Oxford City Council's Community Safety Team met with the Children's Commissioner to discuss child sexual exploitation.
51. The Human Exploitation and the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Coordinators have written the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board's one-day child sexual exploitation training course for front-line practitioners, and are currently delivering numerous training events. In addition, a half-day, two-hour and 20-minute "buzz" session have been written for those who don't require an in-depth understanding of the issue.
52. These sessions are being delivered internally, most recently to 50 housing staff. Other teams who have, or will be receiving the training, include the Community Response Team, Anti-Social Behaviour Investigation Team, Positive Futures Teams, General Licensing and Miscellaneous Licensing teams, other critical staff and members.
53. The training course complements the Generalist Safeguarding Children training that all relevant staff are in the process of attending. A principal part of this training is an understanding of the referral procedure and an embedding of the ethos that, if an officer is in any doubt whether to refer, then the referral should be made.
54. The Human Exploitation Coordinator contributed to the "Say Something If You See Something" toolkit for frontline employees within the taxi and entertainment industries. The toolkit was launched in Parliament in the summer, and will be rolled out in Oxfordshire. Financial support has been given by the Police and Crime Commissioner, via the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership to deliver this toolkit to local communities and businesses.
55. Oxford City Council's Community Safety Team developed a sexual consent campaign that was launched in September 2013. The Thames Valley-wide campaign highlights the issues of consent and healthy relationships.

Information sharing

56. Through the safeguarding children training, staff are made aware of how to refer to social care and who to speak to for advice if they have a concern.
57. The need for speedy and robust information sharing has been tested recently within the city council and all departments involved have come across no barriers to information exchange. Examples include the exchange of information from various housing teams, the Anti-Social Behaviour Investigation Team, Direct Services, taxi and alcohol licensing teams, Environmental Health and the Community Response Team, to the police and social care.
58. Since November 2012 informal meetings have been held between the interim Head of Children's Social Care, Kingfisher staff, the police and, from Oxford City Council, the Director of Community Services and Environmental Protection Service Manager. These continue on a regular basis to ensure that relevant operational and strategic issues are addressed and incorporated into the local Community Safety Partnership Action Plan. Oxford City Council uses its statutory powers in the areas of taxi licensing, landlords, publicans and housing management to protect public safety

Licensing Authority duties

59. Oxford City Council is undertaking, on behalf of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board, research into best practice relating to the licensing of regulated entertainment and taxis. A number of areas in the country have introduced licensing measures in response to child sexual exploitation including mandatory customer care courses and training. Appropriate measures will be introduced to Oxford and the city will encourage the other Oxfordshire Licensing Authorities to adopt similar measures.
60. The council's taxi Licensing Authority function works with the other Oxfordshire local authorities to exchange information relevant to the transportation of vulnerable people.
61. The council will be working with Thames Valley Police to train organisations in the "Say Something if you See Something" toolkit for the retail, transport and hospitality industries who have a vital role in identifying those at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Housing placements

62. The Chief Executive has requested that Oxfordshire local authority housing services inform him of all housing placements in the city. The city council will then be in a position to challenge inappropriate housing allocations.

Diversions activities for young people

63. Oxford City Council's holiday programme and Positive Futures Programme provide young people with positive activities that keep them engaged and out of risk. Where young people are identified as being at risk by frequenting places that put them at risk, the Positive Futures team run an outreach service to engage with the young people and direct them into available activities. The team are also trained to identify behaviours that signal a potential risk and will make a safeguarding referral.
64. Financial support has been given by the Police and Crime Commissioner, via the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, to the voluntary sector to engage

with young people in the city and the county, educating them in the risk of child sexual exploitation.

Safeguarding Annual Audit: Section 11, Children's Act 2004

65. Oxford City Council completes an annual assessment of its safeguarding duties under Section 11 of the Children's Act 2004. In December 2012 the Council submitted Section 11 Self-Assessment to the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board. Informal feedback was that the City Council has effective policies and procedures in place and no further actions were identified as being necessary. However, the Council decided to seek independent and specialist advice to ensure that it is working to best practice and that it is embedded throughout the organisation.
66. In October 2013 the Council commissioned an Independent Review to ensure compliance with Section 11 Audit, with a particular focus on:
- Leadership and Accountability
 - Partnership Working
 - Safe workforce
 - Policies and procedures
67. The Review identified that the Council shows clear ambition from the top to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and their families; that it makes a valuable contribution to the work of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board; has a comprehensive training programme for staff and its recruitment processes comply with statutory requirements and best practice.
68. However a number of areas for improvement were identified and an Action Plan has been developed, in conjunction with the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board.
69. A full report on the Independent Review and Action Plan is elsewhere on this agenda.

Section four: Future direction - longer term strategic issues identified by the county council

70. The Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet report identified a number of longer term strategic risks and issues relating to child sexual exploitation. A selection of the issues is set out below and it is expected that these will be supplemented by the formal recommendations arising from the Serious Case Review when it reports in 2014. For more information on the proposed responses to these issues, please refer to the Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet Report, using the web link on the first page of this report.

- How to best work with vulnerable adolescents who may demonstrate challenging behaviours?
- How to support victims who are currently being abused and do not recognise what is happening to them, or want to be supported?
- How to look for patterns 'horizontally' rather than 'vertically'?
- How to work as effectively as possible with the police and other agencies?
- What is the role of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board?
- What else is needed for an effective prevention strategy?
- What more is needed to work as effectively as possible with partners, including district councils, health, the criminal justice system, schools, the voluntary and community sector?
- How can the county council best use commissioning arrangements to keep children safe?
- Should the county council bring safeguarding approaches within children and adults services closer together?
- What can other areas learn from Oxfordshire?