

Exploitation, county lines, threats and weapons: learning from two serious case reviews

Issue 1—July 2020

This spotlight briefing by the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP), reflects on the operational and/or strategic police practice learning drawn from two published Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) in context of the key relevant findings/recommendations around safeguarding children at risk of child criminal exploitation (CCE) published by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel in March 2020.

It is important to note that although this briefing is focussed on the police learning, the SCRs highlight learning for other agencies too.

Chris and Child C:

Chris - Newham Chris was 14 years old and described as easy to engage, likeable, chatty, funny young man. He had a particularly positive relationship with staff from the Youth Offending Team and Youth Zone. Chris also had special educational needs. On the 4th September 2017, Chris was in Newham in a group of four young people. An unknown assailant passed by in a stolen vehicle and fired multiple shots into the crowd of young people; it is not possible to be sure if Chris was the intended victim of the attack. Chris received a bullet wound to his head and was taken to hospital but sadly died as a result of his injuries the following day.

Child C - Waltham Forest Child C was 14 years old and described as clever, sporty, loved bikes, very giving and had a big heart. On the 8th January 2019, he was sadly murdered by stabbing. Child C was riding a stolen moped when a car deliberately rammmed into him. Child C was knocked off the moped and was then attacked by three of the passengers from the car. Child C sustained 9 stab wounds and died on the ground where he fell.

Both Child C and Chris were :

- Known and being supported by social services at time of murder
- Living with a grandparent
- known to more than one police force
- Known to the Youth Offending Service

One other similarity between both Child C and Chris is that they had both experienced loss/grief in relation to their father's and Child C also had a friend who passed away.

Key questions for consideration...

- Are officers equipped with the relevant training to be able to identify criminal exploitation and trafficking?
- Do officers know when and how to make a referral to the National Referral Mechanism ?
- Is there a clear process for information sharing with local partners? Is there a clear process for sharing information with other forces when a child of concern moves between areas?
- What is your force's approach to out of area children you arrest?
- How does your pre-release risk assessment/safeguarding assessment manage loss of items from a child such as drugs/money that could cause debt and risk to the child?
- Is there a clear process for other statutory/non-statutory services to refer intelligence into your force?
- Senior public protection and safeguarding police leads to map out all the points where officers come into contact with children at risk or experiencing CCE. Do these officers have in-depth knowledge relating to exploitation/interlink to other vulnerabilities? Do they know the local safeguarding arrangements around exploitation, trafficking and missing? *Examples of promising practice related to CCE can be found on the Knowledge Hub under The Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme.*
- How is your force establishing processes to review decisions/actions and practice to ensure the eradication of bias and resultant disparities relating to detention and outcomes for children?
It was clear in both SCRs that race, age and gender were integral features in how the boys were perceived and engaged with by professionals, including the police.
- How do your managers and supervisors ensure that front line officer's responses to situations do not become normalised to the type of harm that children involved in CCE are at risk from?
- How might your local safeguarding children's partnership implement the findings from the Safeguarding children at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) review by the Child Safeguarding practice review panel?

National Vulnerability Action Plan —

Related Actions:

2.1.1 Recognition & Response

Ensuring that recognising and responding to vulnerability is everyone's business, especially at first point of contact.

2.4.1 Voice of Victim

Develop clear processes to ensure that 'the voices of vulnerable victims and witnesses' are heard.

2.6.2 Officer Norms

Recognise that officer norms will change from exposure to aspects of criminality/vulnerability and that these need to be re-set so that thresholds of acceptability are maintained.

Further information can be found on the Knowledge Hub, under our group:

[The Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme](#)

Useful Reading:

[It was hard to escape: Safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation](#)

[Protecting children from criminal exploitation, human trafficking and modern slavery: an addendum](#)

[VKPP Serious Case Review Briefings](#)

[2019 Triennial analysis of serious case reviews: Police](#)

[The Children's Society— Counting Lives Report](#)

[Rescue and response County Lines Project— Strategic Assessment 2019](#)

[Contextual Safeguarding Network Securing Safety](#)

Useful Reading

[All of us were broken: An exploratory study into family experiences of child criminal exploitation](#)

[Language Guide/intelligence document](#)

[National Referral Mechanism](#)

[NRM guidance](#)

[NCA Intelligence Assessment: County Lines Drug Supply, Vulnerability and Harm 2018](#)

Trauma

For Chris and Child C, there was a series of significant events in their life's that will have likely to have led them to experience trauma, such as grief, threats to life etc.

To understand more around trauma, trauma responses and trauma informed approaches, please see the following link:

[Research In Practice– Trauma](#)

Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA)

The [Wood review](#) and enactment of the [Children and Social Work Act \(2017\)](#) removes the statutory requirement for Local Safeguarding Children's Board's (LSCBs) and Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) in their current form. In its place, it names the Chief of Police, the Chief Executive of the local authority and the Chief Accountable officer within the clinical commissioning group as 'safeguarding partners' whose joint responsibility it is to design, implement and review strategic multi agency child safeguarding arrangements. This is in collaboration with other locally designated 'relevant agencies' that come into contact with children.

College of Policing:

The formula that underpins the [THRIVE definition of vulnerability](#) adopted by the college, provides useful insight into the extrinsic factors acting with the intrinsic factors that can make someone at risk of harm. This could be useful for acknowledging and managing risk.

Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel: 'It was hard to escape', Safeguarding children at risk of criminal exploitation

In March 2020, the Child Safeguarding Practice Panel published a review of 21 cases with the aim to identify what might be done differently by practitioners to improve approaches to protecting children who find themselves threatened with violence and serious harm by criminal gangs. In this briefing, we reflect on the following key points from the report and seek to explore opportunities for police to strengthen practice to safeguard children at risk/experiencing CCE:

- **Acknowledging and managing risk:** Police to be able to recognise and identify children who are at risk of child criminal exploitation (CCE) and once identified, effectively assess the risk, including consideration around wider contexts.
- **Effective management of risk/disrupting perpetrators:** Police should work within a multi-agency partnership, creating a risk management plan, building opportunities to increase intelligence to help look at disruption options.
- **Trusted relationship with child:** Police should utilise opportunities to hear the child's voice, identify who has the trusted relationship with the child or signpost to services that can build effective relationships.
- **Parental engagement:** Police should establish who has trusted relationship with parent/carer and within the multi-agency partnership, look at opportunities to support parents/carers, listen to their voice and include them in safety planning.
- **Responding to the 'critical moment':** Police should consider critical moments e.g. point of arrest, being found out of area, and look at what risk management and safeguarding measures are being utilised within those moments to safeguard the child short term and longer term.

We will also explore the findings in the National CCE report that out of the cases the panel reviewed, they found:

- **There was a disproportionate impact on boys from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds**
- **Known risk factors around vulnerability don't always act as predictors such as 'children in care' or 'children already known to social care':** Although being in care can make young people vulnerable to exploitation, the National CCE review found that preconceived risks factors do not always act as predictors and therefore those who may encounter children need to be aware of the signs and refer/seek advice from supervisors.

Please note that the page numbers next to the sub-headings throughout this briefing relate to the page number on the National CCE report

Ofsted Guidance– managing risk: When they (police) find a young person in possession of weapons and drugs, they need to ask: 'is this a vulnerable child?' and 'has this child been criminally exploited?' assess the risk of exploitation when considering whether to charge the young person. This is where we need a shift in culture, similar to what we saw in relation to child sexual exploitation. Clearly, a child in possession of Class A drugs or a weapon presents a child protection issue. [Ofsted, page 17.](#)

Acknowledging and managing risk. (Pg. 32)

It is important to recognise circumstances where there is an escalation of risk. The following evidence of escalation of risk was evident for Chris and Child C:

- Average of 3 threats/notable concern for safety raised to agencies with limited multi-agency safety plan responses.
- Known incident around possession/selling of drugs and following this, known drug debt.
- 4 incidents known to agencies where child was either found with weapon, intelligence to suggest association with weapon and/or social media linked to association with weapon.
- Evidence of internal trafficking but no referral made to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).
- Exclusion from school.

Examples around managing this risk could include:

- Considering the child to be a victim of CCE.
- Requesting a multi-agency meeting with parent/carer and child to look at creating a safety plan around risk.
- Adding security measures to the family property and/or flagging the property for fast police response.
- Intelligence gathering exercise on peers/associates and contexts of concern– they may include looking at social media too.
- Submitting a referral to the NRM
- Making a safeguarding referral/requesting a strategy discussion
- Utilising the Modern Slavery Act, Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders and CAWNs as disruption options

‘Non Engagement’ with services:

There are often multiple factors that may prevent children from engaging with both statutory and non statutory services, especially a child who is being exploited.

It is important that if a child ‘does not engage’ with a service, that as a multi-agency network, alternative approaches are explored to try and find a trusted relationship or approach that does work for the child.

Police Disruption Options:

Modern Slavery Act 2015:

- Human Trafficking
- Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders
- Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWNS)

For further information:

[Child exploitation disruption toolkit](#)

Escalating concerns:

At times there may be situations that occur where you may not agree that a decision/assessment made by another worker on a safeguarding matter/level of risk is safe.

In your local safeguarding arrangements, there should be guidance around escalation.

Speak to your manager if unsure.

Important to remember:

Ensure steps you take to escalate concerns are documented.

If you believe a child risk is not being recognised, it is always safer to escalate / challenge.

Effective management of risk/disrupting perpetrators (Pg. 9 & 20)

The National CCE report found a whole system approach incorporating policy, prevention, disruption, protection and support across multiple agencies is likely to be the most effective approach to managing risk, however it highlighted that there was a significant gap in the cases they viewed around the disruption element of the approach. When reviewing Chris and Child C, it was evident that little disruption activity was taking place. It was clear from both SCR’s that there were some key principles which would have limited the ability to utilise disruption opportunities and coordinate multi-agency intelligence sharing including:

Information sharing/timeliness of information sharing– Within both SCRs, it is evident that there were missed opportunities to share information by the police or for information to be shared with the police from agencies. An additional complication raised within these two SCRs is that different police forces were involved. Police should consider how they share information with other forces if a child is found out of area. Police should also actively contact other forces to which a child is known, in order to ascertain any information held by that force that could support them with risk/safeguarding.

Case co-ordination/multi-agency working- The national CCE review highlighted social care as the lead agency co-ordinating support and managing level of risk for families and children, but within a clear multi-disciplinary framework which sets out accountability and roles/responsibilities. There is a clear role for police within the multi-disciplinary element of the case coordination. If police do not feel there is clear case co-ordination regarding a child they are concerned about, this needs to be escalated.

Intelligence- Police need to consider a broader set of intelligence/information sources such as school, children social care and third sector agencies. Police may need to support these agencies to understand intelligence, how to share this and how this can increase chances of disruption.

Professional curiosity– In both SCRs, the child was initially being seen and responded to through the criminal justice system, rather than being afforded a safeguarding response. As recognised in the [NPCC National Strategy for Policing of Children & Young People](#), ‘It is crucial that in all encounters with the police, those below the age of 18, should be treated as children first’ and that ‘The vulnerability of C&YP should be identified and responded to effectively in order to protect them from harm.’

Goff et al, 2014; Ocen, 2015; Epstein, 2017; Davis, 2019, provide a concept around ‘Adultification’, meaning the concept of childhood may not be applied equally to all Black children. They may be excluded from being perceived as vulnerable and may experience punitive and neglectful responses. They are more likely to be treated as adult-like, erasing their innocence.’ This concept may be of relevance for Black children like Chris and Child C. This concept links into learning for professionals around bias (unconscious or otherwise). In an everyday context bias assists in rapid decision making, but in a professional context when responding to Black children, it is likely to be a systematic cause of error (Reason, 1990).

NRM- The national CCE review highlighted the lack of understanding around the NRM and the lack of training across first responders is widely recognised. With both cases, referrals to the NRM were not completed for the child.

Escalation/feedback when making safeguarding referrals- When information is shared by police to MASH/allocated social worker, it is good practice to establish the outcome of the safeguarding referral and if officers are not happy with the outcome, for this to be escalated. It was evident in the SCRs that at times police did share information appropriately but information was not received by the intended agency or the information was received but deemed as not meeting threshold.

Relationship with children (Pg. 28)

The national CCE report identified that children who are at risk of, or who are being criminally exploited, require strengths-based, relationship-driven approaches. Although police do not have a role that enables long term relationship building, they can highlight the need for this approach and refer to appropriate services who offer this intervention. Police also have key moments with children that can be utilised to hear the child’s voice and respond to this. Within the SCR with Chris and Child C, some examples of these moments include:

- Whilst in custody awaiting interview
- Taking a child home following a missing episode/being found out of area
- Completing a ‘safe and well check’ following a missing episode
- In school through the schools officer

Bernard and Harris (2019) reviewed 14 SCRs involving Black children and found that even when children were old enough to ascertain their wishes and feelings, their voices were often overlooked.

Ofsted carried out an analysis of 67 serious case reviews in 2010 to see what lessons could be learned about listening to what children had to say about their experiences in assessments and found the voice of child is often overlooked.

Parental engagement is nearly always a protective factor (Pg. 9)

Parents and extended family members need support to help them manage risk outside of the family home. In the cases of Chris and Child C’s case, this could have included:

- Supporting the family to understand the increased risk and consider proportionate safety measures particularly following arrest where drugs/weapons/phones may have been removed by police for investigation purposes or where threats for life had been received.
- Support family around being aware of the risks with social media and how to manage and have conversations around safe social media use.

Responding to the 'critical moment' (Pg. 29)

Critical moments are times when a decisive response can make a difference to a child's long-term outcome. Critical moments allow police to make a positive contribution to the life of a young person, perhaps by getting them support, being a listening and empathetic ear, understanding more about what is happening for them and making them safer too. There are several critical moments in the cases of both Chris and Child C which might be useful for the police to reflect on:

- Both had reports of notable concern or threat to life reported to police or other agencies— this provided the police opportunity to put safeguards in place and investigate the allegations/known or suspected risk.
- Both had been arrested at some stage by the police—this provides an opportunity for robust pre-release risk assessments to be undertaken in custody to consider these risks followed by multi agency strategy meeting to support longer term.
- Both had been found with or associated with carrying weapons—this provides police with an opportunity to demonstrate professional curiosity around the vulnerabilities and risks linked with this.
- Both had been reported as missing with police contact on their return—this provided police with an opportunity to conduct safeguarding checks, listen to child and demonstrate professional curiosity.
- Both were associated with the 'selling of drugs' for others which may have led to concern around criminal exploitation and drug debt/debt bondage.

Disproportionate impact on boys from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Pg. 8)

Child C's family identified as being Black British African Caribbean. Chris identified as being Black Caribbean heritage. It is difficult to gain insight into Chris and Child C's own lived experiences of their identity from their individual SCRs, however what we do know from research and insights gained from the National Panel review on CCE, is the impact of disproportionality on boys from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

- Black children are over four times more likely than white children to be arrested. ([Arrest Statistics for recorded crime](#)) Chris and Child C, between the age of 13-14, were both arrested on 4 occasions by police.
- Black children have a higher representation within the most serious offence groups ([Criminal Justice Statistics quarterly](#)) Chris and Child C were arrested for drug offences and weapon possession offence
- Black pupils are more likely to be permanently excluded than the rest of the population ([Department of education statistics; exclusions](#))

Arrests for violence, drugs, weapons and sexual offending, could all be signs of CCE and safeguarding concerns may be apparent. It is important for forces to ensure that officers are able to identify these signs and take appropriate action such as, referring to children's social care. It is important for forces to monitor that this identification and safeguarding response is happening in all suitable cases. The Youth Justice Board have created a Disproportionality Tool, which can be accessed via Youth Offending Teams, which provide data and analysis regarding racial disparities for under 19's.

Known risk factors around vulnerability don't always act as predictors such as 'children in care' or 'children already known to social care' (Pg. 8)

Both Chris and Child C were living at home with a grandparent at time of murder and suitable housing was being sought for the child to live back with mother. At the initial point that both Child C and Chris came to the attention of an agency due to concerns around offending or risk from person associated with gangs/violence, they were not open to children's social care and were responded to by agencies through a criminal justice response with limited safeguarding.

Promising practice example: MET Detention:

MET Detention are piloting an approach called the 'golden hour' where as soon as a child enters custody, the officers aims to make contact with the relevant Local Authority/MASH that the child resides within the hour.

The contact with the Local Authority (LA) within the first hour enables:

- 'Real time' information sharing— this enables both Police and Social Care to have all relevant information at hand to help inform decisions and/or next steps
- Proactive safeguarding— Information received from social care can support with safeguarding the child in custody and also helps better inform pre-release risk assessments
- Signposting— understanding more about the child supports better signposting
- Social care to have all required information to follow up quickly on safeguarding concerns upon release

This does not replace the normal notification process of alerting the LA of a child in custody.

Useful Reading

[Lammy Review— Treatment and outcomes of Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals in the criminal justice system](#)

[Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic disproportionality in the Criminal Justice System](#)

[Where are the Black girls in our CSA services, studies and statistics?](#)

[YJB Disproportionality Toolkit](#)

[School meets street: Exploring the links between low achievement, school exclusion and youth crime among African-Caribbean boys in London](#)

[Research in Practice— Understanding the lived experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic children and families](#)

Summary of key points:

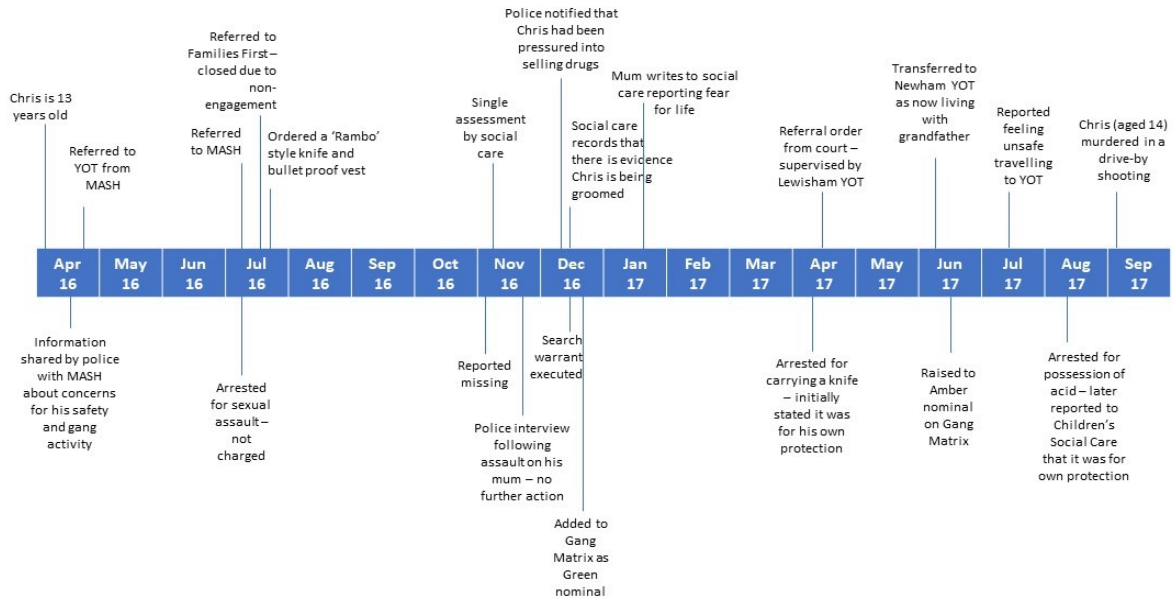
- Recognise and identify children at risk or experiencing CCE
- Ensure children who are at risk or experiencing CCE are safeguarded, including family members too
- Challenge or escalate safeguarding concerns if you do not agree with assessment of risk
- Ensure multi-agency working and effective information sharing
- Utilise moments to hear the child's voice
- Ensure through multi-agency working, that the child is given support through trusted relationships
- Utilise police disruption options
- Ensure effective responses to critical moments
- Challenge bias (unconscious or otherwise) amongst professionals

Promising practice example: MET Police & YOT Parent support

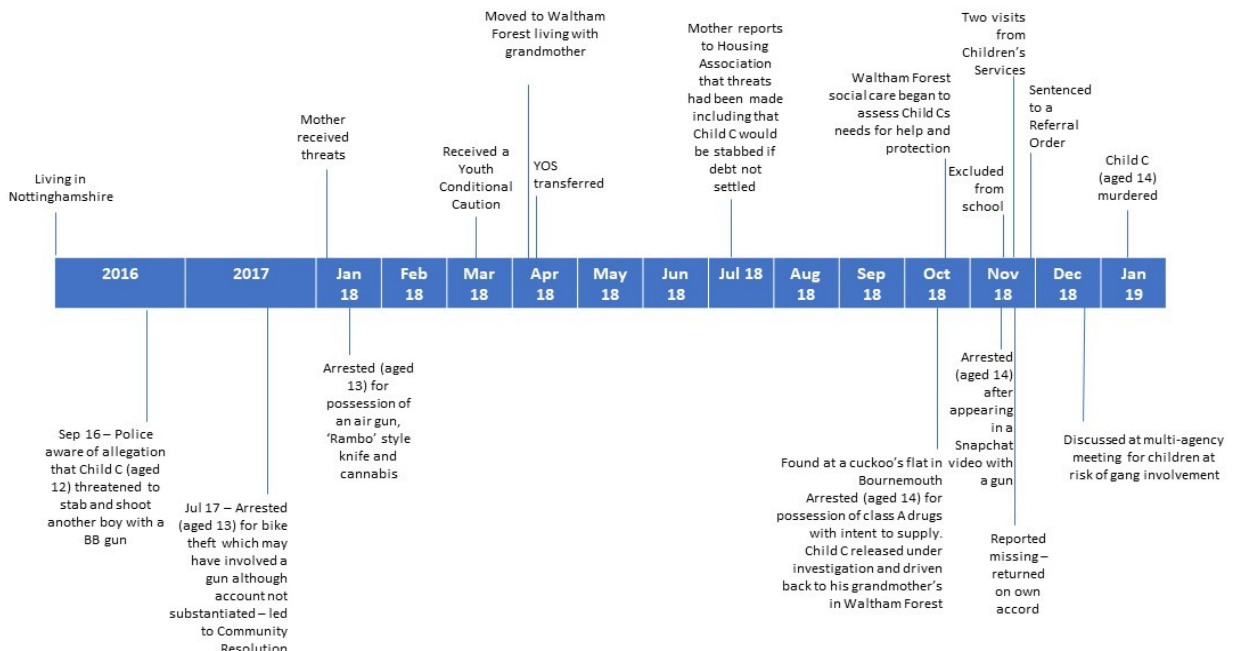
DC Anoushka Dunic, MET police, has been working with Barking & Dagenham Youth Offending Team to deliver a parent training group. The group are aiming to increase parent's capacity as primary caregivers to children open to the YOT. Often parents are recorded as 'refusing to engage' or having 'poor relationships' with statutory services. The group supports parents to build strong, nurturing attachments with their children, alongside awareness raising around exploitation/gangs. Alongside this, DC Anoushka Dunic also co-delivers workshops through schools, so all parents can access information and recognise the signs of vulnerability which can lead to exploitation. Since COVID19, the groups/workshops have continued to be offered through online platforms. As highlighted in the National CCE Report, parental engagement is always nearly a protective factor. This is a promising example of how police can be more innovative in their work to engage, educate, support and build trust with parents collaboratively.

Timelines of Chris and Child C:

Chris



Child C



Contact Details:

VKPP: If you would like to know more, please contact us at: vkpp@norfolk.pnn.police.uk

National Prevention Programme: The Prevention Programme aims to prevent and lower incidences of child sexual abuse and exploitation, child criminal exploitation, modern day slavery and human trafficking on a regional and national basis across England and Wales.

To find out more on how they could support your force, please contact:

James.Simmonds-Read@childrenssociety.org.uk / Lucy.Belcher@childrenssociety.org.uk

Thank you to the following people for your time/feedback:

- NPCC Leads/Staff Officers
- College of Policing
- [Listen Up Research](#)
- London Violence Reduction Unit
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