

Case 5 Issue 37 – Young people		LEARNING THE LESSONS
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Concern for welfare of a minor

Police response to concerns about a 17-year-old girl, raising issues about:

- *Recognising vulnerability and risk*
- *Relaying information to supervisors*

This case is relevant if you work in:

Call handling 	Public protection 
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Overview of incident

Around 9am Mr A called the police on 101 about his daughter Miss B. The call was answered by Ms C, a call handler working in the contact centre.

Mr A told Ms C he had concerns about Ms C’s place of work, and in particular “the people that work there and what I’ve been told goes on above the takeaway”. Mr A told Ms C that Miss B was 17-years-old and he had been told she was being driven home by a member of staff in the early hours of the morning, which contributed to his concerns.

He also told Ms C that Miss B was vulnerable as she had mental health issues and learning difficulties, had moved out of her mother’s home, dropped out of college, and started hanging around with a different crowd. During the conversation, Mr A made references to “Rotherham, Rochdale, Oxford” child sexual exploitation (CSE), and grooming. He also told Ms C that Miss B had been in contact with her aunt, and he had not spoken to her in approximately four months. He said the family did not know where she was living and had not seen her at her place of work.

Mr A told Ms C “you know if you put everything together”, to which Ms C responded “I know what you’re pointing to and it’s the warning signs.”

College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) – Police response to concern for a child

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An investigation begins with a report of child abuse. Officers and police staff should establish as much detail as possible to support a thorough investigation. A victim or witness making a report of child abuse may not always identify it as such. Police officers and staff need to ask relevant questions and clearly identify reports as child abuse.

Read more online:

<https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/child-abuse/concern-for-a-child/#information-for-an-initial-report>

Ms C told Mr A she would check for any police interest in Miss B's place of work, and also check whether Miss B had come into police care or was on any police systems. She did not tell Mr B what type of checks she was carrying out.

Ms C made contact with Force Contact Supervisor, Mr D. Mr D told the IOPC Ms C told him she had taken a call from a man who was concerned his daughter was working long hours in a takeaway, and he thought this was bad for her.

Mr D advised intelligence checks should be carried out on the premises and Miss B in order to establish any known risks. Ms C advised Mr D intelligence checks had been carried out and had returned no results. She also told him Mr A was intending to visit Miss B's place of work. Mr D stated he directed Ms C not to create an incident log as he believed no police action was necessary.

Mr D was later shown a transcript of the call between Mr A and Ms C. Mr D stated he was not aware of Miss B's learning difficulties, and acknowledged from reading the transcript it was clear Mr A was concerned about the welfare of his daughter and had raised the issue of child sexual exploitation and grooming.

He stated had this information been relayed to him, he would have likely recommended a different course of action. He stated the level of vulnerability through learning difficulties, her lack of a known stable address, and grooming concerns, would have resulted in the creation of an incident log requesting officer attendance.

Ms C informed Mr A she had spoken to her supervisor and agreed this was not a police matter and they would not get involved. She stated social services would be the appropriate way to deal with the issue and "it will be for somebody to go down as a family, father, family or any member to go to the place of employment where your daughter is working or you believe working." She stated if he attended Miss B's place of work and felt he needed police assistance, he should contact police at that point. She said they would attend if there was an immediate risk or threat identified to Miss B.

Ms C was asked by the IOPC whether she could have done more to establish where Miss B was living. She said in hindsight she believed she should have liaised with social services. She explained there was no policy on the responsibilities of social services and the police if there was a concern for welfare of a minor.

Ms C did not create an incident log and no resources were sent to explore the circumstances reported. No further action was taken by Ms C.

Approximately one month later, Mr A made a further call to the police in which he informed the call handler about his previous call saying "The police said they wouldn't do anything about it,

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they wouldn't even check the place out or anything like that." Mr A told the call handler Miss B had been raped by someone at her place of work.

Mr A made a complaint to the force, alleging the initial call handler and supervisor failed to address the concerns he made in his initial call.

Type of investigation

IOPC independent investigation

Outcomes for officers and staff

Ms C

1. Ms C, the call handler who took the initial call, was determined to have no case to answer for misconduct in relation to the allegation she failed to consider the concerns of Mr A regarding Miss B's welfare.
2. The IOPC recommended Ms C may benefit from informal management guidance in respect of the need to be more aware of risk and vulnerability and to make sure she raises such concerns with supervisors in detail.

Questions to consider

Questions for policy makers and managers

1. What does your force policy say about working with social services where a concern for welfare of a minor is found?
2. How do you make sure call handlers ask the right questions to identify people who may be at risk of child abuse?
3. How does your force make sure information from initial calls is accurately relayed to supervisors?

Questions for police officers and police staff

4. If you were the call handler, what other questions would you have asked to gather more information about the risk to the man's daughter and/or her whereabouts?
5. What other action could the call handler have taken to establish the risk posed to the man's daughter?
6. Would you have done anything different in response to this incident, knowing the young person's mental health or learning difficulties?