

RBSCB Overview Report

Contact (SPOC) for Runaways and no information has been provided as to why consideration was not given to making a referral to Children's Social Care. In particular the SPOC, or the PPIU might have been able to recognise a concerning pattern of behaviour even though this evaded the attending police officers. Rochdale Safeguarding Board and Greater Manchester Police now work to the Greater Manchester policy regarding missing children²² As a result, frequent episodes of running away from home is now recognised as a potential indicator of child sexual exploitation and with hindsight this episode typifies the warning signs which are now more widely understood than was the case at the time.

- 4.3.8. Two incidents involving [REDACTED] that took place prior to the timeline for this review are of particular concern and need further examination in relation not only to the response of the Police, but also of the CPS. These are of particular note given that the combined response of the Police and the CPS had a significant impact on the way in which events subsequently unfolded.
- 4.3.9. In September [REDACTED] family reported to the police that she had been raped. There was no evidence of any investigation of this allegation at the time and in the words of the Police IMR "*the fact that she was alive and had returned home appears to have been sufficient for police purposes to treat the incident as having been concluded*". An officer from PPIU who subsequently visited the family was also reassured by the sisters that they were just friendly with a group of 'Asian' males, which given the age difference and the concerns of their mother should have triggered a much more inquisitive mindset.
- 4.3.10. Less than a fortnight later the police were contacted by [REDACTED]'s mother reporting her as having been driven off by three adult males and found [REDACTED] in a distressed state above Rochdale. On this occasion there was a police investigation and a file of evidence was sent to the CPS, which decided not to authorise a charge. A significant factor in the decision making by the CPS was the perception of [REDACTED] credibility, [REDACTED]. The CPS advice was therefore based very considerably on consent by [REDACTED] although given that she had also been physically assaulted, sustaining injuries the issue of consent could not have been an issue in relation to this allegation. It was also the case that the issue of consent did not need to be a consideration given her that [REDACTED] 16.²³ The CPS IMR further notes that the CPS focus appeared to be in looking for failings in the prosecution case rather than considering the weaknesses in the case for the defence. It is indicative of the approach taken that in assessing the evidential

²² as 27

²³ Sexual Offences Act 2003

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criteria the lawyer noted: *"the aggrieved is a young lady who is known for going with men and in particular Asians in this type of situation."*

- 4.3.11. Although a Detective Chief Inspector from Rochdale did subsequently write in general terms to the CPS with concerns, no formal appeal was made by the Police against the CPS decision, as they were entitled to do. The failure by agencies to pursue their concerns with other agencies is a repeating theme of this Review. Since these events there has been significant recognition by the CPS of the failings in their decision making at the early stages of these young people's experience and the need for a shift in mindset, policy and procedures. New guidance²⁴ from the CPS emphasises the requirement for periodic proactive joint review of cases by police and CPS lawyers in cases of child sexual abuse. The CPS is also developing a new approach to enable victims to appeal against decisions in their cases.
- 4.3.12. Whilst this is likely to provide an important safeguard in future decision making, it is the view of the author that the significance of the lack of police challenge to the CPS, which has been acknowledged as a feature of this case, requires more than a reliance on CPS procedures and merits active consideration on the part of Greater Manchester Police. This episode combined with the frustrations regarding allocation of resources felt by two experienced Police Officers, one of whom DI1, was evidently particularly committed to pursuing the investigation of CSE, suggests that this is part of a wider difficulty in challenge within the Police. GMP has provided examples to the Review to evidence that it is making progress in creating a significant shift in culture to encourage greater challenge and where necessary escalation by officers. However this issue is a longstanding and complex challenge for the Police which like any organisational cultural change will require persistence and objective review in the long term. A specific recommendation is therefore included in this report at Section 6.11 to establish a system which will monitor and review the use of escalation with regard to safeguarding cases both internally and to the CPS. This can then be linked to the escalation policy of the RBSCB. Such a recommendation is clearly not intended as a 'quick fix', but as a supporting contribution to a wider approach to organisational change given the experience of these young people.
- 4.3.13. A further defining incident also took place in August 2008 [REDACTED] were found at a takeaway and specific allegations of sexual abuse were then made to the police by [REDACTED] and other young people. This resulted in the first explicit police and multi-agency recognition that child sexual exploitation had taken place. From this point on police investigators appear to have understood that they were dealing with Child Sexual Exploitation. It should also have led, and as we now know, could have successfully led to criminal

²⁴ CPS: Guidelines on Prosecuting Cases of Child Sexual Abuse Oct 2013