

Learning Together from Safeguarding Audits Sexual Abuse

This briefing summarises the findings of a SAB **multi-agency audit** of safeguarding responses to adults who have experienced sexual assault or abuse in Brighton & Hove.

The briefing sets out the key findings, recommendations and learning points from the audit.

We want to share the learning from the audit with all staff to ensure that Brighton & Hove becomes a safer place for adults who are at risk of neglect and abuse.

Background: Brighton & Hove Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) conducted a multi-agency audit to examine safeguarding responses to adults who had experienced sexual assault or abuse. The audit was led by James Rowlands, Strategic Commissioner, Joint Domestic, Sexual Violence & Abuse and Violence against Women & Girls (VAWG) Unit and Detective Inspector Ian Still, Sussex Police.

The audit group consisted of representatives from:

- Brighton & Hove Health & Adult Social Care (HASC)
- Brighton & Hove Community Learning Disability Team
- Brighton & Hove City Council Housing Dept.
- Brighton & Hove CCG
- Brighton Oasis Project/Pavilions
- Kent, Surrey & Sussex Community Rehabilitation Company (KSS CRC)
- Looking Forward, Early Parenting Assessment Programme
- Rise
- St Patrick's Hostel
- Impact Initiatives Stopover Project
- Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)
- Survivors Network
- Sussex Beacon
- Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust (SPFT)
- Sussex Police

The audit looked at four cases involving adults who had experienced sexual abuse. All four adults included in the audit had multiple or complex support needs.

Case 1: A woman who was HIV positive and a victim of sexual abuse in her country of origin, prior to moving to England.

Case 2: A woman with complex mental health support needs and a history of street homelessness and sexual exploitation.

Case 3: A woman with complex mental health support needs and a history of substance misuse

Case 4: A woman living in supported housing with Learning Disability support needs

The audit focussed on the following:

- How safeguarding concerns were identified
- Professionals' understanding of sexual abuse, and extent of professional curiosity
- How risks were assessed and identified risk including how historical concerns were considered
- Information sharing and joint agency working
- Management oversight/supervision

If you work with adults in Brighton & Hove with care and support needs, there may also be specific actions & recommendations for your agency and your role. Please ask your manager, or contact your representative on the SAB. If you would like to read the full report please contact us at SAB@brighton-hove.gov.uk



What is working well?

- Several cases highlighted good support to clients with multiple and complex support needs, including clients with substance misuse and mental health support needs.
- There were examples of effective joint working and information sharing between agencies.
- Where there were specific language support needs these were generally addressed well.
- Safeguarding awareness and professional curiosity among staff was generally good.
- Appropriate and timely safeguarding concerns were raised.

What can we improve?

- There was a lack of clarity and consistency in the recording and sharing of information in relation to the risk of sexual abuse.
- Safeguarding issues were not always identified by all agencies. A referral made to SARC in relation to one case contained insufficient information.
- The audit has identified a need for greater awareness of the role of the MARAC (Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference) and the role of specialist sexual abuse services e.g. Survivors' Network and the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). In one case there was a considerable delay in making a referral to SARC.
- In some cases, staff were not fully aware of the correct process for assessing clients' mental capacity under the Mental Capacity Act.
- One key agency's involvement in supporting one client was not known to other agencies and calls into question the information available to the Portal when referrals are received.
- In some cases the response to a client who had experienced sexual abuse was 'incident based' where a more 'trauma informed approach' might have been more appropriate.
- The audit identified the importance of identifying appropriate advocacy support in relation to Making Safeguarding Personal.
- The audit highlighted the challenges involved in supporting clients with multiple and complex support needs, who are difficult to engage.

Recommendations and agreed actions included:

- All agencies to review their needs and risk assessment procedures to improve where necessary how clients are supported to disclose sexual abuse and exploitation so that appropriate support can be provided and appropriate specialist referrals made.
 - All agencies to be informed of the referral process for specialist sexual abuse support services including SARC and Survivors' Network.
 - Agencies to consider how a 'trauma informed approach' might be used to improve support to clients who have experienced sexual abuse, including identifying appropriate staff training.
 - Staff in all agencies supporting people who are street homeless to be provided with information about specialist support organisations.
 - The SAB to ask the MARAC to review its information sharing arrangements to ensure agencies who cannot attend MARAC meetings are kept informed about clients they are involved with.
- Implementation of agreed recommendations and actions will be monitored by the SAB Quality Assurance Subgroup.

Learning & Reflection

Risk assessment and support planning should ensure that those providing support feel able to ask the right questions and that clients are listened to.

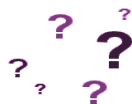
How can I provide the most effective support to people who have experienced or are at risk of sexual abuse?

Organisations who provide support to clients who may have experienced or may be at risk of sexual abuse or exploitation are encouraged to review their risk assessment and support planning processes to ensure that clients are supported to be as open as possible so that appropriate support can be provided and appropriate specialist referrals made.

RIPFA (Research in Practice For Adults) is a good source of information on this topic.

The audit group considered that in some cases a 'trauma informed approach' might have improved responses to clients who had experienced sexual abuse.

What is a 'trauma informed approach' to care and support and where can I find out more?



Definitions of trauma vary, but broadly, trauma refers to events or circumstances that are experienced as harmful or life-threatening and that have lasting impacts on mental, physical, emotional and/or social well-being ([SAMHSA, 2014](#)). Trauma informed approaches to support (TIA) pay attention to a person's experiences of trauma throughout their life and the effect of those experiences on their ability to manage risk and to engage positively with services.

RIPFA provides training in relation to TIA. However, you should discuss with your manager or training lead the most appropriate training for you and your organisation.

Who can provide specialist support?

The audit found that in some cases referrals were not always made to agencies that specialise in supporting people who have experienced sexual abuse or exploitation, when this should have been considered.

See the links at the end of this briefing for information on specialist support available in Brighton & Hove.

People who are street homeless may be particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.

St Mungo's Rough Sleeper Street **Outreach Service** is responsible for identifying new rough sleepers and supporting existing ones. They engage with and assess the needs of those living on the streets and provide appropriate support to enable people to access accommodation, support or to relocate where there is a support network or a local connection elsewhere.

ARCH Healthcare is based at Morley Street in Brighton and provides health services to vulnerable and homeless people in the city.

The audit found there was, on occasion, a lack of clarity and consistency in the recording and sharing of information in relation to the risk of sexual abuse.

Who needs to know?

While client confidentiality is important, there are times when it is important to pass information on to other agencies to reduce the risk of abuse.

An adult's right to make choices about their own safety has to be balanced with the rights of others to be safe. If the adult has capacity to make an informed decision that they do not want the information to be shared, and there is no indication that they may be experiencing undue influence, then the adult's wishes would be respected. However there are circumstances in which an adult's consent may be overridden, including:

- If the adult is at significant risk of serious harm.
- If there is a risk to others.
- If a criminal offence has taken place.
- Where action is needed in the public interest, such as where a member of staff is in a position of trust.

(Sussex Safeguarding Procedures)





Making safeguarding personal

Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP) emphasises the importance of a person-centred approach, adopting the principle of 'no decision about me without me'.

If there is doubt around an adult's capacity to make a decision, a formal mental capacity assessment should be completed. Where lack of capacity is established the **Mental Capacity Act Code of Practice** should be followed and consideration given to involving an independent advocate if the person has no one else suitable to support them.

For more information regarding MSP and advocacy please see the **Sussex Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures**

Further information & resources

	<p>The Portal is a partnership of leading Sussex Domestic and Sexual Abuse Charities. http://theportal.org.uk</p>
	<p>RISE provides a range of specialist support to help local families affected by domestic abuse. https://www.riseuk.org.uk</p>
	<p>Survivors' Network is a registered charity that aims to reduce sexual violence and its impact on survivors' lives. Survivor's Network is the Rape Crisis Centre for Sussex. Survivor's Network provides advice and guidance on how you can support clients who have experienced sexual abuse.</p>
	<p>The Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) offers a range of support services to anyone aged 14 or over, living within the Sussex area who has experienced sexual abuse or sexual violence, either recently or in the past. SARC Professional Referral Pathway Information for professionals including how to make a referral.</p>

MARAC: The domestic abuse Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is a meeting that brings together representatives from a number of agencies in Brighton & Hove to discuss the safety, health and well-being of people experiencing domestic abuse (and their children). www.safeinthecity.info/marac

[Practitioner Guide to MARAC](#)

The [MARAC Operating Protocol and Information Sharing Agreement](#) sets out how agencies can join the MARAC and how information about specific cases is shared.

[Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment Risk Identification Checklist \(DASH RIC\)](#)

www.safeinthecity.info/training provides a prospectus of specialised training in relation to Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) including training in relation to working with perpetrators.

[Modern Slavery Helpline 08000 121 700](#)

[Brighton & Hove Learning Gateway](#) provides numerous safeguarding training options for council staff and staff working in external agencies. Click here [here](#) to register with the gateway if you don't already have an account.

If you have any concerns about a vulnerable adult, contact Access Point

Phone: 01273 295555

Email address: accesspoint@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Minicom: 01273 296205



Feedback: As staff and frontline managers you will know about the quality and impact of your own services, and those of the partner agencies you work with. It is important that the SAB receives continual feedback from staff and managers about what is or is not working. We also want to hear your ideas for improvement so that changes can be made to improve safeguarding throughout the city. We would like to hear your thoughts, feedback and comments on findings presented to you in this briefing and any feedback on the style of the briefing itself. Please e-mail SAB@brighton-hove.gov.uk with any feedback.



<http://brightonandhovelscb.org.uk/safeguarding-adults-board>

[@SAB Brighton](#)