NICCY CSE Seminar, 17 September 2015

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Key

KR = Key Recommendation

SR = Supporting Recommendation

P – is a reference to the page numbers in the printed report of the Inquiry.

Introduction

When I first saw the animation, I was delighted by it, but I also felt very humbled. The fact that it is so personalised reinforces one of the main messages that came out of the Inquiry - about the central importance of relationships to children and young people.

I had hoped that the main focus of this event would be the Thematic Review, so I would be able to take a step back and be more or less a provider of context. However, the fact that the report of that review has not yet been published seems to throw me a bit more into the spotlight again.

In common with the other speakers, I have been asked to focus on:

- An overview of the key findings from my work;
- Engagement with children, young people and others during the work; and
- An overview of any learning/ recommendations or required actions, including key challenges or concerns arising from the work.

I approach this task today with two concerns:

1. That I might bore you by just repeating what you already know from the report. I don't know how much it has remained in your consciousness since it was published. But I will run through some of the key findings as a refresher. I certainly had to refresh myself as I have been working on other things since the report was published last November. And that leads on to my second concern:
2. That I might inadvertently stray into the language and concerns of my current work. As you heard in the introduction, I have, since February, been working on a review of the Children Law in Guernsey, in the Channel Islands. I am now at the report-writing stage and, naturally, my head is full of it. So, if I start talking about an ICPC or a CYCT or an HSSD (instead of DHSSPS) or anything else that is clearly incongruous, please raise a hand.

Key Findings

The **Nature** of CSE: Various types are set out in report (P 61), using the Barnardo's research as the starting point, but with the key caveat (P 7) that threats change shape over time. We noted that CSE was not a new phenomenon but a new label and that the nature of CSE has evolved, and was still evolving, in line with developments in technology. We identified CSE as: "a significant and growing threat to the welfare of children and young people." (P 80) In particular, the fact that **sexting** was described as epidemic in schools and that the practice can expose young people to manipulation by criminals. I am aware of the recent tragic case in NI involving the suicide of 17 year old Ronan Hughes.

One of the questions that came up regularly in the course of the Inquiry was whether CSE was an **organised** activity in Northern Ireland and the extent of that organisation. This is discussed at various points in the report *[P11, 32, 34, 35, 47 (Paras), 54 (immigrant communities)]* It is summed up in the report's Conclusions as follows (P 147):

> "We believe that some exploitation is organised and planned in a targeted way. There is a spectrum of organisation, ranging from criminal gangs to loose groups of perpetrators that coalesce around vulnerable young people. The group scenario featured more prominently in what we heard than the gang scenario."

But we identified a particular Northern Ireland dimension in the shape of "powerful individuals with links to paramilitary organisations."

Engagement with Children, Young People and Others

I am not going to talk through this in great detail as it will take too much time and it is all set out in the report (P 10 and Appendix 3). In summary:

- We commissioned a number of consultations and undertook some direct work involving 580 CYP. Some of this related to targeted groups and some was undertaken in schools by ETI.
- 795 parents were involved in the consultations.
- The 3 Inspectorates (RQIA, ETI and CJI) each undertook a workstream involving workers within their fields.
- Targeted work with health professionals.
- A Call for Evidence produced 50 submissions.
- 3 stakeholder events.
- The Inquiry Team met with a number of individuals and groups, some of whom approached us, and others we approached proactively because we thought they had something important to contribute.
- Visits to children's homes and other facilities.

A key factor in the Inquiry's approach was the involvement of the Education sector. I hope this has continued.

I will just show a few slides setting out some further detail, but I will resist the temptation to talk about it due to time constraints.

> POWERPOINT
>
> **Engagement with Young People**

- NICCY Youth Panel (to help shape the consultation process)
- Children in Northern Ireland through their Participation Network
    - 5 groups involving 64 children and young people
- VOYPIC – 55 children and young people from:
    - Non relative foster care
    - Kinship care
    - Children's residential homes
    - Independent living
    - Secure accommodation
- Barnardo's Safe Choices – 3 young people interviewed by the Inquiry
- ETI engagements as part of Thematic Survey

- Forum organised by Include Youth – 19 young people

Engagement with Parents

- Parenting NI:
    - Online survey – 183 parents
    - Focus groups – 24 parents
- ETI:
    - 570 parents – mainstream
    - 17 parents – special schools
- Inquiry:
    - One personal interview
    - Meeting with parents of children involved in youth justice

Engagement with Others

- 5 adults shared experiences of CSE as children
- Meetings with representatives of:
    - 18 agencies in the voluntary sector
    - Staff from the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England
    - Consultant for the Scottish Parliament CSE Inquiry
    - Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Acknowledgement Forum

Learning/ Recommendations/ Actions

There was a lot of learning that came out of the Inquiry. We didn't want to lose the detail, but also were concerned that, with a long list of recommendations, the more strategic ones might get lost within the detail. So we classified the recommendations as "Key" or "Supporting." Even then, there were 17 Key recommendations and 60 Supporting ones.

I don't think it would be very helpful for me to try to go through them all – they are in the report, but I will focus on some key issues, starting with what the young people identified.

I was impressed by the way the young people who shaped the animation summarised the main points, so I am going to talk briefly about each of those points and then about four others I think worthy of mention within the time constraints today.

Animation

> Police should build stronger relationships with communities, especially with children and young people. (KR 2)

Relationships between police and young people are often problematic, in all jurisdictions, but there is a particular Northern Ireland dimension to this and it embraces communities too, not just young people. The Inquiry's concern was summed up as follows:

> "We have commented on the threats to children posed by powerful individuals linked to paramilitary organisations. We note the differing perspectives from the communities and PSNI as to whether or not police are reluctant to intervene. We also note the fear of some about police being seen to visit their homes in response to a report. Children in these communities have the same right to be protected as any other child. They cannot wait until political or cultural tensions cease." (P 62)

> People should be able to report concerns about children and young people, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. (KR 11)

The report (P 128 -9) sets out the operational difficulties we viewed as posing a barrier to effective collaborative working. In particular, despite what agencies such as DHSSPS and PSNI told us about the availability of out-of-hours services, the report notes that, from the point of view of the member of the public or the worker at the sharp end (such as ambulance drivers or taxi drivers), it was not always clear who they should contact and what kind of response they should expect. Lack of feedback to them about what action had been taken in response to their report was a disincentive to making future reports. So we made some recommendations about that, including suggestions about reconfiguring and co-ordinating existing out-of-hours services.

The report comments: "Paradoxically, agencies are working at their weakest at the points when young people are putting themselves most at risk."

> Everyone should know more about CSE. (KR 1)

I don't think I need to elaborate on this as it is self-evident. What I would say is that things seemed to move on as the Inquiry progressed, as a result of all the publicity around the revelations about Operation Owl and the three strands of work put in place in response to this. SBNI was also involved in an awareness-raising campaign. Many suggested to us that something very high level and comprehensive was required, such as a public health campaign.

> There should be safe places for children and young people to go. (KR 6)

(P 94-6)

As adults, and professionals we have a tendency to use language such as "looked after", "in care" or "secure" which can give a false assurance to us about how safe young people actually are and how well we are promoting their welfare. The point of the recommendation about "safe spaces" was to explore what that would look like from the perspective of the young people for whom safety was an issue. This could mean involving young people as groups, identifying how particular resources might be shaped to promote their safety, and also engaging with individual young people about what could be done to help them to feel safe enough to disengage from their abusers.

[KR 5 re standards in children's homes, is also relevant.]

> All adults working with CYP should receive better training and improve how they share information with each other. (KR 12 and 13]

I don't think I need to elaborate on this. This is a standard recommendation from just about every Inquiry, but it has to be said nevertheless.

Key Theme from Young People

As indicated in the animation, young people presented a key theme:

> Young people didn't want their suggestions to give adults all the power. Instead, they wanted CYP to feel empowered.

It is tempting as adults to respond to the threats to children and young people by restricting their freedom, both through limiting their opportunities for socialising and participating in adventurous activities, and through resort to restraint and secure accommodation at the harder end of things (P

96). Chapter 9 of the report addresses the difficult and sensitive tasks of balancing young people's rights to protection with their broader rights to develop into responsible and autonomous individuals. Of course there will be situations where resort to secure accommodation and restraint is justified, and even necessary. But the Inquiry was clear that these should never become routine responses.

Others I want to add

There are four other recommendations I would like to touch on – noting that this is very selective:

> KR8: There should be a review of youth services by the Department of Education, taking into account the views of children and young people, to ensure that such provision is attractive and appropriate.

It is too easy to trivialise the agenda of providing more accessible and adventurous "things to do" for young people. But I know from all the work I have done in Scotland and in Northern Ireland, how critical this is as a contribution to keeping children and young people safe. That is why I was keen to identify this as a Key Recommendation, located with the section about prevention and early intervention. (P 109 – 110)

I would link this with the Inquiry's concern about the apparently lax monitoring and implementation of licensing laws, making underage drinking very easy to access. (P 39)

I understand that there has been a recent review of youth services and that work is ongoing to take forward the document Priorities for Youth.

> KR9: Department of Justice to establish an inter-agency forum to examine how to achieve more successful prosecution of perpetrators.

Concern was frequently expressed that there was too much focus on restricting the lives of children and young people and not enough on identifying and prosecuting offenders. In particular, we were told, by individual police officers, that there was no real analysis of available information, although this was improving with the work of Operation Owl.

> KR15: DHSSPS to lead on a regional strategy on CSE, to involve the Departments of Education and Justice.

Many people spoke of the need for a regional strategy on CSE and the Inquiry's recommendation reflects this. We said it should be: informed by the experiences and views of children, parents and carers; reflect the particular role of schools; and that it should link to and build upon existing work, such as that related to trafficking, alcohol and drugs (including legal highs), sexual health and domestic violence. In our view, CSE needed an initial push to raise awareness and get it onto the agenda but, in the long term, it will be most effectively addressed if this concern is integrated into the broader child protection agenda, tackling a range of vulnerabilities. (P 134)

> KR17: HSC Board to ensure accessible and appropriate support for adults who were abused as children.

This reflects the generational cycle of abuse that is common to many societies but, here too, there is a specific Northern Ireland dimension linked to the issue about the "powerful individuals" with paramilitary links.

We met a number of women who had themselves been abused as children and who commented, very painfully, on the impact this had had on their ability to keep their own children safe. What they

asked for was not very complicated. They too needed safe spaces to reflect, come to terms, and hopefully talk, as well as the availability of professional support when they were ready for it. (P 139)

Concerns

Despite our best efforts, I don't think we really succeeded in reaching **BME** groups. The report comments:

> Whilst there was some minority ethnic representation amongst the groups of children and young people involved in our consultations, we did not succeed in our attempts to gain access to particular groups. In some respects, this needs to be a project on its own because the diversity of cultures now settling in Northern Ireland means that meaningful consultation, especially where there are closed communities, would involve building up relationships and consulting each community on its own issues. (P 54)

It can't be "one size fits all."

I have flagged up **disability and special needs** as an issue – because it always is. I am aware that some research was published just last week on the particular vulnerability of children with special needs to sexual exploitation. It is important to keep this high on the agenda. (P 54)

I also want to flag up the big difficulty that still exists in promoting a proper understanding of **children's rights**! I don't know how many times people made comments about too much respect for children's rights acting as a barrier to keeping them safe. Of course, we all know that children have a whole spectrum of rights, including the right to be kept safe. I comment extensively on this in Chapter 9 of the report (P 141).

Challenges

In terms of challenges the Inquiry faced:

We wanted to emphasise that the **nature** of CSE changes over time. As already stated, professionals told us that CSE was not in itself new, but that developments in technology had changed its character and scope. CSE will continue to change, and those who set out to exploit children and young people will change their tactics to get around whatever safeguards we put in place. Whatever guidance we put out today needs to be continually kept under review and we need to involve children and young people in identifying emerging risks.

There were also huge challenges in identifying the **extent** of CSE – in Northern Ireland as elsewhere, for a variety of reasons including: lack of awareness and identification; lack of collation of relevant information and statistics; and the reluctance of young people to acknowledge their own exploitation.

In terms of **writing the report**, there was the challenge of basing the conclusions on professional consensus (or almost consensus) and whatever "hard" information there was, while taking account of important information from individuals with experience of the issue who seemed to be saying something different from what the professional/ official view was. We tried to accommodate this by setting out both of these perspectives, often joined by the word "however" or "nevertheless." Some of these balancing acts focused on the following:

- Is CSE organised or not? (P 32)
- How prevalent is "child prostitution" (P 45)

- How prevalent is exploitation by "powerful individuals" with links to paramilitary organisations? (P 47)
- Are children's care homes still being targeted? (P 89)
- Are we sensitive enough to the risk to children in foster care (P 91)
- Are we sensitive enough to the fact that general awareness of "CSE" does not necessarily entail an understanding of its relevance or how to respond to it (P 104)
- Are we sensitive enough to the needs of frontline workers? Guidance may be issued, but how much use is it? This arose in the context of official comments about guidance on the revised circular 3/96 versus what professionals told us (P 123). This important document sets out procedures for sharing information about individuals who may pose a risk to children and some confusion was introduced in the wake of a legal judgment.

Conclusion

In the concluding section of the report, we identified 3 themes (P 147)

- Awareness
- Balance
- Confidence

1. There is a need for greater **awareness** of CSE across the whole population in Northern Ireland.
2. There is a need for **balance** in response to the reality of CSE, so that it:
   a. Does not focus purely on children in the care system;
   b. Does not lead to a panic response that scares children and parents and results in disproportionate repression or suspicion; and
   c. Does not result in a sudden lurch towards CSE as a stand-alone priority (rather than linking it with other initiatives relevant to vulnerabilities).
3. The need to promote **confidence** on the part of children and young people, parents, workers and the broader community that they can respond appropriately to the threat of CSE.

There is a need to promote a response to CSE that is:

- Targeted;
- Proportionate; and
- Flexible.

And there must be an ongoing commitment to listening to and involving children and young people and their parents.

We ended the report on an optimistic note. Despite all of the problems that inquiries such as this throw up, we also found a huge amount of dedication and skill. Northern Ireland has some terrific human resources that can be engaged in the battle against child sexual exploitation.