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Firstly this 7 point briefing was co-produced with the parents of the young person. We want to express our thanks to them for their commitment to support practitioners to learn from this tragic event.

The subject of this case was a 16 year young person. He was known to have been a victim of child criminal exploitation (CCE) which included trafficking drugs across county lines. He was a regular attendee at the Emergency Department being brought in intoxicated, having repeated cuts to his fingers and following a deliberate overdose. He was frequently violent and destructive at home. When it was no longer possible for him to live in his family home he was offered accommodation under Section 20 (voluntary arrangements between young people, parents and the local authority) on three separate occasions but turned this down. He was therefore offered accommodation through the housing pathway. The only accommodation available at the time was temporary hostel provision in an adult hostel delivered by the District Council. The plan was that this would be short term pending more suitable accommodation being identified through Foundation Supported Accommodation.

He was receiving Child in Need services and support from Youth Justice Service and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). This took place during the Covid-19 Pandemic and his mum frequently asked him to come home. He attended the Emergency Department on two consecutive days reporting that he felt suicidal on both occasions. The first occasion was because there had been an incident of significant self-harm and on the second occasion he had taken an overdose. He was assessed by CAMHS and was deemed not to have a significant mental health disorder and was discharged back to the hostel. His family had frequently requested assessment under the Mental Health Act (1983) and his mother arranged for him to see a private psychiatrist and had asked his CAMHS psychologist not to discharge him as she was concern this may happen due his lack of engagement with the service. Sadly, two days later he died following a suspected drugs and/or alcohol overdose that had occurred the previous evening.

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What were the challenges in this case?

The challenges related to the level of control the exploiter(s) had over him. Despite being willing to work with services his parents were not in a position to keep him safe from his exploiter(s). His parents felt that if he had been sectioned under the Mental Health Act (1983) he may have been able to be kept safe, however the CAMHS service did not feel that he met the threshold for sectioning. Therefore it was not possible to offer secure in patient care. Social Care offered to accommodate him under Section 20. However, he was not willing to consent to this and this meant that the options for accommodation were limited to accommodation in the hostel where his family was not permitted to visit him due to Covid-19 restriction in place at the time. Children's Social Care and Housing were aware that the child was welcome to return home and that there was no need for him to live in accommodation that was shared with adults with vulnerabilities. There were multi agency meetings about this young person and plans were put in place to safeguarding him but despite these he died of a suspected drug overdose.

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What actions were taken by agencies and professionals?

- His Social Worker and Youth Justice worker met regularly with this young person to discuss his choices and options
- There were multiagency planning meetings with good engagement from partners
- A referral was made to the National Referral Mechanism and a positive finding of exploitation was made
- He had assessments by both CAMHS and the Crisis team
- His had multiple visits to the emergency department and their safeguarding liaison nurse did engage in the multiagency child exploitation meetings.

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What was the response to the actions undertaken?

Initially the young person had positive relationships with some of his workers and had positive responses to their suggestions. However once he felt things were not working he disengaged. This disengagement led to some services withdrawing.

When the young person was not deemed to have a serious mental health condition by professionals his mother was so worried about her son that she arranged for him to have a private appointment with a psychiatrist. It was when she went to pick him for this appointment that she sadly discovered him unresponsive in the hostel.

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What was the outcome of the case?

The outcome was that this young person died alone in an adult hostel of a suspected drug overdose.

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Learning points:

1. Front line workers need to be alert to the signs of exploitation and have an understanding of the high level of control exploiters can have over young people, which limits the ability of young people to make choices. Managers should ensure that staff supervision thoroughly addresses the risks and ensure staff that staff attend the relevant training that is on offer.
2. Parents can feel powerless to influence a young person subject to exploitation. All partners should be reminded to consider making a referral to services that support parents such as Parents Against Child Exploitation (PACE) which is commissioned through the Office of the North Yorkshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.
3. Action plans should include spending time listening and working with parents so they can be part of the solution rather than focusing on just the young people.
4. Where young people are being exploited and groomed, workers must be encouraged to be alert to the impact of grooming behaviours.
5. When young people disengage with services consideration should be given to why they have disengaged and explore what needs doing differently to support the young person.
6. Consideration needs to be given to the support young people need when they report they feel suicidal and they do not meet the criteria to be detained under a section of the Mental Health Act. Within North Yorkshire there is an agreed [Self-Harming and Suicide Ideation Pathway](#) that is available for professionals to consider in terms of risk. Professionals through supervisions should be encouraged to attend the appropriate [Training](#). A multiagency escalation process will be developed where there is concerns that the young person's needs are not being met. The [Go To website](#) is available to signpost young people, parents/ carers and professionals to for the right help and support.
7. A range of accommodation needs to be available when young people become in need of accommodation. Consideration should be given to what is the safest location and the safest type of accommodation. It needs to be recognised that exploiters can influence young people not to return home. In cases of voluntary accommodation young people should be given opportunities to actively review their decision to be accommodated and when returning home is an option this should be fully explored. Suitable accommodation should form part of multi-agency decision making and agreement. Where accommodation is not deemed suitable for a young person due to safeguarding risks this should be escalated within organisations so appropriate reviews can take place.
8. Social Workers and other staff should always aim to see the young person by themselves so they can have full and frank conversations. It should be recognised that having another young person present can limit the ability to have these open and frank discussions.

Although the current legal position is that young people of 16 years or over can only be accommodated under section 20 if they consent to this we are keen for practitioners to reflect on the parents thoughts that: *"A child of 16 cannot vote, buy alcohol, buy cigarettes, get married or have a credit card. They, therefore, should not be able to make a decision to live unsupported, especially when exploitation is known to be a factor. Children should be supported to return to their families if appropriate, and taken into care under section 20 if not. Section 17* plays into the hands of the exploiters and removes all meaningful support."*

*Section 17 is where a child in need is offered accommodation on a voluntary basis.

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Resources:

There are a range of national and local resources and guidance which can support professionals learning which can be accessed below:

One Minute Guides:

- [County Lines and Cuckooing](#)
- [Human Trafficking and the National Referral Mechanism](#)

Practice Guidance:

- [Child Criminal Exploitation and County Lines](#)
- [Multi Agency Child Exploitation and Contextual Safeguarding](#)

Further information/resources:

- [Information for young people, parents, carers and professionals to support the wellbeing and mental health for young people in North Yorkshire](#)
- [Crimestoppers Fearless Resources Education Resources](#)
- [National Crime Agency](#)
- [Parents Against Child Exploitation \(PACE\) e-learning](#)
- [The Children's Society](#)
- [NPSCC](#)