

# Strategic Management Group (Operation Equinox) Progress Update (December 2016)

## **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to provide updates on:

- the investigations into allegations of historical abuse in children's residential homes;
- the work of the Strategic Management Group;
- the current position in respect of an independent review.

## **2. Context**

- 2.1** In 2010, 5 individuals lodged civil claims in respect of allegations of abuse at Beechwood, a former approved school, observation and assessment centre, remand home, and latterly a community home before its closure in 2006. The allegations were subject to a joint investigation by the City Council and Nottinghamshire Police, with the City Council commissioning an independent investigation by the NSPCC. In 2011 an individual made further allegations to the police, at which stage Nottinghamshire Police launched Operation Daybreak, to investigate all allegations in respect of Beechwood and related matters. A second police operation, Xeres, began in December 2014 to investigate allegations in respect of Skegby Hall, a former approved school and community home with education until its closure in the early 1990's, and related matters. A number of other former Nottinghamshire children's homes along with named establishments in other Local Authorities outside of Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire have been named along with a former school and juvenile detention centre.
- 2.2** Beechwood was within the jurisdiction of Nottingham City Council pre 1974 and again post Local Government reorganisation in 1998. Skegby Hall has always been with Nottinghamshire County Council.

## **3. Current Position**

- 3.1** Nottinghamshire Police established 'Operation Equinox' as an overarching name for the individual operations of Daybreak and Xeres. It also includes two other operations, Lyric and Bulbed, established in 2015 to investigate allegations made by two particular individuals that fell outside of the remit of the existing operations. The creation of Equinox allows resources to be utilised responsively to the needs of each operation. Nottinghamshire County Council have established a dedicated social work team to undertake the social care safeguarding response in relation to allegations of historical abuse made by former Looked After Children where the abuse is alleged to have happened in the current geographic area of the County. This team is co-located with the police. Nottingham City Council has an identified a named Duty-Team Manager as a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) and continues to review the resources needed to respond to required demand.

**3.2** Operation Equinox, as of November 2016, involves 292 individuals making allegations of emotional, physical and sexual abuse (this includes 26 allegations regarding Whatton when it was a juvenile detention centre, although the complainants were over 18 at the time of the alleged incidents). Operation Equinox has to date resulted in four people being convicted of a number of serious sexual offences. There are further trials scheduled and there are a number of advice files currently with the Crown Prosecution Service. It is expected that there will be other people charged and a number of people remain subject to investigation. There have been 139 Beechwood related civil claims (across the City and County) made with the majority relating to times between 1974 and 1998 and therefore the financial liability lying with the County Council. 69 claims have so far been settled or withdrawn at the request of insurers, with another 14 offered. There is a hearing in February 2017 in respect of some of the disputed claims.

#### **4. Management**

- 4.1** The Strategic Management Group (SMG - as described in the previous update reports) continues to meet monthly. A multi-agency Implementation Group was established in accordance to the LSCB multi-agency procedures for organised and complex investigations. A Gold Command group continues to manage the police investigations providing reports to the SMG. Our governance structure describes the relationship and flow of information between these meetings including a regular meeting of Chief Officers from the Police and both Local Authorities.
- 4.2** The SMG (established in accordance with LSCB procedures for complex investigations) continues to monitor its Learning Log. Learning to date has been identified through reports and discussion at the SMG as well as the independent reviews of the criminal investigations that were detailed in the last report to Boards.
- 4.3** A Task and Finish Group of the SMG has developed a Victim/Survivor Support Strategy on behalf of Nottingham City/Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Adult and Children Boards in line with their procedures, and in partnership with; Nottingham City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottinghamshire Police, Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner, NHS Clinical Commissioning Group and Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust. The key objectives of the strategy are:
- To identify and publicise services available for victims/survivors of abuse. A leaflet has been developed and is subject to ongoing review/updates.
  - To ensure those people who might be the first point of contact for victims/survivors are aware of where to signpost people.
  - To ensure that services meets the needs of victims/survivors.
  - The Nottingham Crime and Drugs Partnership have recently commissioned a new service on behalf of the Nottingham Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Joint Commissioning Group. The new service which was launched in April 2016 is being delivered by Rape Crisis. In developing this new service, Rape Crisis Advisory Group identified six groups where the service would like to develop its knowledge and understanding. The first group identified for an event was historical

and institutional abuse survivors and a listening event was held on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016 and attended by 36 people (survivors, family and supporters).

- 4.4 The Corporate Director of Children, Families and Cultural Services at Nottinghamshire County Council continues to chair a regular Survivor Support Group meeting on behalf of the SMG in his role as Vice Chair.
- 4.5 An SMG Risk Register has been developed which incorporates and is in addition to all partner organisational risk registers. This document identifies those risks common across the organisations and that requires, or would benefit, from a coordinated response.
- 4.6 At October's SMG an issue was raised on behalf of the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Adults Board regarding support for staff who are involved in referrals from victims/survivors of historical abuse. It is important that we seek assurance from all agencies to ensure that they are providing appropriate support for their staff as part of their duty of care as an employer.

## **5. Review**

- 5.1 The chronology which details the provision and legislative framework around residential care from the 1940s has been updated to include key information from the Police and Health. This combined chronology will be a working document and is being utilised to inform the current investigations relating to allegations to the police and civil claims. There have been no recent updates but this continues to be a working document which is regularly reviewed by the SMG
- 5.2 The Terms of Reference have been written and agreed for a Learning Review to be commissioned by Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Boards. Legal advice is that the review should not start before the completion of the criminal investigations due to their complexity. Following the announcement of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, Safeguarding Board Independent Chairs have agreed that if, at the end of the inquiry, there are areas that still need review – we will undertake a Learning Review (The outcome of the Wood Review of LSCB's/SCRs may impact on this). The public inquiry is the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse anything else more locally is a Learning Review. This is subject to ongoing review by the SMG, in discussion with the two Independent Chairs.
- 5.3 In November 2015 the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA and also known as the Alexis Jay Inquiry) announced that Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Councils are to be one of 13 case studies. The Inquiry will look into the extent of any institutional failures to protect children in the care of Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Councils from sexual abuse and exploitation. In August there was a change of Chair, following the resignation of Hon. Dame Lowell Goddard DNZM. Professor Alexis Jay OBE is now chairing the Inquiry. Solicitors from the Inquiry wrote to both Council's in January, May and October requesting a variety of current and historical policies, procedures, guidance and investigation reports. In

February 2016 both Corporate Directors of Children's Services met with solicitors from the inquiry to further define the scope of the investigation. At the time of writing this report both Councils are still awaiting further details around the scope of this investigation. More information on the IICSA can be found here <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/>

## **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 That Safeguarding Board members note the updates contained within this report.**
- 6.2 That agencies provide assurance that they are providing appropriate support for staff involved in referrals from victims/survivors of historical abuse as part of their duty of care as an employer.**
- 6.3 That Safeguarding Board Chairs confirm their position regarding the independent review (detailed in 5.2).**
- 6.4 That Safeguarding Board members consider their role in ensuring that victims/survivors access the appropriate support and promotion of the Victim Support Strategy within their organisation.**
- 6.5 That Safeguarding Board members cross-check the SMG Risk Register against their own agency risk register.**