



## **Significant Case Review G Nursery, 2014**

### **Executive summary**

#### **Introduction**

This Significant Case Review was conducted in line with Scottish Government Guidance to Child Protection Committees on the Conduct of Significant Case Reviews (2007) and National Child Protection Guidelines (2010).

In this case, serious offences were carried out with respect to children who attended a nursery in South Lanarkshire and the Child Protection Committee decided to conduct an independent review in order to identify and share learning. A sub-group was set up consisting of senior members of the CPC, its lead officer and its independent chair. An independent reviewer was appointed to carry out interviews and relevant reading and to be involved in detailed discussion with the sub-group on the analysis of information and to draft the report. Parents of children who were at G nursery during the time the offender was employed there were given the opportunity to influence the terms of reference of the review and to meet with the independent reviewer.

#### **G Nursery**

G Nursery Centre is a large early years day care and education centre with 106 full time equivalent places, provided to a number of children under 3 and to 3 and 4 year olds; it is located in and owned by the large local authority of South Lanarkshire, and managed by the Council's Education Resources. The service is registered and inspected by the Care Inspectorate and HMIE.

#### **The circumstances which led to the SCR**

In January 2012, officers of Strathclyde Police attended the nursery in order to request that M, a qualified member of its early years staff registered with the Scottish Social Services Council, accompany them to his home to identify his computer and other equipment which was to be examined. This happened as a consequence of the Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP) having notified Strathclyde Police of the accessing of images of child pornography and a search warrant had been obtained. The subsequent enquiries found a very substantial number of such images and that a contact crime had been committed against 2 young children under 5 years whose family M had befriended via his employment. One child, aged under 5 years, who had spoken to their parent, was able to speak about what had happened in the context of a joint police and social work investigative interview and there was corroborative evidence of the crimes on the equipment examined.

M was suspended, then dismissed from his employment in February 2012 and subsequently pleaded guilty in May 2012 to charges relating to the possession and making of indecent images and the contact offences and was sentenced to a period of imprisonment.

## **Issues and learning**

The SCR describes the issues and subsequent learning which arise from this case. There were a number of strengths within the systems involved; but also several issues on which specific recommendations have been made, as well as areas of further potential learning and consideration for the CPC, South Lanarkshire Council Education Resources, nationwide agencies and the Government

### *Summary of strengths:*

- The offender was detected through his use of internet images by the UK wide resource of CEOP and this information was followed up timeously and effectively by Strathclyde Police. Thereby, further offending was stopped. This would have been unlikely some years ago when detection of such crimes depended almost wholly on disclosure by victims and belief by others. This also reinforces the importance of values and protocols in which children and adults who disclose discomfort about someone are taken seriously as it is likely that many similar situations will not have the availability of concrete evidence such as the images to support children and adults' disclosures.
- Despite the offender pursuing the intention of accessing children to abuse by becoming employed in child care and also by befriending and gaining the trust of children's relatives and colleagues, a number of these resisted his efforts. This would seem to reinforce the value of publicity on awareness of child protection and the obligation on agencies to make it easier for people to report concerns.
- Despite the great and understandable anxiety caused to parents and staff by the revelation of the abuse, the great majority have continued to use the nursery centre and, in the case of staff, continue to provide care which is valued and trusted by parents.
- A number of contributors to the review had been directly affected by having worked with the offender and were open and reflective about the learning they have taken from this experience.
- Following the initial arrest, the Council set up a strong support team which offered access to affected relatives and staff to advice and counselling. There was also a senior multi agency liaison team which based its activities on emergency response knowledge and crisis intervention theory.
- The agencies involved or with responsibilities in this area of work have been open and generous in contributing to this learning review by providing information, including documentation and access to interviews.

### *Summary of recommendations and areas for further consideration.*

Overall, these are about the heightening of child protection systems for children when they are away from family care. They include:

- Safer recruitment of permanent and temporary staff
- Improving the consistency and depth of understanding of the dynamics of abusive intentions for senior, front line management and front line professionals.
- Considering further the most effective approaches to understanding and expectations of the best balance of professional and personal boundaries
- Considering further the more systematic inclusion of parents in the structure of day care services and nurseries.
- Considering further the best approach to external and internal staff management to ensure as far as possible the paramountcy of the well being of children

## **Conclusion**

Whilst most of this review focused on South Lanarkshire Council's Education Resources, the Child Protection Committee considers that most of the learning is relevant to all agencies, voluntary and statutory, providing services to children.

One of the most disturbing aspects of this case was the way in which the perpetrator seems to have set about building up his ability to access children over several years through his career path and the way he created opportunity to abuse children by befriending parents he met through his work: he groomed parents in order to get to children. As the review brings out, this has implications for recruitment on to training courses and into employment, for child protection training, for the alertness of management to the possibility that this could happen and for all involved to be receptive to any concerns raised by parents or colleagues

Whilst recognising that no systems can completely safeguard against determined and devious individuals, the review makes specific recommendations in respect of recruitment for South Lanarkshire Council and for Scottish Government and advises that these should also be considered by all other agencies providing services for children. This case illustrates the need to be particularly focused on those who work in relatively junior or ancillary roles and who may have less direct one to one contact with children but who could use the opportunity provided by their work setting to make contact with children outwith their employment. This risk is heightened as most of these staff will not have been through the more rigorous professional training and assessment which, for instance, would be the case for social workers, health visitors and teachers.

The CPC will take on board the recommendations for training and work with local agencies to ensure to this is followed through in South Lanarkshire and communicated to the wider child protection network.

It is distressing that any child should suffer the sort of abuse which occurred in this case and totally unacceptable that this was perpetrated by someone employed in a caring capacity. All who have been involved in this review feel acutely betrayed by the individual concerned. It makes us all determined to take on board the learning from this review and to continue to do our best to improve services for children.

If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us to discuss how we can best meet your needs.

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