

Safeguarding Children in Care Settings – Assurance Exercise

In October 2017 the Independent Chair of the Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board commenced an assurance exercise around the safeguards that are currently in place in respect of children living in care settings. At this time the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) was hearing evidence in relation to historical concerns, dating back more than 20 years. These concerned allegations of abuse of children living either in Knowl View (a residential special school) or Cambridge House, a hostel for working boys aged 15/16/17 run by a small voluntary organisation.

In the intervening years many Public Enquiries and Reviews have focussed on safeguarding children in care (now referred to as looked after children – in Rochdale Cared 4 Children) and care leavers; the legal framework of the Children Act 1989 came into force, together with detailed volumes of guidance and specific regulations covering care and care arrangements. These have been refreshed and revised many times since then. The legal and professional landscape is almost unrecognisable.

All LSCB partners complete an annual audit of compliance with safeguarding requirements and must provide evidence which is challenged. This evidences high levels of compliance with statutory safeguarding requirements across the sector in Rochdale. That said the Chair felt that it was important to obtain additional assurance.

This report draws on responses provided by the following agencies:

- Greater Manchester Police
- Rochdale Borough Council
- HMR CCG
- Private providers

Seventeen of the elements of the Safeguarding audit are relevant in this context. The evidence collected provides the assurance as follows:

Safeguarding Standard	
1. Leadership able to demonstrate commitment to safeguarding via business discussed in management meetings	All agencies were able to evidence safeguarding issues impacting on strategic business and being discussed at the highest level and cascaded through the organisation.
2. Staff have access to safeguarding policies and procedures in induction and receive regular updates	All agencies were able to evidence that staff induction programmes included safeguarding policies and procedures and that staff had access to these on-line. All agencies provide basic training to all staff who might work with a child/family and specific training for those for whom this is core

	task.
3. Clear whistle blowing procedures for staff/volunteers	All agencies were able to evidence that these are in place and staff and volunteers are supported to make use of them.
4. Safe recruitment procedures for individuals whom the organisation will permit to work regularly with children	All agencies can evidence that checks are made with the Data and Barring Service as appropriate, with enhanced vetting for specific posts. HR procedures are in place in all organisations with references fully checked and gaps in service explored. There has also been increased training relating to Allegations Management and safer working practices delivered the Local Authority designated Officer (LADO). The LADO has proactive relationship with the Data and Barring Service (DBS) and supports referrals to the DBS and updates Policy and Procedures and training accordingly.
5. Policy in place and effective re visitors to residential units	CSC policy re visitors to residential care settings was endorsed by the RBSCB. It requires all visitors to be signed in and for ID to be checked at all times. Regulation 44 ¹ visits confirm that that all Children's Services Residential Homes follow the policy re visitors to residential care settings
6. Children have access to advocacy and independent visitors	CSC Children's Services has commissioned independent advocacy and independent visiting via the Children's Society. Quarterly contract meetings are held and data is shared to support monitoring of the support provided to Cared 4 Children. Police officers investigating abuse allegations are required to speak to the child alone and have had training and support in this respect.
7. Regulation 44 visits conducted regularly consider safeguarding issues and are scrutinised by senior managers to ensure any required action is taken. Regulation 44 reports are analysed for	The Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO) conducts Regulation 44 Visits in line with requirements and is accompanied by designated Elected Members for the individual children's residential homes. The reports are submitted to the Service Manager Safeguarding for independent oversight and scrutiny before submission. The oversight is reported to the Corporate Parenting

¹ Regulation 44 visits: The registered person must ensure that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month.

(2) When the independent person is carrying out a visit, the registered person must help the independent person—

(a) if they consent, to interview in private such of the children, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as the independent person requires; and

(b) to inspect the premises of the home and such of the home's records (except for a child's case records, unless the child and the child's placing authority consent) as the independent person requires.

(3) A visit by the independent person to the home may be unannounced.

(4) The independent person must produce a report about a visit ("the independent person's report") which sets out, in particular, the independent person's opinion as to whether—

(a) children are effectively safeguarded; and

(b) the conduct of the home promotes children's well-being.

trends	Board. The FIRO also completes an annual report within which they report on all their roles and responsibilities including Regulation 44 Visits. Additionally, the relevant Residential Managers, Head of Provider Services, Elected Members, FIRO and Safeguarding Practice and Service Managers meet twice per year to review the process and information arising out of the visits and ensure that all relevant information is being collated.
8. Appropriate supervision and support for staff	All agencies report supervision arrangements are in place though the format does vary. Practice assurance around safeguarding cases is seen as a priority in this.
9. Clear policies in line with the LSCB for dealing with allegations against people who work with children LADO Service in place and effective	All agencies report that staff understand the LADO procedures and each agency has an identified single point of contact (SPOC). RBSCB receives regular reports about LADO activity and is provided with assurance that cases are effectively managed. Training is available to partner agencies and open to private organisations on a regular basis and LADO processes and criteria has also been the subject of briefings via the CSC Practice Managers briefings, Whole Service Briefings and incorporated into other linked training, e.g. Safer Working Practices.
10. Policies and procedures in place to provide safeguards re on-line risks.	All agencies have HR policies about staff use of the internet. The Greater Manchester multi agency procedures provide guidance on e-safety safer working practice. In addition, RBSCB has produced a guide for safer working practices for adults who work with children and young people in the Rochdale Borough which includes a specific section on internet use.
11. Appropriate safeguarding children training for staff	All agencies can evidence that training is delivered.
12. Staff access regular RBSCB web-site updates	The RBSCB website provides a facility to register for updates which is promoted through multi agency training, via social media and the RBSCB/RBSAB newsletter. The site is updated several times every month and email alerts are sent to all staff registered. There are currently 1,664 staff registered on the site.
13. Voice of child informs service development	The recent ILAC inspection noted that the Local Authority “promotes and encourages the participation of children young and young people to shape and develop services Children in care are supported to see their lives positively with a range of inclusive initiatives to ensure they can contribute and influence strategic and individual decision making” . This provides external

	<p>validation of the child's voice influencing service development. In addition this Inspection noted that the Local Authority has strengthened its role as a corporate parent, and the scrutiny and support of political and senior leaders in this work have supported a range of improvements. The Children in Care Council(The Zone) are active participants of the Corporate Parenting Board providing a direct link to decision making at the highest level. Children's Services has a vibrant Youth Parliament which is well embedded and it's reach and influence is supported at Cabinet level with recent examples including Cabinet delegating the airport dividend to the MYP to support changes in relation to children and young people's mental health.</p>
<p>14. Disruption meetings take place when child makes unplanned move</p>	<p>There is an agreed Disruption Policy in place for the ending of all permanent placements where a long term match has been agreed and ratified. The policy is currently being rolled out and implemented across all services to ensure the policy is applied consistently. The FIRO currently has the lead for chairing disruption meetings which provides a high level of independence to the process.</p> <p>Monitoring of placement moves and unplanned endings are overseen at all levels through agreed performance systems and are inclusive of Corporate Parenting. An exceptions report on the number of unplanned endings was presented to the March 2018 CPB. The learning from which is being included in the Permanence Strategic plan.</p> <p>This includes developing and extending a disruption process for any placement that ends in an unplanned way.</p>
<p>15. A culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings both in individual decisions and development of services</p>	<p>With reference to the evidence relating to the voice of the child, additionally the ILACS recognised and acknowledged that that social workers see children and young people regularly, knew their children and young people well had understood their wishes and feelings. This provides validation that children's and wishes and feelings are taken into account and critically the inspection noted that "many children benefit from good quality purposeful direct work to inform their care planning. Children are supported to take part in their reviews and have access to advocates to represent them". This provides evidence of the organisation culture of listening to children and young people and taking account of their wishes and feelings in planning on an individual needs led basis.</p>
<p>16. A culture of listening to staff and taking account of their wishes and feelings both in individual decisions and</p>	<p>All agencies are able to evidence mechanisms for staff consultation.</p>

development of services	
17. Care Leavers – the experiences and feedback of care leavers is gathered and informs interventions and service development	The recent Ofsted inspection indicated that the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers is good

Additionally, arrangements for care of children have changed dramatically over time. Cambridge House was a hostel for working boys. It was not a local authority children's home and was not subject to the management oversight that a children's home would have experienced even in the 60s. The boys had reached school leaving age. At that time, even had they been in care previously, there were no statutory support services for care leavers as such. Arrangements today are radically different. Today every looked after child has the arrangements for their care reviewed with an Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure the care they receive meets their needs. Those who have little or no family contact are offered an independent visitor to support them and promote their well-being and all children in care can access an advocacy service. Support to care leavers now continues to be offered up to the age of 25; with each care leaver allocated a Personal Advisor. Targets are set to ensure all have access to suitable accommodation and in 2017/18 in Rochdale 89% had suitable accommodation. The recent Ofsted inspection indicated that the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers is good. It was notes that the service for care leavers had improved significantly since the last inspection (2014) with children leaving care benefiting from proactive work by personal advisers who worked hard to maintain relationships with them.

The boys placed a Cambridge House would probably present today as either care leavers or at risk of homelessness. Today 16 to 18 year olds potentially at risk of homelessness are offered an assessment, and if they agree, are accommodated as looked after children. For children who have been in foster care there is now provision for them to remain with their carers - "Staying Put" placements – or move to semi-independence with support – "Staying Close" provision. Rochdale takes additional steps to support young people in the semi-independent living setting as this sector is not subject to the same degree of regulation as children's homes or foster care and in some areas there have been concerns about quality.

The children placed at Knowl View were in an educational setting. At that time education and children's social care were managed in separate departments with little connection or coordination. Only very small numbers of children today require residential education and this only happens where local provision is unable to meet their complex needs. Today all children with complex health and social care needs have an Education and Health Care Plan in place and residential schools are heavily regulated. Where the young person is placed full time within a residential school they are deemed Cared 4 and therefore subject to Statutory Reviews

Both children's homes and schools are subject now of external inspection from Ofsted.

There were significant failings in the response to concerns about the children in Cambridge House and Knowl View in the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s. Responses to allegations of peer on peer abuse, sexual exploitation, and allegations about staff or volunteers were not robust and did not protect them. Today all allegations of abuse are dealt with by a multi-disciplinary team in accordance with LSCB safeguarding policies and procedures. Allegations about peer on peer abuse are dealt with in the same way as any other safeguarding concern; a specialist team deals with all sexual exploitation concerns and there is a multi-agency system for dealing with allegation against professionals or volunteers.

Today the concept of the "Corporate Parent" is well established, particularly with councillors and those who work within the council. All those who have the opportunity for unsupervised contact with children are vetted and councillors receive training on their role. Those who visit children's homes to carry out quality visits have specific training for this role and understand how to refer on any concerns. There is a lead councillor for children and a scrutiny committee which receives reports on children's matters.

While the statutory lead for safeguarding children sits with the Director of Children's Services, there is widespread recognition that safeguarding is everybody's business and that this is more than a mantra. Partnership working is well established and has supported innovative responses to safeguarding children, to the point where Rochdale is now acknowledged as having had a major role in the transformation and ongoing development of services for abused and sexually exploited children. None-the-less the LSCB continues to challenge, to audit and review the quality of safeguarding responses.

This additional assurance exercise has provided evidence that the circumstances which permitted the abuse of children at Cambridge House and Knowl View and prevented effective investigation could not be re-created in the current professional, regulatory or legal climate. That said we can never eradicate risk and there is no room for complacency. Risks of abuse can be reduced but abusers will still find ways to target vulnerable young people. The exercise has provided evidence that agencies have in place policies and procedures, and trained staff who will respond very differently today. The LSCB will continue to challenge to ensure that these features do operate to protect the children we serve.

Jane Booth

Independent Chair

Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board.