

Statement – Jim Gamble QPM, Independent Chair CHSCB

The child victims in this case, who are now young adult survivors, have been central to the review. From the beginning, the author listened to what they had to say and focused his work on what mattered most to them. How could something like this happen? How did someone like this become a foster parent and how could they have remained in that position of trust for so long?

I can only imagine the legacy of pain they carry. However, I know that without them we would not have been able to expose the issues highlighted in this Serious Case Review (SCR). I would therefore like to thank them and their families for their courage and support and the difference they have made. It is now our job in the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Board (CHSCB) to do everything in our power to prevent other young people suffering in this way.

The main offender represents everything that is criminal, manipulative and self-serving about people who hide their deviant sexual interest in children behind a facade of normality. The fact is we know such people exist; pretending they don't will not help. Systems are therefore critically important and central to this case is evidence that the system could and should have identified and stopped the offending much earlier.

The police failed to deal with an early anonymous complaint about the main offender's use of indecent images. I am convinced that had they done so the vast majority of the offending (known to us) could have been prevented. Whilst this opportunity to intervene occurred over a decade ago, I welcome the fact that the police have accepted the recommendation to investigate this incident and I am reassured by the steps they have taken to restructure and realign responsibility and oversight for contemporary investigations. As a Board we have committed to continue to scrutinise the effectiveness of these arrangements.

People who work in positions of trust are rightly required to undergo vetting and the offender in this case did. However, he escaped scrutiny because repeated professional judgements were made on the basis of a particular understanding of legislation and case law regarding the sharing of 'soft intelligence'. In simple terms, police knew an allegation had been made against a foster carer and on each of the occasions when he was subject to the regular checks that carers are required to undergo, a decision was made not to share that information. In my opinion this case provides evidence that this system needs to be urgently reviewed and I welcome the fact that the MPS have escalated this matter to the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC). It is my view that this particular point represents a national rather than local issue.

A further opportunity to intervene at an earlier stage was missed following a disclosure by a young survivor to a counsellor in 2010. The SCR provides details of the Health response to this issue and the steps taken to prevent a reoccurrence. I have no doubt that this particular subject will feed into the ongoing debate concerning mandatory reporting.

The CHSCB takes its responsibility for scrutinising the safeguarding of looked after children extremely seriously and has engaged Hackney Children and Young People's Services in this regard. We can therefore say with confidence that services for looked after children have been positively transformed over the last ten years. We intend to maintain a significant level of scrutiny concerning this particularly vulnerable group of young people now and in the future.

Finally, sex offenders who target children will by their nature infiltrate all walks of life. When they occupy positions of trust they add insult to extreme injury by their association with good people, doing an important job for all the right reasons. In Hackney and beyond I know that many young people benefit because of the individuals who commit to looking after them.