

Learning Together from Serious Case Reviews

This short briefing summarises what a Serious Case Review has shown about the child protection system in Brighton & Hove.

It is important if Brighton & Hove is to become a safer place for children to live for everyone to embrace the learning from the review and take the necessary steps to help put right the issues identified.

Siblings W&X: Brighton & Hove Safeguarding Children Board undertook a Serious Case Review (SCR) to evaluate multi-agency responses to vulnerable young people at risk of exploitation through radicalisation. It follows the deaths of two brothers, 'W' & 'X,' in Syria in 2014. They had received services from local agencies in the Brighton & Hove area before leaving the UK.

If you work with children & families in Brighton & Hove, there may also be additional specific actions & recommendations for your agency and your role. Please ask your manager, or contact your representative on the LSCB. **You can read the full report at**

brightonandhovelscb.org.uk/serious-case-reviews-2/july-2017-siblings-wx

Key Learning Points:

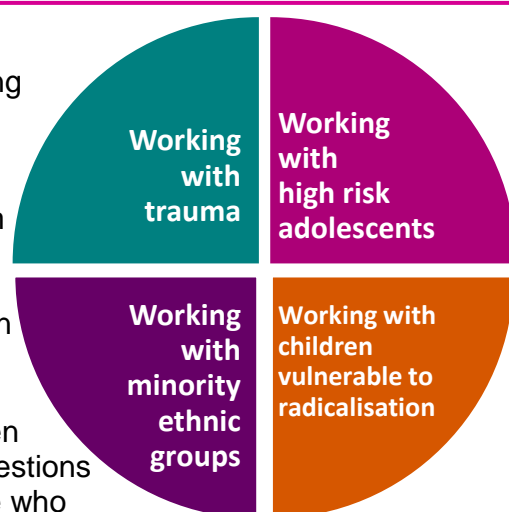
This Serious Case Review identified 13 findings about the safeguarding system in Brighton & Hove, grouped into four priority areas:

Findings relate to the issues of working with families with unresolved trauma who have a longstanding mistrust of authorities; 'blind spots' in how agencies view and respond to the behaviour of adolescents; adopting reflective practice against constant reactive crisis management; and balancing the need to protect the welfare of children with national security imperatives.

Findings also highlight the differing processes for safeguarding children who go missing abroad as opposed to missing in the UK and raise questions about the effectiveness of information sharing regarding young people who come to police attention. The findings also talk to professionals understanding and knowledge of how young people are radicalised and how to best support them, as well as their understanding of Government policies with regard to racialisation.

Findings related to working with minority ethnic groups reflect concerns regarding resourcing and strategies to support women and children from minority cultural backgrounds; professionals' understanding of culture, identity, gender, religion, beliefs and divided loyalties; and statutory agencies knowledge about, and understanding of, local minority ethnic and faith community groups and how best to work together to safeguard children, including those at risk of exploitation into radicalisation.

One finding considers the system strengths in the city following the discovery that the two siblings and another young person had gone missing. It recognises changes to processes, practice and working relationships to help prevent other young people at risk of radicalisation and travelling to Syria.



History: The review concerns two siblings, W & X, who originated from a country in North Africa /Middle East and received services from our local agencies. Both siblings travelled to Syria aged less than eighteen years old and both are reported to have died in 2014. It was understood that the boys were with the Al-Nusra Front, which in 2013 pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda.

W & X were part of a larger sibling group. Many practitioners in the city, from a variety of services, worked with the family. The heart of this review examines the siblings and their family's experiences. This includes their experience of being subjected to racist and religiously motivated abuse and attacks, domestic and physical abuse. The review also considers the youngest four siblings' involvement in anti-social and suspected criminal activities.

In early 2014 it was discovered that three siblings were not in the UK and after a period of uncertainty over their whereabouts, the police learnt they had travelled to Turkey and were suspected of being in Syria. Before this, none of the professionals involved with the family considered that any of the siblings were at risk of being exploited by radicalisation, or at risk of travelling to Syria to join fighting. Some professionals understood that an older sibling had travelled to Turkey to assist in the delivery of aid a few months earlier. Around that time there was a referral to the Channel panel for child X, where there was no evidence identified of him being at risk of being drawn into terror related activities. During 2014 the focus of intervention changed following the discovery that three of the siblings had gone to Syria. At that point multi-agency involvement addressed the risks to the remaining siblings of radicalisation and in particular the possibility of them travelling. Also at that stage, agencies became aware of potential risks to other young people in Brighton & Hove, particularly in the siblings' peer group.

Many of the review's findings relate to the challenges for professionals to provide effective help and support to children who have suffered trauma in their early childhood. Such trauma can provide the context for children becoming vulnerable to exploitation as well as becoming involved in various risk taking and anti-social behaviours.

Unresolved trauma & distrust of statutory services:

Childhood trauma is an important public health concern, with adverse childhood experiences being one of the strongest predictors for difficulties in future life.

At the start of the timeframe under review, the children in the family were aged twelve to seventeen years old. Agency records show that the family had been subject to a long history of contact with agencies. What the review has not been able to determine is whether anyone working with the family fully understood their life experiences. The mother spoke to reviewers of the trauma for the whole family, of the changes in their lives brought about by political events in their home country, and the impact of leaving an educated high status section of society and moving to Brighton where they suffered from racism. Whilst the mother did not describe feeling any lack of trust or faith in practitioners, she did acknowledge that the impact of her family living with threats to their safety was traumatic. Comments made in media reports, in agency records, and by other members of the community suggest that by January 2012 the children may have held a feeling of distrust in the ability of local professionals to help to them. The lack of any prosecution may have left the children feeling that the authorities were unable to protect them.



How would a fuller understanding of the experiences of this family have helped with dealing with the prevailing concerns?

How do you built a trusting relationship with the people you are working with?

Do you feel confident to tackle entrenched defence mechanisms?

Working
with
trauma

Child Protection & Safeguarding Adolescents

Traditionally the focus of the child protection system has been on parenting capacity and the safety and wellbeing of younger children. The more recent focus on child sexual exploitation has led to the increasing recognition of adolescent neglect as a safeguarding issue, particularly when it contributes to the risk of child sexual exploitation and, more recently, to radicalisation. The review highlights some 'blind spots' in how agencies view and respond to behaviours of adolescents. It talks to a range of behaviours that some young people are involved in locally, which can expose them to harm and which could be related to vulnerabilities caused by earlier life experiences and/or parenting issues.



What do you consider are the indicators and risk factors of exploitation?

Does the concept of being able to label a situation as exploitation hide what is actually happening for the child or young person?

Working with
high risk
adolescents

Adolescents & Reactive Crisis Management

One of the notable features of this case was that prior to the review period, the siblings engaged with youth services, attended some activities and engaged with practitioners, disclosing they were suffering physical abuse. However, by the time of the period under review, the four youngest siblings had become increasingly hard to engage. Whilst this was likely to relate to family members' own history and experience of earlier professional involvement, the lifestyle of the four youngest siblings was also a feature. This involved frequently being out until the early hours of the morning; returning home with friends; missing school; involvement with other young people in group anti-social and criminal behaviour (including violent offences against others); substance misuse and suspected drug dealing. Professionals were unable to progress work with the family and instead found they were responding to constant incidents.

Working with
high risk
adolescents



In your practice, how do you balance addressing the immediate issues with the longer term needs of the family?

Missing in UK vs Missing Aboard

When it was recognised that children in Brighton & Hove may be at risk of travelling to Syria, initial child protection conferences were held on each child identified. This did not, however, include young people who were already missing, thought to be abroad and already in Syria.

Working with
high risk
adolescents



Do you know what to do if you think a young person you are working with has left the UK?

Information Sharing & Agency Perception of Relevant Information

In this case there seemed to be differing views or perceptions of the siblings. Some professionals, including social workers and youth offending officers, held a view that the younger male children in the family were victims of racism and this had led them to retaliate and get involved in anti-social behaviour and minor criminality. On the other hand, information held within police systems depicted them as being suspected of involvement in aggressive and violent offences

Working with
high risk
adolescents



Do you feel that you are provided with the full information held about a young person you are working with by the other safeguarding agencies?

Working with
children
vulnerable to
radicalisation

Countering Propaganda

Another feature of this case was the identification of the increasing risk to, the vulnerability of, some children and young people via the internet and social media. Online environments are a major recruitment method, potentially exposing young people to extremist content and persuading them towards a radical outlook. It was recognised that it is difficult for parents and professionals to be confident that they know what is influencing children on the internet and through social networks.



Do you feel that you are sufficiently aware of the levels of radical material available via the internet / on social media?



As a professional, do you have the confidence to discuss the potential for radicalisation via the internet with parents, carers and family?



Links between Racism and Vulnerability to Exploitation

In this case, it is noted that, early experiences of racism in nursery schools and primary schools was described as leading to children becoming alienated, which it turn led them to have low personal self-esteem and, as a consequence, they became more vulnerable to searching for ways to feel better about themselves through other means. There was concern expressed by community members that schools are not able to protect Muslim children sufficiently from racism and that with the ending of required reporting of incidents, there is no longer awareness of the level of hate incidents within schools.



Do you feel that you have the ability to recognise and identify bullying, and prejudiced based incidents, including those which are racist and religiously motivated?



As a professional, do you think you can establish a positive working relationship with a Muslim family, while still considering the current requirements under Prevent?

Recognition of Risk of Radicalisation and Link to Safeguarding

In this case there had been no specific concerns with regard to W & X in relation to radicalisation.

It is understood that this had not been raised as a concern to the police, and that other agencies working with the family had not anticipated or registered any suggestion that the siblings were considering travelling abroad. There were no overt intentions or behaviours, albeit it was noted that when they were involved with the police in 2012, the siblings made angry and abusive comments to officers which did have radical connotations. These were viewed at the time as being the way in which they were expressing their aggression. The review iterates the importance of not just focusing on the individuals but also on the potential links between young people and wider safeguarding issues.



Do you feel that current Safeguarding Procedures work successfully alongside the Prevent processes?



Are you confident that a young person identified via Prevent will be appropriately referred to safeguarding teams for assistance if required?

Welfare of Children and National Security Imperatives

This case highlighted issues about information sharing between agencies, and how this led to misconceived perceptions about “withheld details”. Police information provided at the initial child protection conference, which was attended by Prevent officers as opposed to those from the local Safeguarding Investigation Unit, did not include all the routine information expected at such meetings. There is inconsistency in how safeguarding concerns relating to extremism are recorded. In terms of reporting and monitoring, the Prevent duty requires all agencies to record Prevent safeguarding concerns even if they do not refer to the police or the Channel process.



Are you confident to challenge other partner agencies with regard to the level of information they have provided?



Do you feel that you have a full understanding of your reporting role within the Prevent duty?

Brighton & Hove Systems Strengths

This review found that there has been good response following the discovery that the two siblings and another young person had gone missing. It recognises changes to processes, practice, and working relationships to help prevent other young people at risk of radicalisation and travelling to Syria. The report highlights the good use of legal interventions, namely Wardship proceedings to thwart children identified as vulnerable to radicalisation from travelling to war zones.




Are you confident of being able to promote the use of appropriate legal proceedings to prevent and disrupt the potential radicalisation of a young person?

Domestic Violence and Abuse among Families from Ethnic Minorities

Working with minority ethnic groups

This case heightened agency suspicions that coercion and control aspects of domestic abuse were a feature of this family's dynamics, compounded by the mother's social isolation and lack of support. It was recognised that these circumstances would have made it extremely difficult for the mother to co-operate with professionals. In this case, even though the mother and her children (on advice from professionals) lived separately from the father, he was still known to continue to have access to the children. At that time police lacked means to stop the father visiting, despite it being against his bail conditions, because police bail, prior to being charged, does not provide effective powers when contravened. There is no evidence seen by the review to suggest that professionals sought to support the mother to take out an injunction against him, with power of arrest.


 **Do you have sufficient awareness of the appropriate support services available to domestic abuse victims from minority ethnic groups?**


 **Do you regularly advise on the use of civil injunctions and other court orders to prevent/reduce further incidents of domestic abuse?**

Culture, Identity, Gender, Religion, Beliefs and Divided Loyalties

Working with minority ethnic groups

This case highlighted that professionals were not curious enough about what life was like for this family before arriving in the city, including why they left their country of origin and the political links of the wider family. In this case there was inadequate consideration of the role of identity, religion, culture, family and community in the lives of the children and their parents including the existence, or not, of Islamist thinking. The issue of identity for adolescents is developmentally significant, especially if they perceive themselves as different to those around them. Practitioners may not know how best to support children and families from different cultures and countries who may be subject to conflicting identities and political or religious loyalties.

 **Do you have the ability to consider looking at the personal identity of the young person you are working with?**

 **Are you able to comprehend the difference between cultural and religious beliefs that may have impact on the young person's concept of appropriate behaviour?**

Professional Understanding and Knowledge of BAME Communities

Whilst the case showed that on occasion the local authority does liaise with community groups in a variety of ways, community members reported that they did not feel listened to or heard.

They did however feel they are consulted about various policy and service developments.

It is a concern that there is a perception from local communities that when racial harassment incidents are reported to statutory agencies, in some instances, nothing is heard back of the outcome of the investigation and there is little sense of things changing.

 **Do you think that your role as a statutory agency worker has an impact on your ability to work with a BAME family?**

 **How can you develop a better working relationship and build trust with community groups and BAME families?**

Working with minority ethnic groups

Staff Seminars: We will be holding some three hour long seminars for staff from all agencies working in Brighton & Hove to come together and look at the findings from this review in more depth. These are free to attend, although space is limited, and these will run as part of the Safeguarding Sussex Week:

- [Tuesday 28 November 2017, 1.30-4.30](#)
- [Thursday 30 November 2017, 9.30-12.30](#)

Find out more and book your place at: learning.brighton-hove.gov.uk

The LSCB also support multi-agency training courses on and See our upcoming training at brightonandhovelscb.org.uk/events or book on through the [Brighton & Hove Learning Gateway](#)

Reporting Concerns

If you are concerned about a child contact the [Front Door For Families](#) on 01273 290400 including if you think they are at risk of being exploited into radicalisation or violent extremism



Any worker who believes a crime is being committed, or planned, or is aware of any terrorist activity, should contact Sussex Police Prevent team without delay on 101 ext. 550543

If you want advice from the Prevent team regarding concerns about an individual please email Channel.Prevent@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk

Further Reading & Useful Links

- [Safe in the City Website](#) for local guidance on preventing terrorism and extremism and reporting racist and religiously motivated hate crime
- [Pan Sussex Child Protection & Safeguarding Procedures: Children & Young People Vulnerable to Violent Extremism](#)
- [Brighton & Hove LSCB Website](#)
- Tower Hamlets' [Advice Leaflet for Parents](#) and [Childline's advice for children](#)
- [NSPCC](#) advice on protecting children from radicalisation, and helpline 0808 800 5000.
- [Channel Duty Guidance 2015; Prevent Duty Guidance 2015](#) and [Departmental advice for schools and childcare providers](#)
- Home Office [e-learning](#)
- [Educate Against Hate](#) gives parents, teachers and school leaders practical advice on protecting children from extremism and radicalisation.
- [Extreme Dialogue](#) provide short films and educational resources to help start safe, constructive discussions around extremism and radicalisation in schools or community settings
- [FAST \(Families Against Stress and Trauma\)](#) is a charity based in south London that works nationally with families who have been affected by the trauma of losing loved ones to hateful ideologies and groups, or who may be worried about their loved ones possible involvement with terrorism
- The Department for Education and the Home Office have published advice to help local authorities support British children who [return to the UK from Syria](#)
- BAWSO provide specialist services for BAME families and have written about [Domestic Abuse from a BAME Perspective](#)
- [Women's Aid](#) have advice for BAME women trying to escape from domestic abuse

Feedback: As staff and frontline managers you will know about the quality and impact of your own services, and those of the partner agencies you work with. The LSCB Learning & Improvement Framework highlights that it is important to the LSCB to have a constant feedback loop from the frontline to keep senior management and those with governance responsibilities 'reality-based'; not just in terms of what is or is not working, but to assist with ideas for improvement so that changes can be made systematically.

We would like to hear your thoughts, feedback and comments on findings presented to you in this briefing and any feedback on the style of the briefing itself.

