

Witness Name: John Pearce
Statement No.: 4
Exhibits: JP201 - JP208

Dated: 6 August 2020

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF JOHN PEARCE

I, John Pearce of Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UL, will say as follows:

1. I am the Corporate Director Children and Young People's Services at Durham County Council and I make this statement further to the request of IICSA dated 22 July 2020 to provide a witness statement exhibiting the following:
 - Any further Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy and/or Child Sexual Exploitation Delivery Plans prepared in relation to Durham since those relating to the period 2016-2019 at DUC000691 and DUC000692.
 - Any further evaluations or audits carried out in relation to the eight themes.
2. Durham Children's Services as part of the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) have collaborated to develop a shared vision, and delivery plan for 2020/2021 to improve the response to child exploitation. The progress and achievements of the objectives within the delivery plan will be monitored by the strategic CEG which reports into the DSCP executive group. A copy of the CEG delivery plan for 2020/2021 is shown at exhibit **JP201**.
3. Durham Children's Services have worked in partnership with the DSCP to develop a revised scorecard to help collate, report and analyse information about children at risk and victims of child exploitation, including children who go missing. This scorecard is a standard agenda item at the strategic CEG. This is to improve Children's Service performance and the response to children, as well as mapping and understanding any trends or the changing landscape of child exploitation in Durham, to provide an appropriate and timely response. A copy of the CEG scorecard is shown at exhibit **JP202** with the associated strategic CEG minutes of 25 June 2020 shown at **JP203**.
4. In February 2020, the DSCP directed that there be a multi-agency audit of return to home interviews. A copy of the blank audit tool is shown at exhibit **JP204**. The audit was to address the following:

- How seriously do we take a child or young person missing from home;
- Do we give children the best opportunity to let us know and understand why they go missing from home;
- Do we give children the best opportunity to tell us, and do we try to understand, how they feel and what happens to them when they are missing;
- Do we do enough to help children not to go missing or shorten the time they are missing and help them to feel and be safer;
- And, ultimately, what difference do we make to a child or young person's safety and well-being?

The audit has been completed however the DSCP production of the final report and recommendations have been delayed due to Covid-19 business disruption.

5. In January 2020 Durham Children's Services used the IICSA themes to provide a self-evaluation benchmarking exercise, which was presented to the Durham Children's Services senior leadership and at the strategic CEG. Using the themes, this allowed a gap analysis to be undertaken, which has helped to inform the strategic delivery plan and helped to inform other pieces of work examples of which are set out in paragraph 6 and 7 of this statement.
6. A presentation from Durham Children's Services SEND was delivered to the strategic CEG. The presentation highlighted the links between children with learning disabilities as being children who are more likely to be exploited. As a result of this presentation the Lead Inclusion Officer for schools in Durham has become a member of the Strategic CEG. A copy of the presentation is shown at **JP205**.
7. Durham Children's Services and children co-produced a document to help professionals understand the power of their words when they are talking about young people. The document was launched across all of Children's Services, and is accessible to all workers in Children's Services. A copy of the document is shown at exhibit **JP206** and I draw specific attention to Chapter 3 of the document which deals with victim blaming language.
8. The DSCP commissioned a Missing from Home Preliminary Report which is shown at exhibit **JP207**. This report was discussed at the CEG meeting on 25 June (exhibited at **JP203**). The author is currently working on the 'next stages' section – in particular the deep dive elements and these findings will be shared at a later date as part of the continual review and improvements in practice.
9. Durham Children's Services has established a sub-group of the strategic CEG which is a contextualised safeguarding development group. A copy of the terms of reference for the group dated February 2020 is shown at exhibit **JP208**. The group aims to develop a framework to help all professionals work with young people to understand the impact and assess the needs of young people who are victims or at risk of harm from child exploitation or any harms which happen outside of the family or home/care environment.
10. In addition to the audits and delivery plan which have been referenced in this and earlier statements, there has been, in April 2020 a Missing from home co-ordinator appointed into Children's Services. The missing from home co-ordinator carries out a RTHI for every looked after child within County Durham or where there is no social worker appointed, this

is in line with the national best practice recommendation that all looked after children should be offered a RHTI by an independent person. In all other cases the missing from home co-ordinator will discuss with lead professionals to agree the most appropriate person to undertake the RHTI. The role of the missing from home co-ordinator assists in improving the quality and building a picture of missing children in Durham e.g. identify hot spots, perpetrators , connected children etc. In addition to the missing from home co-ordinator, a child criminal exploitation worker has been recruited to increase capacity within the exploitation team and is now working with 20 children who are victims of child criminal exploitation.

11. Overall this Inquiry has been very helpful to Children's Services as it has allowed a focused review of our practices and where practices can be enhanced, this has been identified with action plans put into place for both Children's Services and our partner agencies ensure that CSE is monitored and performance is continuously reviewed to ensure the best outcome for children and young people in our area.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

DPA

Signed: _____

Dated: 11 August 2020

