

Case 10 Issue 39 – Child sexual abuse		LEARNING THE LESSONS
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Delays in response to potential sexual activity with a child

Repeated attempts to resource an incident of potential child sexual abuse fail, raising issues about:

- *Resilience in control rooms*
- *Following escalation processes*
- *Accurate recording of calls and grading of incidents*

This case is relevant to the following areas:

Call handling		Public protection	
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Overview of incident

At around 3.45am Mr A called the police to report concerns for the welfare of his friend Ms B. Mr A spoke to Call Handler C.

Mr A told Call Handler C that he, his cousin and his cousin's girlfriend (Ms B) had gone to see a friend, Mr D who was drunk. He said the friend started buying Ms B drinks, and had got her very drunk. He also said Mr D was 28 and Ms B was only 15 and he had now kicked Mr A and his cousin out of his house, keeping Ms B there with him despite her saying she wanted to leave. Mr A said he told Mr D that Ms B was only 15 but he carried on. Mr A made it clear he was concerned for Ms B's welfare and said Mr D "had been quite touchy with her to be honest..."

Call Handler C asked Mr A if Ms B wanted to leave the address and he replied saying "I says to her do you want to come with us, and she says yeah I don't wanna leave you two." Mr A also said Mr D had threatened him and indicated that Mr D had a history with firearms.

Call Handler C informed Mr A that officers had been dispatched but it would take them about 15 minutes to get there. She advised Mr A to wait outside the address for officers to arrive which he agreed to do, stating he had a key to the property as well.

Call Handler C then created an incident report but did not include Mr A's comments about Mr D's history with firearms in the report and did not apply the crime classification "sexual activity with a child" – instead applying the "miscellaneous, fear for welfare". Call Handler C applied the

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'Urgent Attendance' grade to the call. She told the IOPC that, having listened back to the call in hindsight, she would grade it as 'immediate' and get officers to attend straight away.

A few minutes later the incident report was transferred to radio operators, who are responsible for liaising with the relevant Local Policing Areas and resourcing incidents. Soon after the incident transfer was accepted by Radio Operator E, who was working alongside Dispatcher F.

Soon after this Call Handler C updated the incident report that the Mr D and Ms B were still at Mr D's property and added details of Mr A and Ms B's ages.

Around 15 minutes after the call was graded as 'Urgent Attendance' a "resource dispatch overdue" auto-prompt was generated on the incident report and "accepted" by Radio Operator E. Immediately after this Radio Operator E updated the incident report to say 'attempting to resource'.

During the course of the investigation it was established that the control room is split into "talk groups" covering the Local Policing Areas within the force area. There is usually a radio operator and dispatcher working on each Local Policing Area. However, between 3.40am and 4am various areas are "patched" together. The force said this is due to the talk group capacity in the early hours of the morning not being at a level that requires a Radio Operator and Dispatcher for each talk group.

Around 15 minutes later an "unresourced escalation" was auto-generated and accepted by Control Room Supervisor G. Control Room Supervisor 2 was operating as one of two Oscar 2 operators in the control room. An Oscar 2 is responsible for operational oversight and supervision of the control room; including open incidents and staff. The role included the responsibility for applying the escalation process when automatic unresourced escalations were generated. The escalation process requires an Oscar 2 to carry out a Threat, Harm, Opportunity and Risk (THOR) and an NDM assessment. There is no evidence that Control Room Supervisor G did this.

A few minutes later at around 4.20am and again at around 4.40am further "resource dispatch overdue" auto-prompts were generated and "accepted" by Radio Operator E. On both occasions she recorded 'attempting to resource'.

According to the force escalation process, Radio Operators are required to inform a local Sergeant as soon as possible if they are unable to resource an incident. There was no evidence to suggest Radio Operator E did this at any point.

Soon after the auto-prompt at 4.40am Radio Operator E logged off her terminal and transferred the incident to Dispatcher F. Dispatcher F accepted the transfer.

Around 15 minutes later at 4.55am Dispatcher F accepted a further "resource dispatch overdue" prompt. She updated the record stating "units all committed". A further two auto-prompts were generated and accepted by Dispatcher F at around 5.20am and 5.30am. Dispatcher F recorded on the incident report that she was unable to resource the incident.

Soon after, the incident was transferred back to Radio Operator E.

In the following hour a further four "resource dispatch overdue" auto-prompts were generated. Radio Operator E recorded that she was attempting to resource the incident.

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At around 6.40am, the incident was switched to the Information Records Bureau and intelligence checks on Mr D were requested. It was also noted that the incident requires action.

At around 6.50am Ms G Contact Management Centre Controller wrote on the incident record that early turn officers should attend the address where Mr D was believed to live.

At around 7.20am Ms G updated the incident record assigning PC H and PC I to the incident. PC H and PC I arrived at the address at around 8am. They discovered Mr D and Ms B asleep in an upstairs room.

PC H informed Mr D that they had received a call to the address and needed to speak with Ms B regarding her safety. He asked Ms B how old she was, to which she replied “fifteen, are you going to tell my parents.”

PC I recalls that Mr D then said “we did not have sex” and that Ms B confirmed this. PC H then asked PC I to speak to their Sergeant for advice. While PC I did this, PC H remained in the bedroom and asked Mr D to get out of bed and get changed. He then asked Mr D if he would go into a different room so he could speak to Ms B in private.

PC H said he asked Ms B if anything sexual had happened between her and Mr D and that she replied with “an adamant no”. PC H said he spoke to Ms B for approximately five minutes before PC I returned.

PC H told the IOPC he did not find Ms B’s demeanour to be upset as she seemed fine speaking with him. He did however mention that Ms B seemed more anxious about getting told off by her parents.

PC I stated that when he returned upstairs, he asked PC H where Mr D was and PC H replied saying he had instructed Mr D to wait in a different room. PC H and PC D said that at this point Mr A entered the address saying he had just seen Mr D get into his car and drive off.

When Ms B’s mother attended the scene, Ms B disclosed that she had had sex with Mr D. Mr D was later located and arrested.

Type of investigation

IOPC independent investigation.

Findings and recommendations

Local recommendations

Finding 1

1. During the investigation it was noted that Local Policing Area desks are “patched together” during traditionally more quiet periods, as a matter of practice. However, this practice was followed despite the shift being extremely busy. The investigation heard from contact management staff that the control room is now regularly busy across all shifts which may reduce the suitability of this practice.

Local recommendation 1

2. The IOPC recommends that the force consider what measures can be taken to improve control room resilience and increase support to staff; with particular regard to the practice of “patching together” Local Policing Area desks.

Response to the recommendations

Local recommendations

Local recommendation 1

1. The force introduced a new case management system. The force committed to keeping the impact of the new system under review and reflect on the data produced once the system has become embedded. The force also ended the practice of patching together Local Policing Area desks, instead moving to a practice whereby officers are ‘transferred’ from one talkgroup to another.

Other action taken by this police force

1. A restorative practice exercise took place where family members of the girl were escorted around the control room to demonstrate changes made since the incident took place.

Outcomes for officers and staff

Control Room Supervisor G

1. Control Room supervisor G was dealt with outside of the formal disciplinary process in respect of allegations he picked up the escalation of the incident but did not complete a THOR or NDM assessment or made attempts to identify a suitable unit to attend. He received management action on prioritisation of tasks and risk assessment.

Call Handler C

2. Call Handler C was dealt with outside the formal disciplinary process in respect of allegations she did not grade the initial call in line with the force’s grading criteria and deployment guidance. She received management action and learning around asking the right questions to understand what grading is appropriate.

Radio Operator E

3. Radio Operator E was dealt with outside the formal disciplinary process in respect of allegations she did not appear to have contacted the Local Policing Area Sergeant to seek assistance in resourcing the incident as per the Escalation Process.

Questions to consider

Questions for policy makers and managers

1. What processes does your force have in place to make sure there is resilience in control rooms and support for control room staff?
2. How does your force make sure control room staff accurately record reports of sexual activity with children and those incidents are graded according to the relevant policies and guidance?

Questions for police officers and police staff

3. What would you have done differently if you received several “resource dispatch overdue” auto-prompts in relation to this incident?
4. What would you have done to identify, secure, preserve and control evidence at the scene?