

Strategic Management Group (Operation Equinox) Progress Update (June/July 2017)

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 Community Home, Woodborough Road, Mapperley (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** As of April 2017, the victim/survivor count within Operation Equinox was 307. Victims/survivors have reported a total of 690 individual allegations of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. These allegations are made against 458 suspects (this does not mean that there are necessarily 458 individuals as some are unidentifiable) (this includes 35 allegations of physical and sexual offences regarding Whatton when it was a juvenile detention centre). Operation Equinox has to date resulted in three people (1 Residential Social Worker, 1 Step Father and 1 Youth/Church Worker) being convicted of a number of serious sexual offences – plus one conviction for an associated matter which was not related to abuse. There are further trials scheduled for 2017/18 and there are a number of advice files currently with the Crown Prosecution Service. More than 50 suspects are now known to be dead and more than 100 suspects remain unidentified (the number of actual individuals within this 100 is still not known). It is expected that there will be other people charged and a number of people remain subject to investigation.
- 3.3** There have been 144 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. 72 claims have so far been settled or withdrawn at the request of insurers. A Case Management Conference was held in February 2017 in respect of some of the complex claims, where Judge Godsmark agreed 8 lead cases to progress.

4. Management

- 4.1** The Strategic Management Group (SMG - as described in the previous update reports) continues to meet every two months. An Implementation Group (with representatives from Nottingham City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottinghamshire Police) 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.
- 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 previous reports to Boards.
- 4.3** The SMG has committed to a partnership funded post and agreed to commit additional resource to victims/survivors for two years to commission:
- A Connecting/Outreach service to bring together survivors with services.
 - A Survivors Support and Advocacy Service.
 - Additional Counselling Support through Rape Crisis.
- A Sexual Violence and Engagement Manager will be recruited to co-ordinate this resource.
- 4.4** The Victim and Survivor Advocacy Group continue to meet every two months. This meeting is now chaired by Helen Jones (Director of Adult Social Services at

Nottingham City Council) and Caroline Baria (Service Director, Strategic Commissioning, Access and Safeguarding at Nottinghamshire County Council).

- 4.5** A Task and Finish Group of the Victim and Survivor Advocacy Group has developed a more victim/survivor focussed leaflet for people who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood. The new leaflet only details local services that are accredited. This leaflet will be cascaded to agencies and promoted across all relevant networks. A copy of this leaflet has been attached as Appendix A.
(Note that this leaflet relates to sexual abuse. Many allegations/claims relate to physical abuse and some emotional. Consideration needs to be given to signposting of provision/support).

5. Review

- 5.1** The chronology which details the provision and legislative framework around residential care from the 1940s was updated to include key information from the Police and Health. This combined chronology is be a working document and is being utilised to inform the current investigations relating to allegations to the police and allegations contained within 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 were written and agreed for a Learning Review to be commissioned by Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Boards. Legal advice was 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 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 four Safeguarding Board 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 2016 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 have requested a wide range of information from both Council's in relation to current and historical policies, procedures, guidance, investigation reports, civil claims information and details regarding individual allegations. In February 2016 and again in May 2017 both Corporate Directors of Children's Services met with solicitors from the inquiry to further define the scope of the investigation.
- 5.4** The Inquiry has made a slight amendment to the scope of this investigation. A copy of the revised scope is attached as Appendix B.

5.5 On 24th March 2017 the Inquiry announced that it was inviting applications from individuals or institutions who wish to be designated as a core participant in the investigation. Applications were submitted by Nottingham City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottinghamshire Police due to their respective roles in relation to the matters to which the Inquiry relates. A preliminary hearing was held on 11th May 2017 where all agencies were confirmed as Core Participants, alongside 75 additional applications. There is no timeline as yet established for public hearings regarding the Nottinghamshire investigations. For more information on the preliminary hearing, core participants and IICSA more generally, please visit their website: <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/>

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 That Safeguarding Board members note the updates contained within this report.**
- 6.2 That Safeguarding Board Chairs confirm their position regarding the independent review (detailed in 5.2).**
- 6.3 That Safeguarding Board members cascade the updated Victim/Survivor Support leaflet (Appendix A) across their networks.**