

Witness Name: Vikki McKenna
Statement No.: 1
Exhibits:
Dated: 31.1.2020

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

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Witness Statement of Catch22

I, Vikki McKenna, will say as follows: -

1. Catch22 are unable to provide an overview of the nature and extent of the risk child sexual exploitation poses in St Helens, however from direct work cases referred into Catch22, the models of CSE have been mainly around Inappropriate relationships, Online exploitation.
2. Catch22 have been commissioned in St Helens since October 2015 to deliver a missing from Home & Care and Child Sexual Exploitation Service to young people. Caseworkers will offer and complete return home interviews to every child who is reported missing to Merseyside Police within 72hrs of them being seen safe and well by a Police officer, this is for all young people whether they are looked after children or children living at home. Catch22 receive referrals from MACE (Multi Agency Child Exploitation) meetings for young people who are at risk of or involved in Child exploitation. Catch22 delivers LSCB/P training to multi-agency professionals throughout the year around exploitation.
3. In terms of other services who offer support to young people around child sexual exploitation in St Helens, Catch22 believe that we are the only service that offers specific support around sexual exploitation to young people. Barnardo's and CAMHS offer support around mental health and counselling. St Helens Youth Service offer level 2 support, however a referral can only be made to the service if the young person is open to Level 2 and has a lead professional in place. St Helens Youth Service will not work with young people who are involved with agencies at Level 3 and Level 4. TAZ complete work around positive relationships and sexual health and YPDAAT work with young people around alcohol and substance misuse. In relation to any gaps in service, Catch22 only accept referrals that are deemed medium or high risk for one to one work so therefore any young people that need preventative work are potentially being missed and are often referred back into Social Care when there has been a significant incident or there are more serious concerns.

4. I have not managed St Helens service for a number of years until September 2019 as the previous manager left the organisation. In terms of case escalations, Catch22 have recently escalated a case with 2 siblings where there were concerns around sexual exploitation. There are a number of adult males who potentially are a cause for concern, one is a known sex offender. These males live in close proximity to the family home. Catch22 were unable to engage the family, causing concern. Following the escalation, social care has since progressed the case to child protection, information sharing has improved, and the family are now engaging.

5. 5a. Catch22 have a specific role around conducting return home interviews for all young people who have been reported as missing to Merseyside Police. Catch22 endeavour to complete return home interviews within 72hrs of them being seen safe and well by a Police Officer. Caseworkers will then refer any safeguarding concerns into the MASH and any relevant intelligence is submitted to Police. Catch22 caseworkers will also work with young people who are victims of child sexual/criminal exploitation through a programme of 1:1 work, focussing on signs, indicators of grooming, healthy relationships, online safety, self-esteem and confidence. Support is also offered pre and post court cases.

5b. Catch22 are based within St Helens MASH (multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and sit alongside officers from Merseyside Police. This improves effective communication between agencies.

5c. Morning briefings have been in place since 2018 and are attended by a wide range of agencies, such as Police, Social Care, Health, Catch22, Community Safety Partnership. This gives a well-rounded account of referrals that have come in overnight, arrests of potential perpetrators, relevant intelligence, young people who are currently missing. CE1's (Child Exploitation Screening Tool) are discussed to look at potential concerns around child exploitation. In terms of poor practice, victim blaming language continues to be used on the referrals as they are referring to young people as "putting themselves at risk", "it is her girlfriend/boyfriend". Professionals dismissing signs and indicators of child sexual exploitation as "just normal teenage behaviour".

5d. Catch22 attend 4 weekly reviews for young people who are involved in or at risk of child sexual exploitation at the meetings this means that some cases are moving from high – medium or medium - low as the risk seems to have reduced, due to not enough information coming through or a young person engaging for a while. Catch22 believe that this isn't enough time for evidence of risk reduction and for professionals to build up a trusted relationship. Young people who are 16 – 17 tend to be overlooked, plans are put in place but there seems to be an apathy that intervention is too late. Which if the signs and indicators were looked at initially rather than looking for evidence then preventative intervention could have been put in place sooner.

Theme 1: Catch22 do not have any information in relation to profiling potential/suspected offenders. A quarterly meeting is held at Police Headquarters which is Pan Merseyside Strategic MACE, where all Local Authorities attend, along with Police, Health and Probation, there is a workplace set and agreed which looks at priorities across the area under the 4 P's. Prepare, Prevent, Pursue and Protect.

Theme 2: All young people that are referred into Catch22 are treated with the upmost respect by caseworkers and will challenge professionals when using victim blaming language to describe young people who are victims of sexual/criminal exploitation.

Theme 3: Catch22 attend relevant CE2 meetings with young people who are at risk of or involved in sexual exploitation. CE2's are reviewed every 4 weeks.

Theme 4: As mentioned above, Catch22 are commissioned to conduct independent return home interviews with all young people who have been reported missing to Police. In 2017 this included children who are looked after, children who lived at home and children who are placed in Wirral from other Local Authority areas. In 2018, St Helens Local Authority brought in a procedure in that they would charge responsible authorities for Catch22 to conduct return home interviews for their children. Catch22 will conduct return interviews for St Helens looked after young people who are living outside of Merseyside within a 30mile radius, we rely on social workers to inform Catch22 of these missing notifications. In 2017-2018 a total of 1370 missing incidents were received for all young people reported as missing. 647 incidents were created by 71 young people who were looked after. All of these incidents, the young person will have been offered a return interview. 330 return home interviews were completed with 35 young people. In 2018-2019 a total of 837 missing incidents were received for all young people reported as missing. 621 incidents were created by 72 children looked after. 306 return interviews were completed for 38 young people. In 2018-2019, 837 incidents does not include those children who belong to other local authority areas. In terms of challenges, Catch22 only has 1 caseworker for conducting return interviews with young people, given the demand of work coming into the service, it would be beneficial to have another worker with a view to then reducing missing incidents through direct work earlier.

4c: in 2017 when Catch22 completed return interview for young people placed in St Helens area, all information would be shared with Police, MASH and the responsible authority, since 2018, Catch22 are not commissioned to conduct these return home interviews and I believe that there is potentially information being missed as no other professional is speaking to the young person apart from Police when they have been reported. Local Authorities only tend to get to know that a child looked after from another local authority is placed there when they are reported missing for the first time, rather than being notified beforehand by the Responsible Authority.

Theme 5: Catch22 are seeing more young males being referred into the service due to being exploited criminally. When delivering the awareness raising sessions to multi-agency professionals, Catch22 cover recognising signs and indicators of sexual exploitation and will offer resources for professionals to use when working with young males.

6. See above Theme 4

7. Child Sexual/Criminal Exploitation is seen as a priority by St Helens Local Authority and Merseyside Police. Staff are now co-located in one area to improve information sharing. St Helens also have a newly formed Complex Safeguarding Team, although this is very early days it is proving positive.

8. I believe that more resources for Social Care, Police, Catch22 are needed to tackle child sexual exploitation. More Preventative work would benefit young people and thus have a knock-on effect on social care and police further down the line.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed: _____ **DPA** Vikki McKenna _____

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