

One minute guide

Learning from a Waltham Forest Serious Case Review

June 2020

Overview

In January 2019 a 14yr old child, J, was deliberately knocked off the stolen moped he was riding and was then repeatedly stabbed to death by three men. A 19 year old was found guilty and given life imprisonment. At the time of his death J was sleeping on his grandmother's sofa, apart from his mother, who was pursuing a housing application.

J had problems at school leading to suspensions and other disciplinary measures, he was also educated from home for a while by his mother, but this eventually broke down, he therefore had a lot of unsupervised time. He began to get into trouble in the community and on several occasions the family were threatened by people unknown to them in relation to debts that J was said to have built up. His mother moved him to a different part of the country to live at his grandmother's home, as she was concerned that J was being exploited, whilst she applied for housing in that area.

J was then found, with a 17 year old, out of area in Bournemouth in a “**cuckoo house**” (the house of a vulnerable person who has been targeted by an organised crime group and the house used to deal drugs) with a large quantity of money and drugs. On return to his grandmother's home, assessments around help and protection were started. He was then permanently excluded from school for a gun-related incident – this was not the first gun related incident but, on both occasions, intel held in respect of fire arms was not shared with other agencies.

Increasing priority was given to assessing and addressing his vulnerability and some services were already in place with initial assessments near to completion when he was murdered eight weeks later. Delays around the housing and alternative education input meant the family were still living separately and he continued to have unsupervised time where he continued to be exploited.

Findings

- J spent a lot of time out of school and elective home education with limited adult guidance. Time spent out of school for whatever reason, is recognised to be a significant risk to children who are vulnerable to Criminal Exploitation. School placements for J were not pursued with the necessary vigour.
- From the cuckoo house incident, it was clear that J was a victim of Criminal Exploitation – in the form of County Lines. After this incident professionals missed unplanned opportunities, often referred to as “reachable moments”, to breakthrough to him as a victim of Criminal Exploitation, particularly the journey from Bournemouth to London.
- The threats to J and his family were around **drug debt bondage** (promises of a person’s services as security for the repayment of a debt) but there was no plan in place in relation to this.
- There were communication difficulties between the services in Bournemouth, where J was found in a cuckoo house, and J’s home area and not all information was transferred.
- There were considerable numbers of professionals involved with J creating the potential risk of duplication and confusion. J was discussed at the ‘**Bronze panel**’ (a regular multi-agency child exploitation meeting to analyse risk, share information and enable further actions to be decided) but only had 10 minutes on this agenda and there was no multi-agency case review bringing all of the agencies involved together.
- The Housing application process was slow. Housing were not involved in case discussions but had information and resources that no other agency had that were important for the protection plan.
- Information regarding some of the gun-related incidents and threats made against J were not shared by the police.
- Initial assessments by the Local Authority were not quick enough and did not include a wide enough search of agency involvement or an examination of J’s associations outside of the family to help explore his vulnerabilities to criminal exploitation.
- Professionals from all agencies need to have an understanding of criminal exploitation and county lines, including an awareness of contextual issues ie. those risks of harm that are outside of the home, and how to work with them. Although there was some consideration of the ‘context’ of J’s abuse there was no work undertaken to address them.

Indicators of Criminal Exploitation/County Lines



Key Contacts and Further Information

Please find a copy of the full review here:

https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/sites/default/files/WFSCB%20-%20SCR%20Child%20C%20May%20final_.pdf

County lines One Minute Guide: https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/30440/county_lines

Contextual Safeguarding One Minute Guide: https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/31708/contextual_safeguarding

Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership website: <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/lscb>

Safeguarding Procedures around gang activity and youth violence:

<https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/pkpzs/regional-safeguarding-guidance/children-affected-by-gang-activity-and-youth-violence>