

Case 6 Issue 37 – Young people		LEARNING THE LESSONS
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Contact between a minor and a registered sex offender

Police contact with a young man reporting he was being blackmailed for sex, raising issues about:

- *Asking questions to establish age and vulnerability*
- *Carrying out systems checks*
- *Training on handling 999 calls*
- *Safeguarding training*

This case is relevant if you work in:

Call handling		Public protection	
Information management			

Overview of incident

Around 6.30pm Mr A (aged 16) called 999.

The call was answered by PC B, a resource allocator dispatcher (RAD) who worked in the force's control room.

Mr A reported a man he had never met before was emotionally blackmailing him for sex by saying he would "talk to my mum and say loads of stuff that apparently I've done." Mr A told PC B:

- he had retained all of the messages from the person
- he did not know the offender's identity
- he received text messages and a phone call from the offender
- the offender knew his home phone number
- he estimated he had received around 30 messages from this number

PC B had worked in a call centre environment for more than 10 years and worked in a response function prior to this incident. However, he was not a full time 999 call taker and had not

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received any training on handling 999 calls. PC B's role was predominantly working on the service desk, which involved dealing with checks for officers out on the street. However, the role had evolved to include taking 999 calls.

PC B took a record of Mr A's address and advised Mr A he should contact his network provider to block the number he was being contacted from. PC B recorded the number the texts were sent from and gave Mr A a police reference number. He asked whether he would like him to make direct contact with the phone number. Mr A asked him not to do this.

PC B advised he would make enquiries with regard to the phone number and recorded an entry on the incident log summarising the conversation with Mr A. He also recorded a risk assessment which said "No inherent threat or risk apparent, no disclosed particular vulnerability."

Previous entries on force systems for Mr A showed he had low-level autism and learning difficulties. PC B told the IOPC he acknowledged this information would have been available to him at the time he took the call, but he had not looked at it while talking to Mr A.

PC B acknowledged he would normally ask for a caller's date of birth. He did not on this occasion because he did not feel the caller was a victim or an offender. PC B stated he did not believe this was a child protection issue because he said he "had no reason to believe he was anything other than an adult", despite not asking for his date of birth.

PC B received safeguarding training between five and 10 years before this call. The force were asked whether they had any policy or guidance on the frequency with which officers should complete training on safeguarding. They confirmed there is no guidance other than for officers working in specialist roles.

PC B did not carry out any intelligence checks on the telephone number which had been sending the text messages. He told the IOPC the reason for this was he "didn't see the need to pursue the call any further. There was nothing this person was reporting that I felt I needed to have any further concern with."

PC B was asked by the IOPC why he did not carry out any checks despite telling Mr A he would. He said "I think that's something that we say really all things being equal. It was something to say more than anything else because [...] I wanted [Mr A] to be satisfied."

College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) – Information and intelligence checks

Information and intelligence checks of all available databases are critical to effective investigations and safeguarding children. These checks should apply to all individuals relevant to an investigation. The information gathered should be recorded. Violent or sexual offences committed against victims of any age by a child abuse suspect are relevant, in addition to any other offences that may influence an assessment of risk. Information on the circumstances of each offence will assist in determining the extent of risk presented. Depending on the circumstances and what is proportionate to the situation, checks should include the following databases or systems:

- Integrated Children's System, Contact Point and any local systems for accessing information about children who are the subject of child protection plans

- PNC
- ViSOR
- PND
- Child abuse investigation unit database (or equivalent database for recording concerns for children)
- Local databases
- Missing Persons Index
- Young Offenders Index
- Force intelligence systems
- Force control room records for any related incidents occurring within a specified area and at relevant addresses
- records of crimes and other incidents in respect of relevant addresses and individuals
- CEOP Child Exploitation Tracking System searches relating to identified email addresses, user names and associated relevant information
- Childbase
- European and international

Read more online:

<https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/child-abuse/police-response/information-management/#information-and-intelligence-checks>

Around three weeks later, Mr A made a second 999 call stating a man was blackmailing him for sex. He stated he was due to meet the man the following day and asked whether police could attend and arrest him. Mr A told the operator he had met the man previously and they had had a sexual relationship. He said the man was threatening to tell his mother if he did not meet him, and provided the operator with a phone number, which was the same one he had provided three weeks earlier.

The operator recorded on the incident log Mr A has “autism, low end of scale” and he was clearly very vulnerable and reluctant to give information. A further entry on the incident log stated checks had been carried out on the mobile number given by Mr A and had indicated the possible identity of the offender.

The call handler recorded on the incident log the suspect was a registered sex offender in breach of his sexual offenders prevention order (SOPO). He was not allowed to have internet access or unsupervised access to anyone aged 16 or under. This information would have been revealed earlier had intelligence checks been carried out by PC B following the initial call.

Type of investigation

IOPC independent investigation

Findings and recommendations

Local recommendations

Finding 1

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1. PC B had experience of working in a response function, but was not a full time 999 call taker and had not received any training on handling 999 calls despite regularly performing this role. PC B's role was predominantly on the service desk, but his role had evolved to include taking 999 calls.

Local recommendation 1

2. The IOPC recommended the force should make sure all police officers and police staff members who may be expected to handle 999 calls as part of their role, receive 999 call handling training on a mandatory basis.

Finding 2

3. PC B failed to identify Mr A's vulnerability and subsequently did not carry out a sufficient risk assessment. PC B had received safeguarding training seven years previously.

Local recommendation 2

4. All front line officers and staff (including call handlers) should be required to undergo safeguarding training and refresher training within a set, periodic timeframe.

Response to the recommendations

Local recommendations

Local recommendation 1

1. The force has transferred a number of police officers and staff to contact centres. It is intended these officers will be capable of both taking 999 calls and dispatching resources. Mandatory training is on-going to achieve this.

Local recommendation 2

2. All officers and staff have been trained in the THRIVE+ risk assessment model and are able to assess risk in a structured manner. Refresher inputs are available and supervisors' risk assessments made by their teams.

Outcomes for officers and staff

PC B

1. PC B, the RAD who answered the initial call from Mr A, was found to have a case to answer for misconduct. This was for failing to carry out system checks and failing to ask questions to enable a full risk assessment to be carried out. PC B attended a misconduct meeting, received management advice, and was required to undertake individual learning.

Questions to consider

Questions for policy makers and managers

1. How does your force make sure all officers and staff who handle 999 calls are trained to do so?
2. What policy or guidance does your force have about how often officers and staff should complete safeguarding training?
3. What guidance does your force have about the questions that should be asked when handling a 999 call?
4. How do you make sure adequate intelligence checks are carried out as part of potential child abuse incidents?

Questions for police officers and police staff

5. What other questions would you have asked if you took the initial 999 call?
6. What other action would you have taken if confronted with this incident?