Safeguarding News

Operation Brooke – Child Exploitation uncovered in Bristol – November 2014

Two groups of Somali men were found guilty of grooming and sexually exploiting under-age girls in Bristol.

It follows Operation Brooke, the largest investigation into child sexual exploitation in Avon and Somerset Police's history.

In two separate trials, 13 men were found guilty of charges including rape, paying for sex with a child, and arranging for that sex to happen.

In total, there were six victims. The youngest was just 13 years old and lived at home with her mother.

An independent Serious Case Review (SCR) has looked at how agencies worked together before, during and after the investigation, establishing strengths and gaps in the multi agency responses to child sexual exploitation in order to learn and improve.

At the heart of this review is the testimony and experience of the children who were the victims of these crimes. They give clear advice for authorities, professionals and the wider community about how we can better prevent child sexual exploitation and respond to it effectively.

Those working with children increasingly recognise that it can be very hard for young people to see themselves as victims and therefore have insight into what help they need. Professionals must ask the difficult questions, often many times and they must listen and act.

The review identifies the challenge we face when children are groomed in such a way that they do not identify themselves as in danger; it highlights the need for professionals to have not only the appropriate knowledge and insights, but also the correct tools and approaches to support the children and intervene with perpetrators; and it demonstrates the importance of strong strategic and operational co-operation, across agencies, created in this instance by the formal structure of a major criminal investigation. Whilst it is impossible to eliminate risk entirely, these findings will help everyone tackle the complex issues that CSE present.