

# Local Learning Review for Child M:

## Learning brief

This briefing has been produced following the notification of Child M under the Safeguarding Board's Rapid Review process. Such reviews are one of the ways in which Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Board (BFSB) aims to share learning to support continuous improvements in our work to safeguarding children within the borough. This brief contains key messages and lessons learnt from the review in respect of Child M and aims to enable you and your team to reflect and challenge your thinking. As a result, we ask that you take time to read this brief and consider the following questions:

- \* Does this case identify any learning for my individual practice?
- \* Does it help identify any training or development needs?
- \* Does anything need to change within my team or service to implement this learning and support best practice?

### Background to the Learning review for Child M

At age 15, Child M suffered life threatening injuries during a road traffic accident involving other young people. It is suspected that Child M was driving the vehicle (owned by a member of the extended family) at the time of the accident; the police also discovered that the car contained illicit substances and a quantity of cash. Child M's activities prior to the accident and the subsequent responses of his family raised concerns about criminal exploitation that resulted in safeguarding interventions and further police investigations.

The review established that all three occupants of the vehicle came from the same Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) community and consideration was given as to any missed opportunities for services to have engaged Child M/his family. In addition, the review considered whether there were any barriers preventing him/his family accessing help and support, or in professionals fulfilling their safeguarding responsibilities.

This review recognises the discrimination experienced by those within GRT communities (that too often results in children experiencing bullying and becoming the victims of violence) and the risk that professional judgements can be influenced by assumptions based on stereotyping individuals. As a result, the review acknowledged that members of GRT communities may be reluctant to seek help from local services and to place trust only in those with whom they have formed an established relationship.

#### Learning established:

- ⇒ Professional curiosity and applying a 'think family' approach to concerns about siblings at risk of exploitation provide an important opportunity for understanding the needs of other children within the same family/community.
- ⇒ An extended absence from school increases the vulnerability of children being exploited.
- ⇒ In cases where pupils attend schools outside of the area in which they live, it is important that those schools ensure good communication is maintained with the relevant local authority.
- ⇒ Robust recording of intelligence /sharing of information is vital for multi-agency evaluation of the needs/risks relating to children who are vulnerable to exploitation and/or present a potential risk to others.

While those involved in this incident were from a GRT community, it was clear that the majority of the learning identified could be applied equally to other children where the unconscious bias of professionals might prevent objective decision making.

#### Links to further learning/additional documents:

[A Good Practice Guide for improving outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children in education](#)

### **Education:**

The barrier for GRT children leaving school early may vary and therefore require careful exploration of individual circumstances, but too often access to education and experiences of bullying and racism are significant reasons for children disengaging from school. The wider context of prejudice and discrimination experienced by GRT communities does not appear to feature strongly enough within strategies to combat racism and in many schools there is a lack of GRT education within the curriculum,

The review identified that there are currently limited opportunities to promote understanding of the history/culture of GRT groups, suggesting that greater consideration needs to be given to ways in which children from GRT communities can be supported to remain in school. The engagement of schools and provision of additional support provided by local authorities was also acknowledged to be an important factor in enabling such children to complete their education.

While policies and procedures were seen to be applied as a last resort (often at a time of crisis), the value of proactive engagement facilitated by professionals who have taken time to develop a trusted relationship is recognised as being of importance in helping promote the views of families within GRT communities.

Questions to consider when working with children and families within GRT communities

- ⇒ Does your school curriculum need expanding to include GRT communities?
- ⇒ How can you/your staff proactively build links to better support children and their families?
- ⇒ How well do you work with your LA and other partners to plan services?
- ⇒ Are you curious and proactive in exploring the needs/risks associated with children and their families?
- ⇒ Do you have established relationships with members of the community who can provide support and advocacy in times of crisis?
- ⇒ Are you confident in using your local authority's Elective Home Education (EHE) and Children Missing from education (CME) processes?

### **Social Care/Health:**

In common with safeguarding children living within other minority ethnic communities, fear was recognised as potential barrier for a social worker and/or health worker engaging with GRT communities. The review acknowledged that workers can lack understanding of the cultures within such communities and benefit from accessing advice from colleagues with knowledge and specific experience. As with all aspects of safeguarding, establishing relationships with children and their families would appear to be essential to achieving shared outcomes. Enabling those within GRT communities to identify their needs avoids approaches that appear to impose interventions and dispel fear of draconian sanctions being imposed.

Questions to consider when working with children and families within GRT communities

- ⇒ Does the local authority / health trust include consideration of these communities within training to promote anti-discriminatory practice
- ⇒ Do workers have access to knowledgeable and experienced advisors who can support their practice?
- ⇒ Do you maximise the established links colleagues/local partners already have in place?

### **General:**

The review recognised the importance of local strategic partnerships in ensuring a collective awareness is maintained of gaps within services. In tackling inequalities, it is important that mechanisms are adopted to ensure GRT communities contribute to the design of future services.

Questions to consider when considering the needs of children with GRT communities

- ⇒ Have GRT communities been involved in reviewing and planning services ?
- ⇒ Have the design of services taken into account the lived experiences of children and families?