

Case Study Two

Information sharing and the use of multi-agency powers to address concerns around a commercial premises

In her 2015 report “Reflections on child sexual exploitation”, Louise Casey CB stated that there were “a myriad of ways in which different parts of the local authority - whether through their regulatory, licensing and community safety functions or their leisure and community services, can seek out this information, share it with partners and act to tackle child sexual exploitation”. Furthermore Casey expressed the view that “through their governance and regulatory powers across a range of arenas and functions such as housing, licensing, environmental health, fire and fraud, councils already have a suite of powers and tools at their disposal which can be used to enter premises under a range of pretexts to investigate possible CSE”.

There was criticism in both the Jay and Casey reports that the Council and its partners had not used all the enforcement powers available in order to tackle activities/ behaviours associated with child sexual exploitation that was occurring within the Borough.

As a result of these criticisms, action was quickly taken to repair and formalise the information sharing processes within the Council and between its partners. This included the regular attendance of a senior manager from the council’s regulatory service at the weekly CSE Intelligence Sharing Meetings that are chaired by South Yorkshire Police. Information that is discussed at the weekly meetings includes detail on offenders, victims and locations of concern. These meetings also provide a forum where a multiagency approach to a problem can be discussed – if need be with formation of a separate task and finish group costing of the various council services and partner agencies.

One such task and finish group was formed in order to address issues of concern at a local commercial premises that arose in early 2016.

The premises was used as a meeting point for young people – most of whom were young teenagers from a community in Rotherham that was considered at high risk of sexual exploitation. The information was that large numbers of children were in the vicinity of the premises in the late evening on a regular basis. Intelligence from the area was that girls attended the premises, and when police arrived the girls were escorted out of the building by the organisers via the rear doors. When local police officer visited the premises, they found that the only adults present were those that owned / managed the premises. The layout of the premises, the clientele and the behaviour of the owners

were such that they facilitated exploitative behaviour towards the children / young people that attended the premises.

A police licensing officer had attended, however it was not possible to identify any licensable activity and so it was not possible to use powers under the Licensing Act to deal with the premises.

This information was brought to the weekly CSE intelligence meeting and shared with those present.

It was agreed that the premises were a concern and that there was a need for disruption activity in relation to the premises. The manager from the council's Business Regulation Service took away the action to coordinate a multi-agency approach to the premises. This was developed over the subsequent days and culminated in a visit to the premises by officer from South Yorkshire Police, Rotherham MBC Licensing, Rotherham MBC Building Control, Environmental Health and South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service. Officers from these agencies were fully briefed in relation to the premises and the concerns surrounding the activities taking place there. They were asked to inspect the premises and make full use of any enforcement powers that they may have.

Detailed discussions took place with the owner/ manager of the premises, who was left in no doubt regarding the nature of the concerns regarding the premises and the seriousness with which those concerns were held by the agencies present.

A number of enforcement actions were taken by agencies that attended the premises, including a closure of the premises by the Fire Service in relation to concerns around means of escape in the event of a fire.

The premises remains closed to this date, and the details of the owner / manager and any other premises with which they are associated will be monitored and recorded within intelligence systems so that if concerns of a similar nature arise in the future then can be acted upon as a matter of urgency.

It is felt that this combination of joint, multi-agency enforcement action quickly and effectively addressed concerns around a premises that, although not overtly criminal in nature, could nonetheless be seen as a precursor to behaviour associated with the grooming of children for sexual exploitation.

The information obtained from the weekly CSE intelligence meetings is essential in ensuring that all agencies are able to act appropriately in relation to tackling CSE and associated behaviour. In addition, the meetings provide a forum for the development of previously untried methods of addressing items of concern. They have served to educate all partners that attend the meetings, and the task and finish groups, with

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regard to the various powers that can be used by different partner agencies to disrupt activities that are associated with the sexual exploitation of children in Rotherham.