

# Allegations against Foster Carers and Abuse of Children in Care - 6 Step Briefing

## The Background

In 2012, a police investigation resulted in a male foster carer being convicted of sexual abuse. At this time, a Serious Case Review was commissioned by the LSCB. Soon after, allegations were made against a second foster carer during a similar time period (1970s – 2000s) and a police investigation began. In early 2015, further allegations came to light against one of the foster carers and the review was paused due to a parallel criminal process. The SCR re-opened in May 2016 and was completed as a thematic review.

## Safeguarding Concerns

- The carers concerned were seen as a “useful” resource as they were willing to look after children whose behaviour was deemed to be challenging. The focus on the child’s challenging behaviour meant that at times, allegations made against the carers by the child were seen as a problem with the child rather than as a concern regarding the care they were receiving in placement
- There is a pattern of controlling behaviour on the part of Perpetrators 1 and 2, which afforded them an inappropriate level of power within the system. The approach towards the carers seems to have been one of giving them the “benefit of the doubt” and engaging with them as colleagues, which meant that unacceptable behaviours were not dealt with
- The accumulation of concerns and allegations made against the foster carer were not recognised and patterns of behaviour such as using the complaints system to deflect attention away from challenges to their behaviour was not understood sufficiently as a cause for concern

## The Incident

A male foster carer was convicted of 18 offences of historical sexual abuse. He had been a registered foster carer from the early 1970’s until 2003 and fostered children for Hampshire County Council until 1997 and after that date for the newly formed Southampton City Council. In 2016, the same foster carer was convicted of further offences and given an extra four years in prison.

The second foster carer had admitted downloading images of children but as a result of a Police operation, he was indicted for a total of 13 offences.

## The Review

It was agreed that the review process would include:

- A review by Southampton Children’s Services of the records of foster carers where convictions or serious allegations of abuse were known to Hampshire Police, or other partner agencies. This meant that as the first stage of the review had involved a review of Perpetrator 1’s fostering file, the task for Southampton Children’s Services was to complete a similar review of Perpetrator 2’s file
- A review of information from Hampshire and Southampton Children’s Services about action taken between 2012 and 2016 to improve the safety of children in foster care
- Offering known survivors of abuse in foster care an opportunity to contribute to the review
- Speaking to practitioners from all partner agencies about their perceptions of current practice as it relates to keeping children safe in foster care
- Speaking to children currently or recently in care about their experience and thoughts about how children in foster care can be kept safe from harm
- Offering known perpetrators an opportunity to contribute to the review

## The Findings

**Finding 1:** The split between social workers responsible for fostering and practitioners responsible for individual children in care can lead to a fragmented, rather than a “whole family” approach to working with the child within the family.

**Finding 2:** Although recruitment and quality assurance processes have developed over time, practice will be enhanced where:

- relevant information from other agencies about foster carers is routinely shared with Children’s Services
- social workers are trained and supported by their organisation to challenge foster carers where there are concerns about their practice
- relevant information regarding foster carers who are removed from the register or resign following concerns about behaviour are shared if they seek other roles working with children and young people

**Finding 3:** Although there is common understanding about the importance of hearing the voice of the child there may still be barriers ensuring that the children’s “voice” whether through behaviour or verbal communication is heard.

**Finding 4:** Understanding the significance of accumulating concerns and complaints is key to keeping children safe in foster care.

**Finding 5:** Although investigations into allegations about abuse in foster care have improved during the time period covered by this review, all partner agencies need to consider whether children in care receive the same quality of response as children not in the care of the local authority.

## Useful links for good practice

- [The foster placement \(children\) regulations \(1991\)](#)
- [The Children Act Guidance and Regulations Family Placement Vol 3](#)
- [People Like Us: The report of the review of safeguards for children living away from home](#)
- [Care Panning and Case Review and Fostering Services \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2013](#)
- [Assessing Adoptive Parents Foster Carers and Kinship Carers: Second Edition](#). Alper, J. & Howe, D (2014)
- [Independent inquiry report into the circumstances of child sexual abuse by two foster carers in Wakefield, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council - Parrot, B., McIver, A. & Thoburn J. \(2007\).](#)
- [Croydon LSCB \(2017\) Serious Case Review “Claire”](#)
- [The role of the supervising social worker in foster care \(An international literature review Rees Centre University of Oxford\) - Cosis, H., Brown, J., Sebba J., & Luke, N.](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children - A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children 2018](#)