



Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review
Family B

Lead Reviewer: Malcom Ward

January 2022

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1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This review was commissioned after one of the B Family children, Child C was seriously wounded when one of her siblings was playing with knives and required emergency life-saving surgery. There was concern that this injury was caused as a result of siblings playing with knives. She fortunately survived and recovered. This aim of this Review is to learn from the way in which the family had been supported by local services in the years up to this near-fatal incident. There had been several years of concern about inter-family aggression on a Council Traveller Site and different multi-agency attempts to safeguard the children who were impacted. The review covers the period 2017 to autumn 2019.
- 1.2 A key issue in the work was to stop long-standing intra-community violence or move the B Family to alternative accommodation, which was suitable for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller¹ families for their protection. This was not achieved. Later, concerns were discovered about the family care of the children and the family's inability to protect them from the community violence. The children became subjects of a Child Protection Plan and later a Supervision Order, for the younger children. They lived in unsafe and unsuitable accommodation for a year, before returning to the Traveller Site as children in need. The interventions were not effective in securing long-term safe and alternative permanent accommodation.
- 1.3 There were different degrees of understanding by professionals about the needs of children from the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Community, and a lack of specialist advice to front line practitioners to support this; except for the primary school, which had access to advisors. A recent, successful, overarching multi-agency strategy and co-ordination of services for Traveller Community Families had ceased in 2017. This was seen as a key systemic issue, underpinning responses to this family.
- 1.4 Another key systemic context was that the Social Care Department was not functioning well at the start of the period as judged by the OFSTED Inspection from 2014.
- 1.5 There was sensitive direct child centred work with the children by schools and social workers and there were attempts to work with the parents. However, Children's Social Care was unable to ensure the full cooperation of some other key services. Police, Community Safety, Traveller Site Staff & Housing Staff were not fully involved in the formal multi-agency safeguarding, particularly the key Core Group Meetings, as they should have been. Some services were unaware of their statutory safeguarding children responsibilities.
- 1.6 At the time of the intervention the approach taken was a single-family casework and protective approach rather than a coordinated community (contextual) approach to the wider intra-community violence, which also impacted on other families' children. It was not seen as a complex problem which required co-ordination at a more senior level across departments within the Council and District Council and with key partners. At no point was it escalated to senior managers to resolve this.

¹ When referring to GRT generally Gypsy, Roma Traveller was used. For the purposes of this review, the family considered themselves to be Gypsy or Traveller, so these terms are used throughout this report.

1.7 A key agency working intensely with the B Family was a local Church, but the importance of their role was not fully recognised, and they were not seen as a key part of the multi-agency protective network when they should have been.

1.8 Mr and Mrs B, the parents, were able to give their views to the independent reviewer and a Panel Member.

1.9 A number of the practitioners and managers who had been directly involved in the case (or representatives) were also able to give their views on what had happened and why and on possible lessons.

1.10 Advice was obtained from a consultant about working in safeguarding with Gypsy, Roma Traveller families.

1.11 The review noted that there have been some improvements in the local safeguarding system since the critical incident (October 2019) and makes recommendations for further improvements; some of which are already being implemented.

1.12 The recommendations include:

- increasing multi-agency understanding of and reviewing procedures with regard to community-based violence,
- ensuring access to specialist advice for practitioners, and their supervisors, working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families'
- a review of the shared Council, District Council and Partner Agency approach to safeguarding children,
- monitoring the effectiveness of multi-agency Core Groups as a key function of the local children's safeguarding system.
- inclusion of local Faith and Community sectors in children's safeguarding at both strategic and practice levels, and
- a review of the County Council's and District Councils' priority re-housing arrangements for children in need of protection, where accommodation is a key element of the assessed harm.

1.13 Surrey County Council and Partners have agreed a new multi-agency strategy for coordinating multi-agency services to the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities which will be monitored by the key local Strategic Partnerships.

Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership

July 2021

2 Reason for this Review and its methodology

- 2.1 The Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership commissioned this learning review following a serious and life-threatening wounding to Child C (aged 7) by a younger sibling. Child C survived and recovered. It was agreed that the review should cover all the children in the B family as they had been known to local services as vulnerable for several years, including as subjects of multi-agency Child Protection Plans², and later a Supervision Order³, under the Children Act 1989. At the time of the critical incident, the youngest three children were assessed as Children in Need⁴ and the oldest child was Looked After⁵. No-one was charged for the wounding.
- 2.2 The Partnership agreed the Terms of Reference, appointed an Independent Reviewer and a Multi-Agency Panel of Independent Senior Managers. The focus period for the review was set as January 2017 to October 2019. It was agreed that specialist consultancy would be sought to aid learning about provision of services to Gypsy, Traveller and Roma families.
- 2.3 Each Agency provided independent reports analysing their work against agreed standards and key lines of enquiry. The agencies were: children's social care, schools and education services, GPs and other local health services, housing services, local police, community safety, traveller site management, child and adolescent mental health services, adult mental health services, and from CAF/CASS, the independent advisory service to the Family Court.
- 2.4 Mr and Mrs B contributed their views. A reflective workshop was held to learn directly from the practitioners and managers who had been involved in the case.
- 2.5 A Child Safeguarding Practice Review seeks to identify lessons to better understand the effectiveness of the wider local multi-agency safeguarding systems and to make recommendations if improvements are required. The review is not about apportioning blame but seeks to understand what happened, and why, in a systemic context.

² **Child Protection Plans** A formal plan of action made after a multi-agency Child Protection Conference has agreed that a child is at risk of significant harm. Child protection plans are reviewed at regular intervals. Children subject of such plans are among a Local Authority's highest priority children requiring protection from anticipated harm. For more information see **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018**, pages 49 – 53 [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/689642/working-together-to-safeguard-children-2018.pdf)

³ **Supervision Order** An Order of the Family Proceedings Court under the Children Act 1989. A Supervision Order is granted when a Court agrees that children are at risk of significant harm but do not need to be removed from the family for protection. The Local Authority is responsible for supervising the children's welfare and safety. The Order is time-limited.

⁴ **Child in Need** Following a multi-agency **Child and Family Assessment** a family may be identified as being in need of additional and co-ordinated services from a range of agencies, led by a social worker. These are voluntary in nature under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. See **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018**, page 40.

⁵ **Looked After** The status under the Children Act 1989 when a child is cared for by the Local Authority, either voluntarily under section 20, or by a court order under sections 31 or 38.

3 The B Family

- 3.1 The B Family comprises Mr and Mrs B, and their four children. They are part of a close extended White British Gypsy family. The wider B Family includes Mr B's parents - Mr and Mrs B Senior, who lived in adjacent accommodation, and Mr B's sister (and partner) who moved away but continued to provide support.
- 3.2 During the period under review, January 2017 to October 2019 the children's ages were:
Child A Aged 12 – 15 years
Child B Aged 8 – 11 years
Child C Aged 4 – 7 years
Child D Aged 2 – 5 years
- 3.3 At the start and end of the review period the family home was a caravan/trailer on a small Council-run Traveller Site. The Licensees for the single plot were Mr and Mrs B Senior. For many years Mr and Mrs B had "doubled-up" their family trailer on the single plot adjacent to Mr B's parents. They were not direct Licensees of the Council, however. Nationally this 'doubling up' is quite common as there is a national shortage of sites for Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Families.
- 3.4 For the period when the younger children, B, C and D were subject of a Supervision Order, July 2018 – July 2019, they were resident with their mother in a smaller caravan, off-site. Mr B remained at the family caravan on the Traveller Site. Child A moved to live with a relative and was later 'accommodated'⁶.
- 3.5 The B Family had been known to local multi-agency services for several years, predominantly because of risks from exposure to ongoing and long-term community violence from a dispute with other families which were also resident on or associated with the Traveller Site. The children were reported to have regularly witnessed serious violent incidents and threats and to have been distressed by them.
- 3.6 Local services had been supporting Mr B, the children's father, with respect to his mental health.
- 3.7 Mrs B was employed in a responsible role for a large employer and worked a regular shift pattern which enabled her to manage work, parenting and care and support to Mr B. She was the family's main breadwinner.
- 3.8 The children were good school attenders and were healthy.
- 3.9 The family were members of a local Church where they received family and adult support services as well as attending worship and contributing fully to church life.

⁶ **Accommodated** under section 20 Children Act 1989. Child A was looked after by the Local Authority in the care of his paternal aunt and her partner.

4 Local Agencies' Involvement and Services Offered to the B Family

This timeline of local agency contacts with the B Family is greatly summarised from the information analysed by the Review Panel, for reasons of confidentiality.

Previous Background known to local services at the start of 2017 which was significant

- 4.1 The B Family was previously known to local universal services and came to be known to Surrey Children's Social Care intermittently from 2005. From 2011 there were several episodes of Children's Social Care involvement due to concerns about parental and family relationships, and possible emotional abuse to the children resulting from the wider community violence.
- 4.2 In February 2015, a multi-agency Child Protection Conference assessed the impact of the serious community incidents between adults on the Traveller Site. It was not possible to resolve the community violence. It was assessed that the case did not meet the threshold for a Child Protection Plan and although offered support as Children in Need the case was closed in May 2015.
- 4.3 In April 2016 Mrs B fled with the children following violent threats. By November 2016 there were concerns about the impact on the children's development.

2017 Increasing Concerns about alleged inter-family violence and intimidation at the Traveller Site, Referral to Children's Social Care – Children made subject to a Child Protection Plan and Use of the Public Law Outline

- 4.4 From January to June 2017 Police investigated regular allegations and counter-allegations of community violence but either there was no corroborating evidence to support any charges or the adults were reluctant to assist the investigations.
- 4.5 A **Multi-Agency Child Protection Strategy Meeting**⁷ was held in May 2017, but not all relevant agencies were present. It was agreed that a multi-agency Child Protection Assessment should be undertaken.

*This was a key decision about the direction for the case. To follow a single family-based approach using a social work led **Child and Family Assessment** rather than a **contextual safeguarding**⁸ approach to deal with a community-based problem wider than the family. An alternative approach would have been to use a Community Safety approach.*

⁷ **Strategy Meeting / Discussion** Part of statutory child protection processes as set out in **Working Together 2018**

⁸ **Contextual Safeguarding** – At this time there was increasing understanding about the risks to children from extra-familial dynamics, but these were not embedded in practice. Working Together 2018 introduced the concept of contextual safeguarding more fully but not specifically for this form of community violence.

- 4.6 In June 2017, a Child Protection Plan was made for all four children as they were experiencing significant harm from emotional abuse and risk of physical abuse. Key issues were the community violence, Mr B's deteriorating mental health and behaviour. A key decision as part of the Child Protection Plan was that the Travellers' Liaison Officer and the Site Manager were to support an appropriate planned move in line with the safety concerns for the children and report back to the Review Case Conference and were to be part of the Core Group, as necessary; however, they were not present to agree to that action⁹.
- 4.7 In mid-June 2017, the first Core Group¹⁰ was held. Police¹¹, representatives of the District Council and Management of the Traveller Site were not present. A further Core Group Meeting was held in July. Again, Police and District Council representatives were not present. It was noted that their involvement was crucial in relation to the wider context of violence. The ongoing violence continued to be a stressor and the children were still being impacted by it.
- 4.8 By the time of the Mid-August Child Protection Conference Review There had been further alleged community-based assaults and harassment which were continuing to impact on the children. The possible need for the Family to move from the site was raised. The Council Travellers' Liaison Officer and Legal team were reported to be beginning to engage in the child protection process and were to attend the next Core Group. The Social Worker was to consult with the Police on actions that could be taken. Mr B's mental health continued to be a concern. This Conference noted the need to move to a community focus and the need to engage other Partners as this was not just a single family-based issue.
- 4.9 In September, following allegations of physical abuse and domestic abuse within the family there was a new child protection assessment. Mr B signed a new Written Agreement that he would not be in the sole care of the children.
- 4.10 In early November 2017, the Police were informed of an alleged threat to shoot Mr B Senior for being a "police grass". Mr B Senior did not wish to take the matter further, he was worried about reprisals.
- 4.11 Children's Social Care initiated the **Public Law Outline**¹² process due to increasing concerns around the escalating community violence, the B Family's inability to protect the children and the additional parenting risks identified within the family.

⁹ It is not clear that there was a Traveller Liaison Officer in the Local Authority at the time and this review has not been able to establish that. There may have been confusion about a voluntary sector post-holder who supported Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families.

¹⁰ **Core groups** Core Groups are formal multi-agency meetings, held at regular intervals to monitor the impact of the Child Protection Plan and to amend it, as necessary.

¹¹ Police would not usually be members of a Core Group unless there was a specific crime or safety need for them to be so. In this case that would have been relevant because of the community violence and link to other families. The importance of their membership of the Core Group was not identified at the first Child Protection Conference and was not corrected at later Core Groups or Conferences.

¹² **Public Law Outline** Guidance about the process for Family Court Proceedings under the Children Act when a Care Order or Supervision Order is being considered. It sets out the stages and tasks required before the Court Hearings [PRACTICE DIRECTION 12A - CARE, SUPERVISION AND OTHER PART 4 PROCEEDINGS: GUIDE TO CASE MANAGEMENT \(justice.gov.uk\)](https://www.justice.gov.uk/practice-direction-12a-care-supervision-and-other-part-4-proceedings-guide-to-case-management)

2018 Family Court Proceedings as Mr and Mrs B were assessed as unable to protect the children from the violence and possible harm

- 4.12 From January 2018 there was further concern about the ongoing impact of the community violence on the children, including the family stables being burned down. A further family-focused child protection assessment was initiated, and Children's Social Care was to consider **Family Court Proceedings**¹³ to protect the children. Mrs B and the three younger children moved away from Surrey temporarily, impacting the children's schooling and support to Mr B. Children's Social Care initiated Family Court Proceedings, for all four children, as the community violence increased.
- 4.13 Mrs B and the three youngest children returned to live in a small caravan, sited on a relative's driveway. The living conditions were deemed to be inadequate by all parties. The Social Care Department offered bed-sit accommodation in London. This was not seen to be appropriate by the family given the distance to the children's school, Mrs B's work, Mr B's health and the family's identity as Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, living an outdoor culture.
- 4.14 At the February 2018 Child Protection Review Conference, it was noted that the community violence was beyond the parents' control and they were unable to protect the children. The children's very basic needs were being met and there were no concerns about the children's basic development. However, the temporary living conditions for the younger children were assessed as inadequate.
- 4.15 In late February, the Court agreed an Interim Supervision Order for the three youngest children.
- 4.16 At the end of February Police were called to a serious fight at the Traveller Site involving members of both families. Children's Services agreed to lead a further investigation into the impact on all the children, including those from other families. The Police arrested and interviewed several individuals but there was insufficient evidence to achieve a prosecution. Police later tried to mediate between the families but not all parties agreed to this; it did not proceed, therefore.
- 4.17 The Child Protection Core Group met in June and July. There was, still no appropriate accommodation for the family to be re-united or for the children's needs to be met. There had been some minor improvement in living conditions in the temporary caravan. The three youngest children were making progress at school.
- 4.18 In late July, the Family Court made a 12-month Supervision Order for the three youngest children. The oldest child, A, had become Looked After under section 20 of the Children Act in April and was in the care of his aunt, living away from Surrey. *(This Review has been advised that Child A moved from the Site as he was reaching an age where he could be regarded as a young man and may thus become more of a target of the community violence or involved in it.)*

¹³ **Family Proceedings under the Children Act 1989** Formal legal proceedings to consider the welfare of children with the power to make orders about them.

July 2018 to July 2019 (One year)

Younger Children on Supervision Order, Child Protection Plans ceased; and younger children supported as Children in Need from July 2019 when Supervision Order ceased

From this section this review focusses on the assessments of need and responses for the youngest three children

- 4.19 The youngest children ceased to be subject of Child Protection Plans in August 2018. It was noted at the final Child Protection Conference that the children required a stable living environment free from fear and harm and that the Traveller Site was not right for this. However, there was no plan for changes to the inadequate caravan accommodation where the younger children were currently living. The plan was to keep looking for appropriate alternative accommodation.
- 4.20 In November and December multi-agency Child in Need Meetings were held for the youngest three children. Housing was not present, although they had agreed to attend. There was no clear indication from Housing about options for the family. Current living conditions were still not suitable. The children could not return to the Travellers Site due to the high risk of further exposure to violence. It was noted that nothing had changed. There were no other Traveller Site plots available. The Social Worker was to follow up with managers of other Traveller Sites about their waiting lists, which would require Mr and Mrs B to accept the need to move to a different site. Mrs B was due to meet with the Housing Case Manager, but she also wanted there to be a re-assessment of the levels of community risk at the original Traveller Site, which she believed had now reduced. Plans to install CCTV on the Traveller Site were delayed and required planning permission. *(Information provided to this review shows that the CCTV alone would not have resolved this issue.)*
- 4.21 In February 2019, the School noted marks on Child C. She disclosed that she had been told not to tell school staff about what happens at home “or something will happen”. This was followed up.
- 4.22 By the March Child in Need Meeting a further Child and Family Assessment had been completed. The outcome was that the family was not able to return to the Traveller Site. The views of key agencies had been taken into consideration, including a possible phased return to the Site. However, it was assessed by Police that there was still a high risk to the family if they were to return, due to the ongoing dispute. The welfare of the children of the other families on Site was now also being considered by Police and Social Care.
- 4.23 The April Child in Need Meeting noted that Mrs B had applied for housing. She had felt forced to do so, but her expectations about housing which would meet the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller culture were assessed as not being realistic. Mrs B felt that the Local Authority was not recognising the children’s cultural needs as Gypsy children; including not allowing them to go back to the Site to see the family animals. The Local Authority’s view was that it was still not safe. The Child in Need Plan continued, as previously, with a need to support Mrs B and expedite the application to find alternative accommodation. Affordability was a problem with regard to private rental housing.

Mrs B had now been diagnosed with depression. The Child in Need Plan continued as previously with the main emphasis being the need to find suitable alternative accommodation for the family.

4.24 By June it was noted that Mrs B was reluctant to move to a house that she felt did not meet her family's cultural needs. The scarcity of appropriate Local Authority Housing meant that the only solution was a move to privately rented accommodation if Mrs B could find it at an affordable rate. Housing believed that when the Supervision Order came to an end in July that Mrs B would return with the children to the Traveller Site. As a result, Children's Social Care was planning to seek an extension of the **Supervision Order**.

4.25 Nothing had changed since the previous summer. Mrs B wished to return to the Traveller Site. Children from other families who had moved away because of the violence had now returned and it was maintained that there had been no new violent incidents. The children's return to the Site was supported by the health and school representatives, with the proviso of close monitoring. Mrs B said that CCTV was to be installed shortly and would cover the whole site.

4.26 In July, it was agreed by Senior Management in Social Care that, as there had been some improvements, not to request an extension of the Supervision Order. Mrs B and the three younger children would return to live at the Traveller Site over a phased period under a Child in Need Plan to enable Social Care to monitor and support the family and to ensure that the site was safe enough. The Church was providing holiday schemes for the children. A Special Guardianship Application had been made for Child A, but Mrs B did not support this.

July 2019 to October 2019

Supervision Order ceased and the youngest children remained subjects of a Child in Need Plan, Child D was Looked After living with his Aunt off-site Mother and younger children returned to live at the Traveller Site

4.27 In August, Mrs B and the three younger children returned to Mr B and the family trailer at the Traveller Site. At the end of August, a Child in Need Meeting was held but only Mrs B, the social worker and the school nurse were present, as it was still the school holidays. The move back to the Site had gone well and the children were happy to be back at home. There were no new concerns about violence. The next meeting was scheduled for the end of September at the primary school.

4.28 **In October** Child C was seriously wounded when one of her siblings was playing with knives and required emergency life-saving surgery. There was concern that this injury was caused as a result of siblings playing with knives. She fortunately survived and recovered. This Review was agreed to learn from the way in which the family had been supported by local services in the years up to this near-fatal incident.

5 Mr and Mrs B's Perspective on the Services they were given

- 5.1 Mrs B met with the Independent Reviewer and a Panel Member twice. Mr B was in the second meeting. In the first meeting Mrs B was supported by a representative from their local Church, a professionally trained family worker, who had been working with them.
- 5.2 At the time of the two meetings Mr and Mrs B were both deeply upset by the continuing action being taken to safeguard the children following the injury to Child C in October 2019. The new action to safeguard the children influenced their responses to this Review and they wished to comment on current matters as well as the services over the period up to the critical incident.
- 5.3 Mrs B appeared to be able, articulate and perceptive. She was able to give a strong account of her perceptions and information to back them up. She appeared warm, emotionally intelligent and caring of the children and was distressed about what had happened to them. Mr B spoke less and deferred to Mrs B but was able to share his views.
- 5.4 They believed that a fundamental underlying issue was the historic allocation of a plot on the Traveller Site to them which, under the Gypsy Traveller culture, they believed should have gone to members of another family. They felt that they had been forced to sign the agreement under threat of eviction. However, they did not, in fact, take up that licence as the plot had been occupied by a member of the family with whom there was the ongoing conflict. They believed that other plots became available and could not understand why no other plot was later offered to them, even on another site. They believed that issue was fundamental to the ongoing dispute.
- 5.5 They were unhappy that the Police and Site Management and other agencies (mainly Children's Social Care) did not get to the bottom of or resolve the community dispute. They believed that they were victimised and treated unfairly. They did not understand why other children on site, also impacted by the aggression between families, were not also subject to child safeguarding measures.
- 5.6 Mrs B believed that Local Agencies do not understand the Gypsy/Roma/Traveller culture.
- 5.7 When Mrs B and the younger children were required to move off site, they found the offers of Bed and Breakfast and other housing totally unsuitable culturally. Mrs B felt it would have required the children to have been taken out of their school. The temporary caravan on a residential driveway was, in their view, unsuitable, especially in winter; but Mrs B felt forced to go there. While there they experienced victimisation and racism from local people.
- 5.8 They were supported well by the local church - including the loan of a home, by a church member, for the Christmas period.
- 5.9 They found all the health services, namely health visitors, school nurse, GP Practice and hospitals, and the school and school related health services very helpful and supportive.
- 5.10 With regard to the Family Court Proceedings in 2018 they believed the Family Court Advisor for CAFCASS was very helpful and fair.

- 5.11 Mr and Mrs B did not think that the Traveller Site Management, Housing or the Police did enough to resolve the aggression on site. They believed that these services should have attended the multi-agency Child Protection Meetings to explain what they were doing to resolve the violence and accommodation. They believed that there was evidence to act against those who they believed were the cause of the aggression and who were not keeping to the terms of the Site Licence agreements. They also believed that the District Council had mislaid key documents.
- 5.12 Mr and Mrs B were very critical of Children's Social Care, except for the first two social workers, one of whom worked hard to understand Gypsy, Roma and Travellers culture. They believed that the help they were promised was not forthcoming and that there was very little progress on agreed actions between child in need or child protection meetings.
- 5.13 Mrs B believed that the children were asked leading questions, particularly about where they wished to live.
- 5.14 They said they were not given the social work reports to child protection meetings until just a few minutes prior to the meetings in the reception area while waiting for the meetings to start; whereas other agencies would give their reports in advance or tell Mr and Mrs B what was in them. However, the Independent Chair of the Child Protection Conferences was seen as helpful and fair, he helped explain things. Mrs B said that she was helped to understand the process of the meetings, which enabled her to take part.
- 5.15 They did not understand why Social Care did not seek advice from Gypsy Groups, or information from the Church, with which they were very involved.

6 Family Support offered by the Local Church

- 6.1 The B Family attended two linked local churches throughout this period. Mrs B had been a church member for 16 years and sat on the Church Council. The children also attended a linked church school.
- 6.2 Mr and Mrs B agreed to the Independent Reviewer speaking with key church workers to learn from the Church's role and perspective in support for this family, and more generally the church's role in safeguarding in the wider community. A meeting was held with the Vicar and the Church's qualified Family Support Worker. The Vicar had over 20 years' experience working with Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities.
- 6.3 All the family attended Church on Sundays. Both Mr and Mrs B attended a counselling group for parenting children with additional needs once a week. The children attended holiday playschemes. Mrs B was a helper at a Church Toddler Group twice a week. She was also a volunteer at the school. Mr B sought and received additional support from the Church with his own health and was noted, in time, to be cooperating with his NHS treatment. His health improved initially but then declined again because of the additional stress from the family separation and family court proceedings.

- 6.4 The Church's view was that the children were always well cared for physically. When the family lived off site in the small caravan Mrs B took the children to the swimming pool so that they could shower. During this time church members were very involved in supporting the B Family, including helping to babysit the children to assist Mrs B. There was a pool of church members that Mrs B could call upon for assistance. They also occasionally helped with meals as the cooking facilities in the temporary caravan were inadequate. At Christmas 2018 a couple from the Church lent the B family their home for 2 weeks.
- 6.5 The Vicar and Family Support Worker were aware of the involvement of Social Care and supported Mr and Mrs B with this, offering advice; for example, Mrs B reported to them that she had been unaware of entitlement to support with Legal Aid during the Care Proceedings, and they advised her. *(Surrey Children's Services is clear that such advice had been given in writing as part of the Proceedings.)*
- 6.6 Mr and Mrs B needed help to understand jargon in reports. Mr B had greater problems with literacy. Sometimes reports were sent electronically but the family had no computer or printer and so could only access them by phone.
- 6.7 The Church Family Support Worker attended one (Child in Need) meeting at the school with Mrs B and met the social worker; but did not feel welcomed as a colleague. In retrospect a lesson for the Church was that they could have perhaps been more proactive by helping Mrs B more directly in her District Council / Housing application or issues on the Traveller site. It did not occur to them to make approaches to local services or to elected councillors to advocate directly for the family. Perhaps they could have played a greater role in advocacy.
- 6.8 The Vicar found Mrs B to have very strong beliefs and high moral values and a commitment to serve the community. She was, at times, criticised by other Gypsy, Roma, Travellers when she cooperated with or used local statutory services. It was seen as unusual by other Gypsy, Traveller families that she was fully employed, which was said to be unusual in their culture.

Strategic Issues regarding the Faith Sectors and their relationship to Surrey Council and the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership

- 6.9 The Vicar thought that the Church Diocese was probably the biggest independent employer of professional youth and children's workers in Surrey (over 200 staff). The Diocese boundaries are almost coterminous with Surrey County Council boundaries. The Diocese has safeguarding leads and each Church has its own safeguarding leads. The Church schools, like the one that the B children attended, are also linked into the Diocesan Education Board. However, the strategic interlinking of the Diocese and the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership was not clear. He thought the links probably needed to be stronger.
- 6.10 *Council practitioners later told this Review that they were unaware of the very full and active role of the Church with the B Family. It was not common practice to think about involving faith organisations which are supporting families in multi-agency work and meetings to safeguard specific children.*

7 Working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Families – A specialist perspective

- 7.1 It was agreed that the review should seek specialist advice to better understand the inter-relationship of the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community and statutory agencies. An Independent Adviser, with no association to the B Family or to Surrey, was identified via the British Association of Social Workers. She was given an anonymised and confidential briefing about the case, with the agreement of Mr and Mrs B, and then met with the Lead Reviewer for this Review. The consultant is a qualified social worker with expertise in family social work and contextual safeguarding, not solely with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. She is also a Traveller.
- 7.2 The Lead Reviewer also identified key recent research and reports which are noted in the Appendix to this report.

Comments from the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Consultant

- 7.3 **Equality of Opportunity and Ethnicity** There is a need in any work with Gypsy, Roma, Traveller families to understand equality of opportunity and differences in respect of the Gypsy, Romani, Traveller culture, which has been recognised as a legal ethnicity since the 2011 Census. It includes a heritage of nomadism and the right to travel is important, even in families which no longer travel. However, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller families are often regarded as “Travellers” for planning purposes, even if they no longer travel or lead a nomadic life for personal reasons (e.g., health, school).
- 7.4 **Access to Traveller Site Plots** Gypsies do not have the same housing rights as other tenants. They are usually granted Licences, not tenancies; these are less secure. A Licence would govern access to the plot, rent, behaviour (including violent or anti-social behaviour) and agreement about periods of absence from the site, usually a set period, for example, no longer than 12 weeks with rent to be paid, in absentia. Non-compliance with the Licence can be used as the basis for eviction as the rights are not as strong. Unlike Tenancies, Licences cannot be transferred or passed on at death to family members, even if they have been resident or have shared a plot. The Licence also gives access to Housing Benefit. *(In this case the Licensee was Mr B’s parents and so Mr and Mrs B had no security.)*
- 7.5 Nationally there is a shortage of Local Authority Traveller Sites where Travellers can rent a plot. It is very common, therefore, for families to have to ‘double up’. A son or daughter will often squeeze a second caravan on to the small plot licensed for one caravan to the parent and this is often tolerated as there is a known lack of Traveller accommodation. Another dynamic in this is the cost of renting the basic plot which is seen as expensive for what is offered as the families must provide their own caravan. They lease the concrete foundation and access to amenities. As many Travellers rely on benefits, which do not meet the costs of rent, doubling up also has an economic advantage in sharing the costs.
- 7.6 Access to a plot is seen as vital for continuing Gypsy, Roma, Traveller family life.
- 7.7 Travellers do not have the right to rent on private sites. Such sites are set up by and for the use of their owners, possibly including extended family. Other Traveller families cannot seek to rent a

plot on these private sites. *Mr and Mrs B were, therefore, dependent on access to a Local Authority site.*

- 7.8 Allocation of Plots** It is not uncommon for the Site Warden to negotiate with current residents about allocation of vacant plots and there can be pressure for some families to be granted licences and others not; this is a more informal approach than first come first served or allocation by need but aids community cohesion and supports extended families. There is a sense of trying to keep extended family close and a hope that those doubled up may be allocated their own plot, in time.
- 7.9 Alternative – standard housing** There is case law about the offer of standard housing of bricks and mortar for tenancies as a housing solution not being appropriate for Gypsy, Roma, Traveller families.
- 7.10 Managing relationships between Licensee Families on a site** A key question is: How does the Local Authority Manager/Warden manage any disagreements between resident families on site? This will depend on what local community development has been or is being done and how often the Manager/Warden is able to visit. Is it only once a week to collect the rent? In some Local Authority areas Wardens have moved an office (portacabin) temporarily on to the site to support managing issues.
- 7.11 Local Authority Strategic Approach to Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Families** A key systems dynamic is how the matter of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller accommodation fits into the wider approach to the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community by a Local Authority. For example, is there a local needs assessment for the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community? What is the overall approach? How are the needs of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller families incorporated into the local Joint Strategic Needs Analysis?
- 7.12 Life on Traveller Sites** A site would usually become a community where there is a lot of interchange and sharing between the residents with openness, frequent inter-actions, some inter-dependence, borrowing, sharing childcare and a strong sense of togetherness. Children would usually have access to the whole community and become a children's community in their own right, often outside together and in and out of each other's trailers.
- 7.13 Disagreements / "Feuds"** The consultant thought that these were culturally rare. There can be disagreements and where these do occur the Warden has strong powers through the Licence to deal with them, including eviction, which can be more easily obtained. There may be a reluctance to work with the police by residents.
- 7.14 Dynamics of this case** In relation to the B Family the Consultant thought that the issues behind the disagreements and alleged violence had not been fully explored. A contextual safeguarding approach could have been used to understand the risks to the family (children and vulnerable adults) in its wider context. It seems that the parents' view that the arguments / violence stemmed from the offer of a plot which "should have gone to another family" was historic and was, in fact, resolved since Mr and Mrs B did not move on to the allocated plot and it was allocated to the second family even though Mr and Mrs B had signed a Licence. Why then did the dispute continue? Were there other contributory factors beyond the plot issue? How were these assessed?

- 7.15 A multi-disciplinary contextual safeguarding approach would have taken a wider assessment of the impact of the violence on all the families – particularly the children in all the families.
- 7.16 Was the B Family seen as too different and scapegoated in some way because of the differences in their way of life to other families on site? Mr B's mental illness could have been explored as a possible factor. He was not fulfilling the traditional male role model, including male group activities, casual labour, bonding with sons and mates, etc. There is often stigma about mental illness in the community, especially for men. It can be taboo. There is often old-fashioned prescription of gender roles, the male as breadwinner.
- 7.17 Mrs B had married in and was not seen as having the same Traveller heritage in her upbringing. Was she seen as an outsider, "not one of us"? She also worked in regular employment in a responsible role and was the breadwinner. This is unusual in the community especially for a woman. How did other families see this?
- 7.18 **Assessments** How were these dynamics assessed? How was this family seen as part of their inter-dependent community? Had they become victims? Information appears to relate to two families based on the site covering only a few of the plots. How were the views of other residents / families sought and assessed as possible witnesses, with regard to the community on site as a whole? What were the children's inter-relationships with other children? How were these assessed? Emotional abuse may have included being ostracised on the Site by peers.
- 7.19 What was the approach to the underlying problems on the Site? A traditional nuclear family Child and Family Assessment approach would probably not work. If there had been similar alleged harassment / violence to a family in a house in a cul-de-sac how would agencies have responded? Would a possible hate crime approach have been explored?
- 7.20 There would not have been a clear way of resolving this within the community itself as there is no system of trusted elders. The solution where a dispute is intractable is often for a family to move off site.
- 7.21 Where the Manager / Warden is not regularly on site there would not be a clear picture as the community would likely operate in a closed way, not wishing all their business to become known.
- 7.22 **Ways of life / ethnicity** Although Travellers may not travel so much nowadays since there is a national lack of access to alternative plots, the ethnic **heritage of nomadism** is important to a sense of identity. Ownership of horses and dogs is a very important symbol of this history – almost totemic. Associated with horses and their care, leisure riding and cultural activities such as fairs and bigger regional gatherings would be the use of knives, seen as essential in horse care for removing stones from hooves and bridle / harness management, with a possible need to be able to cut a horse free. Gypsy parents, like others, would teach children according to their ability and age to use knives responsibly and with care. On some sites there may be trapping of wild rabbits, and their skinning, etc.
- 7.23 Children from Traveller Sites often drop out of education. Experience of racism at school or in the wider community can be a factor in this, particularly for older boys who may go to work with their fathers, who may be in casual labouring work. The Consultant thought that it was more unusual that in this case that the children were good school attenders and well engaged and that

there was also good engagement with health support services for father and for the oldest boy. This is perhaps rarer and spoke to the strengths of the family and to possible difference to other families.

7.24 It may also be rarer for Gypsy, Roma, Traveller families to be regular church attenders and this has been known to be a cause of ostracism.

8 Learning from the Case Practitioners and Managers

8.1 An online Reflective Practice Learning Workshop was held for as many practitioners and managers as possible who had direct involvement in the case over the period being reviewed. Some had worked with the family for longer. The Workshop's purpose was to learn from the practitioners to better understand their assessments and the work done from a systemic perspective and to understand why some actions and not others were taken and how the organisation of the local multi-agency safeguarding systems affected this.

8.2 Eighteen practitioners and managers were present. The Church representatives were unable to attend but some of their views were shared.

Practitioners' views about understanding of and work with Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Families

8.3 One Council Manager believed that a lack of sufficient knowledge or advice around the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller way of life had created problems for the practitioners dealing with the B Family. This practitioner also questioned whether a similar lack of knowledge about Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Life had impacted on this Review. In this practitioner's experience Gypsy, Roma, Traveller families settle disputes in different ways, as do many other cultures, and will not co-operate with "Authorities".

8.4 It was seen as very hard to secure an eviction from a Traveller Site. Unless concerns are witnessed by a member of an authority there is always no chance of legal action. Violence, organised violence, and intimidation were seen by this practitioner as common place on Traveller Sites; only heard about after the event, if at all. Now, if there were to be similar matters residents would be sent a warning letter from the Site Manager.

8.5 Evicting a licensee without clear evidence on a balance of probability from a Traveller Site was thought to be highly unlikely and would most probably be heard by a judge used to dealing with Gypsy, Roma, Traveller matters.

8.6 Surrey County Council is not a Housing Authority and there is no specific housing policy for Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Families. There are many dynamics as to where to offer a plot to a specific family. Most sites are dominated by one family therefore to place a new family on to such a site could be risky.

8.7 At the time of this work Surrey Council and its constituent Boroughs and Districts did not have a Gypsy, Roma, Travellers' Liaison Officer. The small Traveller Site Team is often assumed to hold a Travellers' Liaison Officer role, but this is not the case. However, Social Care workers clearly thought that they were working with a Gypsy/Travellers' Liaison Officer.

- 8.8 There were both insufficient numbers of Traveller Sites and family plots to meet the demand in Surrey. Two Site Managers were covering 15 sites across the whole county, comprising 187 pitches and approximately 1100 residents, as many plots were doubled up. There were also many families on the waiting list.
- 8.9 This raises strategic and whole systems questions about how Surrey County Council seeks to meet this demand and what is happening for those families when they are not adequately accommodated. It also raises questions about what, if any, is the system for prioritising Gypsy, Roma, Traveller children who have been assessed as being at risk by the statutory child protection processes and who are therefore among the Council's highest priority children.
- 8.10 The Traveller Sites Team manages the pitches, not the families. Traveller Site staff do not enter the licensees' chalets and have little or no knowledge of how families live. Traveller Site staff are viewed as people of authority. If safeguarding or other issues are seen they would be reported to the relevant authorities.
- 8.11 A Traveller Site is a residential cul-de-sac, and it should be viewed in such a way. Very few housing cul-de-sacs have formal monitored CCTV and where there have been safeguarding issues in such cul-de-sacs they have not led to the installation of CCTV. Some of the Surrey Council Traveller Sites have CCTV at the entrances (for example to control fly-tipping) but they are not monitored and do not deeper look into the sites, for example to monitor behaviour.
- 8.12 A School Practitioner who had known the family for several years commented that the area had a significant number of families from the Traveller Community and that school staff were well aware of cultural matters and that some had attended training on Traveller Cultural Awareness. The school also had a Traveller Champion who had a good relationship with school families from the Traveller Community.
- 8.13 This Practitioner who had known the family over several years, including prior to the period under review, also noted that the B Family was different to other Traveller families with whom she had worked. Mrs B had told this Practitioner that the B Family was treated as outsiders by the Traveller Community because of Mr B's mental ill health, and because Mrs B was the main bread winner and that she broke from a lot of tradition, including the way the children were being brought up, as if across two communities. Mrs B was very committed to the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller life but also valued a wider approach.
- 8.14 A Senior Health Advisor, from a wider overview, had formed the opinion that in Surrey overall work to manage risk and safeguarding in the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities for children, young people and vulnerable adults had not been co-ordinated strategically across multi-agency systems and that this had been raised as a concern in the past. Work was now in place to address this by the time of this review.
- 8.15 A School Safeguarding Lead noted that a large part of this case was about Community Safety, but the children's safeguarding network had been told that there was nothing that could be done to change the situation. The School understood that Mrs B had felt forced by the Council to sign a Licence for a plot on the Site but that the plot was in dispute with the other family, which thought it was rightly theirs. The Council told Mrs B that she had forfeited the right to the plot as the B

Family was absent for more than the allowed time. If Mrs B had not signed the B Family would not have been allowed to stay on the Site. The other family blamed the B Family for stealing their land, even though they had in fact occupied the plot.

- 8.16 The School felt well equipped in having a well-informed understanding of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Life from its own experience with several Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Families who had used the school, and from employing a Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Champion as an adviser. The School often used the Council's specialist Race Equality and Minority Achievement Service (REMA) to assist with training for staff and support with lessons for Gypsy, Roma, Traveller children. The School also met with the Travellers' Liaison Officer who explained that it was a "family feud", and that the only way to resolve it would be to move the B Family another Site. Other Traveller residents on the Site were seen to be loyal to the second family, not the Bs. The School believed it was well-accepted as being aware and supportive of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller culture, by Traveller Families. REMA and the School Champion did not have the authority to resolve the safeguarding matters or relocate the B Family.
- 8.17 Schools receive no additional funding to meet any additional needs which arise from serving Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities.
- 8.18 A Social Care Manager confirmed that specialist advice had not been sought by Social Care about working with Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Families to support working with this case. A reason for this was not given.
- 8.19 One Practitioner believed that colleagues from some other agencies had formed a set view that this was a cultural matter and a way of life and so nothing could be done.
- 8.20 Other families were said to have been affected by the Community Violence and moved away temporarily to a Travelling life because of the violence on Site in order to protect their children – disrupting their links with schools and local services. *This perhaps gives a wider systemic view of how several other families were being impacted by the community dispute between two families.*
- 8.21 A family involved in the community dispute was reported by one practitioner to have tried to get permission to move their trailer to another site to get away from the troubles, but this was not agreed.

Lack of involvement of the Community Safety Team

- 8.22 The Social Care practitioners and the School staff were unfamiliar, at the time, with the role of the Community Safety Team¹⁴ which has lead responsibility for the local management of anti-social behaviour; or how to make referrals to the team.
- 8.23 Social Care staff saw the Police as fully involved and understanding of the issues. There seems to have been a misunderstanding of the role of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and a

¹⁴ [Surrey Community Safety Team - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk) Can undertake community assessments of anti-social behaviour and issue Community Protection Notices or apply for injunctions to prevent anti-social behaviour.

lack of awareness of the Council's Community Safety Team; the latter have greater powers to work with anti-social behaviour, such as that on the Travellers' Site.

Impacts on the children

8.24 It was clear to several practitioners who worked regularly and directly with the children that the children were scared every day and that the oldest child (A) was particularly severely affected over time. It was assessed that the children needed to be in a safe environment before they could be offered additional therapeutic services to help them deal with the trauma that they had experienced. CAMHS advice was fed into other targeted support services which the youngest B children were being offered through the School.

Direct work with the children

8.25 A lot of direct work was done with the children about their feelings and the impact of the violence and the move from the Site on them, by social workers and at school. They were children who were very much part of an extended family and brought up both by Mr and Mrs B and by Mr and Mrs B Senior. The children very much wanted to be back on Site with the wider family, and with the family animals. Although the horses belonged to their grandfather the children saw them as belonging to the family and so also to them.

Parenting Work and Support

8.26 Mrs B attended parenting training groups and a targeted play programme, organised by Children's Social Care. (Social Care was unaware that Mr and Mrs B were also attending parenting groups at the Church.) The grandparents found it much harder to accept that the violence was having an impact on the children and were reluctant to work with practitioners about this.

8.27 Mr B was vulnerable and was often supported in group meetings by a mental health worker. Mrs B very much took the lead.

Re-Housing and Housing Priority

8.28 When it was clear that the B children were at significant risk if they remained on the Traveller Site Children's Social Care worked for resolutions, including providing temporary Bed and Breakfast. Mrs B was adamant that this did not meet Mr B's needs or the family's culture. It was Mrs B's decision to use the small caravan placed on the driveway of relatives (*not on a Traveller Site*). Social Care assisted with necessary repairs to the adjacent house so that some of it could also be used to improve living conditions.

8.29 Mrs B was clear, however, that a house would not meet the family's requirements, particularly Mr B's mental health needs which she saw as being more important than cultural needs, although these too were very important. Under pressure she did eventually make a homeless family application; but set strict boundaries on what would be acceptable to meet the family's culture. The Homeless Persons Team did not regard her as homeless as she had a habitable trailer on the Site. Housing sought to assist and advise but stated that there was nothing more that the service could do which would be acceptable to Mrs B because of the cultural restrictions she was raising.

8.30 A Social Care Manager was of the view that the Housing Officers were not prioritising families at risk for re-housing unless the courts directed them to do so. In the light of the learning from this case this Manager would now escalate the matter to more senior managers.

**The working of Child Protection Conferences, Core Groups and Child in Need Meetings
Key functions of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Children System**

8.31 A Social Care practitioner noted that Core Groups were often not well attended by partner agencies. The School endorsed this and believed that the case had 'stagnated' as actions were not progressed by some agencies which also did not attend the meetings. A key frustration for some agencies was that the Site Management did not attend when expected but it also became apparent that on at least one occasion the Site Manager was unaware of the meeting and had not received an invitation.

8.32 There was an imperative to ensure that Core Groups were held "within timescale" and so they would sometimes be arranged in school holiday periods when key services were unable to attend.

8.33 The School noted that many of the meetings were scheduled during school holidays. However, the School always sought to ensure that someone senior attended (including disrupting personal holidays to do so) or send a report when no one could attend. For the School this was seen as wider systems issue which affects not just this case. There is a need for a better co-ordinated approach to how these important multi-agency meetings are scheduled in advance of school holidays.

8.34 A Senior Social Care Practitioner noted that the quality assurance of and the progress of the Child Protection Plan rests with the Core Group. The leadership and quality assurance of Core Groups rests with the relevant Social Work Team Manager. Changes since this case now mean that a Team Manager would chair all first Core Group Meetings and all subsequent Core Group Meetings for children under 5. The expectation is now that Core Groups will be chaired by advanced social workers.

8.35 At Child Protection Conferences the Independent Chair checks that Core Groups have been happening and will escalate if they have not. Midway Meetings have now been introduced to check progress of the Child Protection Plans between Child Protection Conferences. If there is insufficient progress this is escalated using an agreed process to senior managers. After each Child Protection Conference, the Independent Chair now completes a Quality Assurance process/proforma to senior managers. The Child Protection Conference Chair can also raise concerns about lack of progress with their own manager.

8.36 Practitioners informed us that because of the wider workload pressures at the time, the imperative was to ensure that Core Groups and Child in Need Meetings were held within timescales, but less priority was given to completing the record/minutes of the meetings, and thus some records of decisions were not made (as in this case). Under the Family Safeguarding Model, introduced since this case, the provision of records of Core Groups is now also prioritised and monitored.

8.37 In late 2020, a Thematic Review of the working of Core Groups audited 130 sets of children's records. The effectiveness of the Core Group, the overall safety of the child and the quality of the minutes were evaluated. The audits found that the child's overall safety and focus on their experience was a strength, however the quality and effectiveness of the core group minutes required improvement. In the majority of records either effectiveness of practice or the quality of the minutes were found not to meet agreed consistent practice standards. In these cases drift was frequently a concern. Work is in place to improve this. Practice guidance and procedures in respect of Core Groups has been refreshed. Monthly audits will continue to monitor the quality. An area of continued discussion relates to who should chair the Core Group.

8.38 The Lead Reviewer asked whether thought had been given to reconvening a Child Protection Conference when the Supervision Order came to an end in July 2019, as there was still concern about risk of harm from community violence. Any agency could have requested this, but it was not considered at the time. In retrospect a Manager thought that it would have been a useful step. Most involved professionals were of the view that it would be safe and better for the children to move back to the Site, only the Police were concerned about possible future risk but there had been no new community incidents reported. A key practitioner thought that at the time there had been no new incidents and Mrs B was seen to be cooperating and so a Child Protection Conference was not considered.

8.39 In the final period a Child in Need Meeting was chaired by a Duty Social Worker as the keyworker had been called away on another case.

The overall work led by Children's Social Care

8.40 The Lead Reviewer was curious to know why there had been no Family Group Meetings. Practitioners said that Family Group Meetings are now convened at the very early stages of Social Care's involvement with families, including during the assessment phase prior to transfer to the longer-term Family Safeguarding Teams for Child Protection/Child in Need work.

8.41 Preparation for Family Proceedings, especially paperwork and authorisation for submissions to the Court by managers and legal advisors takes a lot of time and there can be delays because of the extreme pressures.

8.42 The Church workers were seen by Social Care as an important part of the family's support network, particularly during the period when the family moved back to the site. However, the full significance of the Church's role with the family was not understood.

8.43 The School was clear that there was good, regular work by the social workers to work closely with the School and to see and work directly with the children.

Multi-Agency Working

8.44 A School Safeguarding Lead had great concerns about the children after Mr B Senior was attacked. The children remained on site and at acute risk, but professionals were not visiting due to concerns for staff safety. At one point a worker visited with the Vicar as it was thought that this would ensure that worker's safety.

8.45 The School reported evidence to authorities of seeing intimidation between adults of the different families but no actions were taken as a result. School Leaders were of the view that the Police, Social Care, or the Council could use the hearsay evidence from the children to take legal action, but these agencies were reluctant to do so without more concrete evidence. The School's view was that harm was accepted because families lived on a Traveller Site and that such harm would not have been accepted for families in another location. On one occasion when the School had clear concern about possible imminent threat to a member of the B Family, at the school premises, the Police were called and would not respond unless the threatened violence was actually happening rather than only a threat; however, a Police Supervisor then overturned this view and sent a patrol car.

8.46 When the concerns about the safeguarding of children from other families on site were recognised and different social workers were appointed for those children there was no joined up way of working across the cases to look at the wider system for all the families; separate meetings were held about each family.

Strategy Meetings

8.47 Early in the review period a large multi-agency Strategy / Team Around the Family Meeting was held to look at the safeguarding issues relating to the children of the B Family and of the other main Family on the Site. Housing was represented. Relocating the B Family was seen as the only possible solution, but proposals put forward about this appear to have been blocked.

8.48 The School believed that there was a wider Strategy Meeting about all the families to which it was not invited, despite all the children of the different families being in the school.

8.49 A Senior Practitioner advised this review that Strategy Meetings always have Social Care, Police, Health and Education/School involved; but that was not the practice in this case. It was noted that there were so many meetings for this family and about the Site that there was confusion for some practitioners about the status of different meetings and their roles, for example strategy, child protection conference, core group and child in need meetings.

Workload Resources, Specialist Advice, Supervision and Emotional Support to Staff

8.50 Responses from Social Care and the School practitioners commented on the availability of personnel resources with regard to how much time this case took. The School also had separate sets of parallel meetings on the children from the other families affected adversely by the Community threats and violence.

8.51 A wider systems issue for a small school is limited staffing resources. The statutory **Designated Safeguarding Lead**¹⁵ DSL may also have other priority and key leadership responsibilities. If there

¹⁵ The **Designated Safeguarding Lead** is a specific manager from within the school leadership team with overall responsibility to guide the school in its responses to individual safeguarding cases as well safeguarding overall in the school. It is rarely a designated single post, but a set of responsibilities placed on an individual alongside other responsibilities that they hold. In small schools this can often be the Head Teacher or another Senior Teacher as there are unlikely to be resources for additional staff.

are then several safeguarding children cases the work required may not get the time it needs and can impact on the other important tasks for school leaders. With a complex situation such as this case and the related families with regular meetings and crises to manage there was no additional human resource to draw on.

8.52 A systems matter raised by the School to this Review was that Schools do not have the same access to reflective supervision and safeguarding guidance as other professions, such as social work or health. To whom does a Designated Safeguarding Lead or Head Teacher turn for advice or emotional support in intractable cases such as this, where children or parents regularly share their acute distress and fear of violence with school staff? The Governing Body was supportive. There was also a direct link to the Vicar, who was familiar with the case (and who on one occasion had harboured the children) which provided some support to the DSL. However, this raises a bigger systems question for Surrey and for the Diocesan Education Board about how Designated Safeguarding Leads are supported in their safeguarding leadership of cases, staff teams and school communities.

8.53 The staffing challenges and workload for the small Travellers' Sites team were noted above.

Escalation

8.54 A Senior Health Advisor was confident that Health Practitioners were very aware of the Escalation Policy as there had been learning from a recent Serious Case Review which had raised this, and all health staff had been reminded. It was also discussed in (community health practitioners') safeguarding supervision or when practitioners were making a referral to children's services and the referral was deemed not to meet threshold. However, in this case, the Core Group did not escalate the issue that Police, Housing and Site Managers did not attend Core Groups. In hindsight, in trying to understand why this was not escalated at the time this manager wondered whether the Core Group practitioners were impacted by the "rule of optimism".

8.55 The School sought to escalate the case to Children's Social Care in the early period more than once on safety grounds because of the violence and threats to the family but were repeatedly told that the case did not meet the local threshold as the risks were not tangible. There was not, at the time understanding that a case could be escalated to the Safeguarding Children Board for review. As noted in paragraph 9.44, below, the local Escalation Policy has recently been revised.

Understanding the Church's role in parallel working with the family

8.56 The Church workers were seen as an important part of the family's personal support network, particularly during the period when Mrs B and the younger children were moving back to the site in summer 2019. Mrs B had talked about her involvement with the Church and some groups, but it was not clear how extensive this was and so Social Care did not realise the significance. They did not contact the Church on the grounds of confidentiality (*although Mrs B could have been asked to agree to this*).

The influence of the family court

See **Keeping Children Safe in Education** (Statutory Safeguarding Guidance for Schools) [Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672672/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_-_GOV.UK_(www.gov.uk).pdf)

8.57 The court placed an emphasis on the need for Social Care to resolve the housing issue rather than on a thorough assessment of the impacts of the violence and the family dynamics on the psychological wellbeing of the children. The children were scared every day. Feedback was given that workers can sometimes feel disempowered when the court gives a particular direction or does not agree to requests about the nature of assessments.

9 Lessons from the Review

Important systemic contexts to the work being reviewed

9.1 Leadership of children’s safeguarding by Surrey Children’s Social Care

9.1.1 During the period of the work being reviewed there was a key systems context which must be noted to understand the overall leadership of this multi-agency, multi-disciplinary work. Surrey Children’s Social Care was not meeting its responsibilities for the welfare and safeguarding of children well enough. In 2014 OFSTED inspected the Service and found it to be inadequate with regard to child protection services and overall management.¹⁶ The Service was inspected again in early 2018 and was still inadequate for child protection services and overall management.

9.1.2 By September 2018¹⁷, following the appointment of a new senior Children’s Social Care Senior Management Team, a plan for improvement was coming in to place. A new “family resilience” model was being introduced for social work practice. There were fewer changes of social workers and smaller caseloads. However, Inspectors still had concerns about the quality and leadership of inter-agency work. Strategy Meetings and Child in Need Meetings were not well attended by partner agencies (at this time the B Family were Children in Need but were also subjects of Supervision Orders because of significant harm). Overall Child in Need plans were not clear in their actions and their priorities. Almost half of the children in need were not being seen within timescale, and as a result there was some drift. New systems for quality assurance were being introduced.

9.1.3 By June 2019¹⁸ Inspectors found that social workers’ caseloads had substantially decreased as part of the new family resilience model. There were continued improvements after the introduction of a new “front door” model, which was reducing the number of cases requiring assessments and allowing more time for ongoing casework. Social workers were feeling better supported by a new reflective case meetings approach and reduced caseloads. The new quality assurance processes were building a clearer picture for managers of the overall quality of the social work, which was beginning to improve.

9.2 The National and Local Picture of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Matters and Responses

¹⁶ OFSTED Inspection Report 2015 (for 2014 Inspection)

[Report template - integrated SIF pilots 2014 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](#)

OFSTED Inspection Report 2018 (for Feb/March 2018 Inspection) [50004443 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁷ OFSTED Monitoring Visit September 2018 [50030095 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁸ OFSTED Monitoring Visit June 2019 [50088564 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](#)

- 9.2.1 The House of Commons **Report: Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities**, April 2019¹⁹ gives a comprehensive national picture of the issues for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families. Its opening summary is included for reference in the Appendices to this report. It noted inequalities in service responses nationally and locally over a long period. National policy was found to be overwhelmingly focused on planning and accommodation issues to the detriment of other key service areas. There were problems with a lack of an overarching strategy and short-term funding of projects. There was low trust between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and public services, due to historic and ongoing discrimination. This report has found clear parallels to the situation in Surrey.
- 9.2.2 Within Surrey there had been an overarching Strategy for Work with Gypsy and Traveller Families from 2014. **Brighter Futures for Gypsy and Traveller Children and Young People in Surrey 2014-17** measures the progress of that strategy. It was evaluated in 2017 when the Strategy came to an end²⁰.
- 9.2.3 The Evaluation noted that Surrey had one of the largest populations of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers of any local authority. This community represented a significant ethnic minority group for the County. The **Brighter Futures** Report made several recommendations, which, among others, included:
- **The Brighter Futures Project Officer** post should be continued, to engage directly across all Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers communities acting as a conduit to support unmet needs, and to continue to facilitate Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers' participation and community engagement as part of Surrey's Early Help approach.
 - **The Strategy Leadership Group** should continue to oversee progress and make links with other key local partnerships.
 - **Data** should be regularly analysed against national performance.
 - **Accommodation** High level leadership, at Chief Executive level, was to be sought to address the perceived accommodation gaps for Surrey's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families. Challenges were noted to include identifying available land, a complex and changing legislative framework, and prejudice against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- 9.2.4 The **Better Futures** Report was a key document which provides a view of the local social policy and provision landscape for Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers Families at the start of period for this Review, 2017. As such it provides a useful context in which to analyse and learn from the work done subsequently in a wider systems perspective, where one case may be an example of how well local services were responding to a specific ethnic section of the population, to help safeguard its children.

¹⁹ [Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities - Women and Equalities Committee \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk) April 2019

²⁰ The report appears to be no longer available for public access. A video about is available. [Brighter Futures for Gypsy and Traveller Children and Young People in Surrey | Surrey Information Point](#)

- 9.2.5 In seeking to establish the outcome of these recommendations from the **Brighter Futures Evaluation** since 2017, this present Review has been provided with the following statement:

“Surrey County Council developed a Brighter Futures Strategy for Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers communities in 2014. This strategy was multi-agency and sought to tackle local inequalities and improve outcomes for Surrey’s Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers children and young people. The action plan was timebound, from 2014- 2017, with the recognition that many issues for Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers communities are long-standing and entrenched, so the actions were to be part of an ongoing approach to working with Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers families, children and young people to improve their outcomes and aspirations. The strategy focussed on 0–19-year-olds but included broader issues relating to the needs of Surrey Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers families and communities where these impact upon children and young people’s wellbeing. Key networks were established during this period and the health sub-group of the Brighter Future’s Strategy helped to make the case for the Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers Outreach Project delivered by Children and Family Health Surrey. This team alongside Surrey’s Race Equality and Minority Achievement (REMA) team, and the Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers Advice and Guidance officer from Surrey Community Action have regular contact and interaction with Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers communities across Surrey.”

- 9.2.6 **Recent developments 2020** This Safeguarding Practice Review was also informed that a new local Strategic Group to oversee multi-agency responses to need and for services to the local Gypsy, Roma and Travellers Community was being established in 2020. The Lead Reviewer was able to meet with the Lead Commissioners of that Group, to share the emerging findings of this Review and contribute to the Terms of Reference which were being drawn up; including to embed governance of the new Strategy in the Surrey Community Safety Partnership, Surrey Health and Well-being Board and the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Key Lessons from the Systemic Review of this case

The underlying principles of the approaches to safeguarding and supporting the B Family. The need to hold in mind a contextual safeguarding approach

- 9.3 A key challenge in this case is the shift from a recognition of the contextual / community safeguarding problem, namely risks to the children from community violence on the Site and how the family managed this, to a more traditional nuclear-family focus. There was only a limited co-ordinated multi-agency approach to the community violence looking at its causes and impacts on all the children including those in other families. It is understood that, later, there were parallel and different responses for different families.

- 9.4 In 2017 research into and understanding of **contextual safeguarding** was still developing. The term and approach were not adopted into **Working Together to Safeguard Children**²¹ until 2018 by which time for this case the family specific response had resulted in Family Court Proceedings. Contextual safeguarding recognises that some forms of harm to children are from outside a family; examples can be exploitation, particularly sexual exploitation and more usually exploitation through criminal exploitation, such as gangs or county lines. These dynamics were not found in this case which may be a reason why a contextual community-based approach was not seen as a solution. The important difference is the need to recognise that the source of harm is potentially

²¹ [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

community based, rather than familial, and will require a different response. A response which may not necessarily be led by Children's Social Care, although Social Care should be full partners where children may be at risk. Where community violence is the source of harm leadership would probably rest with Police or Community Safety Services.

9.5 A wider, more co-ordinated **anti-social behaviour approach** was considered as a way of managing the inter-family violence. Police, Social Care and Traveller Site Management sought legal advice. This review has been advised that local experience was that the standard of evidence required for court actions under the **Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014** was high. (*This was not, however, the view of the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller consultant to this review from a wider geographical perspective.*) It was assessed locally, on legal advice, that there was probably insufficient evidence to secure court orders under the Act. Warning letters were sent to the families.

9.6 Information provided to this Review by the Police confirms that management responses to and investigations into violence in complex situations where there are additional cultural dynamics need to ensure that front line officers are suitably culturally aware and skilled with cultural competence; officers should also be supported by enhanced supervision. Police Officers attending and investigating violent or traumatic domestic, family or community-based incidents must be guided and supported to consider the potential impact, short and long-term, on children who may be involved, including as witnesses to trauma and intimidation, not just as victims.

9.7 **Recommendation 1** **Surrey Police is recommended to review its Standard Operating Protocols, training and management support arrangements for frontline officers who are required to attend and investigate community based or culturally orientated or (organised) violence. The need to consider an assessment of the impact on cohorts of children and young people as potential victims or witnesses of such violence should be included in that review of procedures, training and management supervision.**

9.8 There is also a question about the extent of the powers and responsibilities the Council has regarding community cohesion and violence within its managed Travellers Sites. This Review was advised that powers are very limited. Yet the Council is acting as a Landlord. The Review was advised that now warning letters would be served more quickly for breach of the behaviour conditions of a Licence to hold a plot on a Council Traveller Site.

9.9 For the B Family the more traditional Social Care led nuclear family approach became the pathway. Hence the use of Family Court Proceedings which agreed the Supervision Order focussed on the parenting and rehousing of the children from the Traveller Site and their community for their safety, rather than on tackling the problem of community violence and its impact. This single-family approach is analysed in the next section.

Overall Management of agency and inter-agency safeguarding of the B children as an example of how well local services were safeguarding children

9.10 **Identification & Referral** The Police notification system to Children's Social Care worked well with regard to recognising the possible risks to the children within an individual family. The Primary School told the review that in the earlier stages, prior to the review period, it was hard to

achieve acceptance that worries about the children met the agreed multi-agency thresholds for assessments.

- 9.11 **Strategy Discussions** It is not clear to this Review that agencies which knew the family and children well were routinely included in Strategy Discussions. Some of these preceded **Working Together 2018** which introduced stronger guidance on the need to include relevant agencies, such as Health. It is important that services which know children or parents well should be included in Strategy Meetings and Discussions.
- 9.12 **Information sharing & Multi-disciplinary assessments and work** The evidence is that this worked well between the core agencies of Social Care, Schools, Community Health, Hospitals and Adult Health, but there was not sufficient involvement of Traveller Site Management, Housing, and Police in the earlier stages of the work. There also seems to be confusion on the part of some services on the role of the Traveller Site Managers and whether they were Traveller Liaison Officers, which they were not.
- 9.13 There was no full recognition of the important role that a local Church was playing in the active support for the family and its work to help Mr and Mrs B to strengthen their parenting. The School was aware of this. It is unfortunate that the whole network did not seek to bring the Church Family Support Practitioner more formally into the Core Group/Child in Need Group. A lesson is to ensure that assessments consider the importance of other local community resources (such as voluntary or faith organisations) that will be able to assist interventions, subject to consent, where necessary.
- 9.14 Given the nature of the community-based violence it is puzzling that the Community Safety Team was not asked to advise or become involved when it had a key role to play. Social Care in the lead role for multi-agency assessments appeared to be unaware of that role.
- 9.15 **Direct work with children – seeing the world through the child’s eyes** There were good accounts of the direct work done with the children to support them sensitively, to understand their needs and to listen to their wishes and feelings. Practitioners from Social Care, Schools, Health Services and the Church were able to assess the strong emotional impacts on the children. The School Practitioners have told this Review about the children’s acute fear from the frequent violence on the Traveller Site (this applied not just to the B children).
- 9.16 **Recognition of the meaning of ethnicity and cultural aspects for the children** It is not clear that the work by all agencies considered fully the importance for the children of their Gypsy, Traveller ethnicity and identity, which were fundamental for them. There was no use of specialist advisors to assist social care practitioners on the possible significance of the cultural behaviours and differences. Mrs B commented that one of the early social workers sought to understand the culture in a positive way. The Primary School was confident in having developed a good understanding of the cultural issues from several years’ involvement with local Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities. They had also appointed a Traveller Champion whom they could consult. This was not the case for Social Care, however. It is not clear how the Police ensured such a culturally sensitive approach.

- 9.17 Some staff believed that they were consulting with a “Traveller Liaison Officer”, but it is not clear that there was such a postholder. The Site Manager may have been seen, wrongly, in this role.
- 9.18 When important decisions were being made about children from such an ethnic minority, including the possibility of removal into care, it would have been important to have sought specialist advice to test with a reliable and independent source statements being made by Parents or other Family members about norms, culture, and way of life.
- 9.19 Strategically, given the size of the Gypsy, Roma and Travellers community in Surrey, it could be argued that there is a need for access to impartial specialist advice to assist staff in any Department when making key decisions about children, adults or housing, etc. It is probably not possible or practical for such a resource to be a permanent in-house resource; thus, arrangements should be considered to enable officers to access reliable, independent advice from external sources. In a similar way to which interpreting services would be provided when English is not spoken.
- 9.20 **Recommendation 2 Surrey Council should consider how best to ensure specialist advice is available to its officers to ensure that they take into account the ethnic and cultural needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller service users when undertaking assessments and planning services.**

Child in Need and Child Protection processes – Core Groups and Child in Need Meetings

- 9.21 This Review has noted that this part of the safeguarding children system did not always work well. Child Protection Conferences met at the required frequency to review progress of Child Protection Plans. However, although Core Groups Meetings and Child in Need Meetings were probably held at the correct intervals there was not always a record of the meeting showing how the Plans to safeguard the children were progressing, being monitored and amended as required. Actions beyond the control of Social Care were allowed to drift.
- 9.22 This gap in the Core Group updating the written Child Protection Plan has to be understood in the systemic context of what was happening overall in the Social Care Department at the time; it was not functioning well, as the Inspections and OFSTED visits show. This Review has been advised that internal quality assurance systems are now in place to monitor these Child in Need and Child Protection processes. The most recent OFSTED Monitoring Visit of 2019 corroborates this.
- 9.23 Core Groups and Child in Need Meetings are meetings required by statutory guidance for the most vulnerable children in a Local Authority area who require a multi-agency safeguarding plan. Agencies which were required to support the safeguarding of these children did not always attend or report on their actions to progress the plans. Some have advised this Review that they did not receive invitations, which Social Care believes were sent.
- 9.24 **Recommendation 3 The Social Care Department should review the way that Child Protection Conferences, Core Groups and Child in Need Meetings are convened and how their membership is agreed to ensure that services which are essential are aware of the duty to attend or report on their own work, as required.**

- 9.25 In late 2020 a Thematic Review of the working of Core Groups audited 130 children's records. The effectiveness of the Core Group, the overall safety of the child and the quality of the minutes were evaluated. The audits found that the child's overall safety and focus on their experience was a strength, however the quality and effectiveness of the core group minutes required improvement. In the majority of records either effectiveness of practice or the quality of the minutes were found not to meet agreed consistent practice standards. In these cases drift was frequently a concern. Work is in place to improve this. Practice guidance and procedures in respect of Core Groups has been refreshed. Monthly audits will continue to monitor the quality. An area of continued discussion relates to who should chair the Core Group.
- 9.26 **Recommendation 4 The Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership should request and monitor quarterly quality assurance reports on the operation of Core Groups and Child in Need meetings, including essential attendance and the oversight of multi-agency child protection and child in need plans.**
- 9.27 Not all Council Departments required in this case appear to have understood that this is part of a statutory process. It is not clear what work had been done in Surrey to assist other Council and District Council Departments, working in parallel to Children's Services, to understand the multi-agency safeguarding children processes and their roles and responsibilities within them and how **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018** (updated 2020) applied to them.
- 9.28 **Recommendation 5 Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership and Surrey Children's Services is recommended to review how key Council and District Council Departments and Partner Agencies understand their wider corporate and statutory roles and responsibilities under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and Working Together 2018; and how this duty reaches down to relevant staff. It is recommended that there should be a register of the named Safeguarding Lead in each relevant department to whom individual cases can be referred and escalated, as needed.**
- 9.29 A systems challenge for these essential group processes and their frequency is the statutory timescales within which such meetings (or equivalent processes) should take place. This case shows a wider common issue which is the need to hold meetings throughout the year and potentially during school holidays. Schools are often one of the most important agencies to be represented in such meetings as a service which would usually see children most days in term times and thus provide a vital safeguard.
- 9.30 **Use of Written Agreements** On three separate occasions Children's Social Care asked either Mr or Mrs B, or both, to sign a written agreement about parental behaviours or actions. These were separate from the Child Protection Plan and from the formal agreement that was used as part of a pre-court process in the Public Law Outline, initiated in November 2017. There is little research into the efficacy of such written agreements where parents are asked to sign a document to say that they will or will not do something. Such as there is suggests that they are not useful. Key questions include how such agreements will be tested or enforced; and how are they shared with Partner Agencies so that other Practitioners are aware of the parental behaviours which are to be monitored? The B Family breached the agreements, but it is not clear what action was taken, although the case did later proceed to the Public Law Outline and then to Court. **Surrey Children's Social Care may wish to review the use of such agreements and their efficacy**

and provide specific guidance on their use, including the role of partner agencies in supporting them.

9.31 **Supervision Order ending when the possible harm had not been resolved** Concerns were discovered in relation to the parenting of the children within the B Family, including the parents' inability to protect the children from the community violence, which was not necessarily within the parents' control. The Family Court agreed that the threshold for significant harm had been met and that a Supervision Order would provide the authority to monitor and support the family. All parties agreed that there were no grounds to remove the children into care; but that had been considered. The Court has been reported to want the issue of re-housing to be resolved as quickly as possible, although that is not within the remit of a Social Care Department, but rather the wider Local Authority, where it has housing responsibility. In Surrey, which is a two-tier authority, Housing responsibilities rest with the District Councils not the County Council. This is an inherent systemic challenge for the multi-agency safeguarding network around individual cases and the Safeguarding Children Partnership at a strategic level which may have to advocate for or negotiate with several sections of the Council. This led to Mrs B moving herself and the younger children off site voluntarily to unsuitable and risky accommodation. The agreed solution of a permanent move to suitable accommodation was never realised.

9.32 The Supervision Order was agreed for one year only, to July 2019. It inherently recognised that the three youngest B children were among Surrey's highest level of need and that they were likely to experience significant harm, but they no longer carried the tag "child protection" as the Child Protection Plans had ended when the Supervision Order was made in summer 2018. Case practitioners were concerned in Spring 2019, as the Supervision Order was coming to the end of its term, that the situation and possible harm had not changed, and steps were initiated to seek to extend the Supervision Order. However, it was agreed finally that sufficient progress had been made and that there were no grounds to seek an extension of the Order.

9.33 There is a question, however, given that the harm was still judged to be present and that there was a strong likelihood that Mrs B and the youngest children would move back to the Traveller Site, whether formal consideration should then have been given to a further period under a Child Protection Plan, when the Supervision Order ended. Any agency could have requested a Child Protection Conference. If agreed, it would have provided an additional level of authority in the work which does not apply in the more voluntary "child in need" approach. **Surrey Children's Social Care may wish to review its procedures with regard to Supervision Orders ceasing and next steps for supporting and monitoring families. It would be beneficial to include the need to seek the view of an Independent Child Protection Coordinator on whether additional safeguards are needed when a Supervision Order ceases but the underlying harm has not been reduced.**

9.34 **Parental assessments, parental engagement and cooperation measuring parental ability to change** There were repeated Child and Family Assessments focussing on the B Family. The children's needs were clearly identified, and steps were put in place to support and safeguard them. Mr B was seen to be a possible concern because of his health and behaviour at times. It is not clear what work was done directly with him to assist him in his parenting role. The focus of work became Mrs B who was increasingly under stress and was eventually diagnosed with depression.

9.35 A key element of Child and Family Assessments must be to measure and support parents' ability to change. It is not clear that evidence-based and proactive parenting programmes were used to help bring about and support sustained change, particularly for Mr B, one of the sources of concern. For a period, a Family Support Worker was involved alongside the Social Worker and this was seen by colleagues in partner services to be valuable support, especially to Mrs B.

9.36 **Use of Family Group Meetings** Mr and Mrs B were not isolated as they were very much part of an extended family. They lived alongside Mr B's parents on the Traveller Site and Mr and Mrs B Senior and Mr B's sister were involved in care of the children and of Mr B, when he was vulnerable. Mr B's sister took over the care of Child A. A formal, independently facilitated, **Family Group Meeting**²² to fully involve the wider family was to be considered but it is not clear why this did not go ahead. It would have been a useful way to explore the strengths and understanding of the wider family and the part they played in the children's lives. Also, it would have tested that they fully understood the Agencies' concerns about the harm to the children and to put forward what their own possible solutions might be. The other adults could also have helped practitioners understand the family's perspective on Gypsy, Roma and Travellers culture and way of life. Family members occasionally attended Core Group or Child in Need Meetings.

9.37 **Use of advocacy** This Review has found no evidence, in the early pre-legal stages, that Mr or Mrs B were advised about or offered advocacy services to support them and help them to understand the complex safeguarding processes that they were going through, including risk of their children being placed in care. Given Mr B's additional vulnerability it could be argued that he may have needed advocacy in his own right to support him in understanding the processes. Mrs B was seen as very competent in her understanding, determination and resilience, but independent advocacy may have assisted her in seeing different perspectives and the Social Care Department's point of view.

9.38 At later stages when the Social Care Department commenced work under the Public Law Outline the family were advised of the need to obtain legal advice. It is not clear how well they understood this as they told Church workers that they had not been advised about entitlement to Legal Aid, when this was fully part of the process and had been advised.

9.39 **Involvement of the voluntary and faith sector in safeguarding children** The Church, including a professionally trained Family Support Worker, was very involved with the B Family and played a key role in provision of family support and other services, as well as matters of Faith. Thought should have been given to them being part of the Child Protection Core Group and Child in Need Group, subject to the B Family agreement. *See Section 6 where the Church's role is explored more fully.*

9.40 **Recommendation 6 The role of the Faith and Voluntary Sector Strategic Overview**

The Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership should review its structure and processes to ensure that there is adequate representation for the Partnership, at appropriate levels, from the Faith and Voluntary Sectors at a macro-level such as Diocese or equivalent for other Faith

²² **Family Group Meeting** An independently facilitated process where key family members and or friends come together, without social workers to seek to suggest solutions to the concerns assessed by Children's Services. <https://frg.org.uk/family-group-conferences/>

sectors, especially where they provide direct county wide welfare or support services to children, young people and / or vulnerable parents.

This will enable the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership to influence and monitor the quality of safeguarding within large county wide organisations and its delivery in localities and ensure congruence and effective multi-agency working across the Faith, Voluntary and Statutory Sectors.

As an addition the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership may wish to consider inviting such organisations to provide assurance equivalent to Section 11 audits.

9.41 Recommendation 7 The role of the Faith and Voluntary Sector Practice

The Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership should ask Children's Services and Early Help Providers to review and put in place arrangements to ensure that colleague practitioners from the Faith or Voluntary sector, who are working directly with families on Child in Need or Child Protection Plans, or families who have an Early Help assessment, can be included in Core Groups and Team Around the Family Meetings, as appropriate.

9.42 **Management guidance and quality assurance to the case** This case was unusual, complex and out of the usual scope of social work given the community violence at its core and the need to engage services which were not usual partners in child protection work. Supervision and Quality Assurance systems (through the Child Protection Conferences) were in place, but they did not pick up the need for a different approach.

9.43 In addition, there was involvement by senior managers, lawyers and Panels to sanction the Family Proceedings and agree costs for Bed and Breakfast or repairs to the house where the small caravan was located. It is surprising, therefore, that senior managers did not recognise that the case was making no progress and needed different approaches to either the community violence, to the non-attendance at key statutory meetings by other Council Departments' staff or for the need to re-locate the family; and which were beyond the control of a social worker or social work team manager. A creative corporate response was required, which was likely to need Director level involvement.

9.44 **Escalation** The network of practitioners was clearly frustrated by the lack of progress and lack of solutions to the community violence and re-location. Any one of the Core Group Practitioners could have escalated the case to senior managers or to the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership. The review has been informed that there is now a revised Escalation Policy. **The Partnership may wish to review how this is working to ensure that Agencies and their staff are confident in its use.**

9.45 Surrey and District Councils / Children's Services Priority Re-Housing Policies

The B Family were assessed as being in the highest category of safeguarding need. A major source of risk to them was accommodation based; initially the community-based violence focussed on the Traveller Site and later, for the younger children, the inadequate interim living arrangements. Finding alternative suitable accommodation, was a key priority element of the Child Protection Plan but it was never achieved. The Court was said to be keen that suitable accommodation

should be found for them. The B Children were among the Council's highest level of priority but for over a year lived in unsafe and unsuitable conditions.

9.46 This review has shown that frontline workers saw the need to resolve the accommodation problem but were unable to do so. A challenge was the family's wish to have their culture and way of life respected and their belief that a house, if one had been available, was not a suitable solution, unless it met certain conditions to respect the outdoor life. It is understood that the Council has a Priority Re-Housing Policy for use between the District Councils and Children's Services with regard to nominating for priority re-housing in special cases. Although there was liaison between Housing and Social Care there is no information to show that a Priority Re-Housing Protocol was considered or used to resolve the problem.

9.47 The Review was advised that the Priority Re-Housing Protocol was currently being revised.

9.48 **Recommendation 8 Priority Rehousing Arrangements**

Surrey Children's Social Care and District Councils in undertaking the review of the Priority Housing Protocol should seek to ensure that it meets the needs of children in need of safeguarding under Child Protection Plans or subject of Court Orders under the Children Act, where accommodation is a key element of protecting children.

All relevant Departments of the County, District and Borough Councils should be required to work together to resolve the accommodation issues where they are a source of risk.

In revising the Protocol thought should also be given to inclusion and equality so that it addresses any specific needs for identified and recognised minority groups, such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children or families.

10 Recommendations

Recommendations included in section 9 are re-grouped here and if endorsed by the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership will form an Action Plan for improvements to be monitored by the Partnership.

10.1 **Recommendation 1** Surrey Police is recommended to review its Standard Operating Protocols, training and management support arrangements for frontline officers who are required to attend and investigate community based or culturally orientated or (organised) violence. The need to consider an assessment of the impact on cohorts of children and young people as potential victims or witnesses of such violence should be included in that review of procedures, training and management supervision.

10.2 **Recommendation 2 Provision of Specialist Advice to Officers working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities**

Surrey Council should consider how best to ensure specialist advice is available to its officers to ensure that they take into account the ethnic and cultural needs of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller service users when undertaking assessments and planning services.

Management of Child Protection Plans and Child in Need Plans through Child Protection Conferences and Core Groups, and Child in Need Meetings

10.3 Recommendation 3 Ensuring the correct membership of Core Groups and Child in Need groups

The Social Care Department should review the way that Child Protection Conferences, Core Groups and Child in Need Meetings are convened and how their membership is agreed to ensure that services which are essential are aware of the duty to attend or report on their own work, as required.

10.4 Recommendation 4 Quality assurance of Core Groups and Child in Need Meetings

The Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership should request and monitor quarterly quality assurance reports on the operation of Core Groups and Child in Need meetings, including essential attendance and the oversight of multi-agency child protection and child in need plans.

10.5 Recommendation 5 Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership and Surrey Children's Services is recommended to review how key Council and District Council Departments and Partner Agencies understand their wider corporate and statutory roles and responsibilities under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and Working Together 2018; and how this duty reaches down to relevant staff. It is recommended that there should be a register of the named Safeguarding Lead in each relevant department to whom individual cases can be referred and escalated, as needed.

10.6 Recommendation 6 The role of the Faith and Voluntary Sector Strategic

The SSCP should review its structure and processes to ensure that there is adequate representation for the Partnership, at appropriate levels, from the Faith and Voluntary Sectors at a macro-level such as Diocese or equivalent for other Faith sectors, especially where they provide direct county wide welfare or support services to children, young people and / or vulnerable parents.

This will enable the SSCP to influence and monitor the quality of safeguarding within large county-wide organisations and its delivery in localities and ensure congruence and effective multi-agency working across the Faith, Voluntary and Statutory Sectors.

As an addition the SSCP may wish to consider inviting such organisations to provide assurance equivalent to Section 11 audits.

10.7 Recommendation 7 The role of the Faith and Voluntary Sector Practice

The Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership should ask Children's Services and Early Help Providers to review and put in place arrangements to ensure that colleague practitioners from the Faith or Voluntary sector, who are working directly with families on Child in Need or Child Protection Plans, or families who have an Early Help assessment, can be included in Core Groups and Team Around the Family Meetings, as appropriate.

10.8 Recommendation 8 Priority Rehousing Arrangements

Surrey Children's Social Care and District Councils in undertaking the review of the Priority Housing Protocol should seek to ensure that it meets the needs of children in need of safeguarding under Child Protection Plans or subject of Court Orders under the Children Act, where accommodation is a key element of protecting children.

All relevant Departments of the County Council, District and Borough Councils should be required to work together to resolve the accommodation issues where they are a source of risk.

In revising the Protocol thought should also be given to inclusion and equality so that it addresses any specific needs for identified and recognised minority groups, such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children or families.

10.9 Action Already Taken

County Wide Strategy for coordinating services to the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Communities

During the Review an Interim Recommendation was made to the Chair of the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership about the need for the Council and Partners to have a co-ordinated Multi-Agency Strategic Approach to work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities in Surrey. Work had already started on this in parallel and a meeting was held with Senior Managers, The Chair of the Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Lead Reviewer to ensure that the lessons from this Review were included in the Terms of Reference for the new Strategy Group which is to lead this overarching strategy. The Strategic Leadership Group will report to the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership, the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Community Safety Partnership and the Safeguarding Adults Board.

July 2021

Malcolm Ward, B.Soc.Sc, Master of Social Work
Independent Reviewer

Appendices

House of Commons Report: Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, April 2019

[Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities - Women and Equalities Committee \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/news-parliament-2017/grt-report-published-17-19/)

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have the worst outcomes of any ethnic group across a huge range of areas, including education, health, employment, criminal justice and hate crime. Too often local authorities and public services fail to differentiate between different groups who have different needs. Our inquiry has found that, while many inequalities have existed for a long time, there has been a persistent failure by both national and local policy-makers to tackle them in any sustained way. This failure has led to services that are ill-equipped to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people to use services that they need and are entitled to.

The Committee did not set out to tackle issues relating to Traveller sites or encampments but to tackle a wide range of other policy issues often eclipsed by issues of accommodation. Given that three in four Gypsies and Travellers live in non-caravan accommodation, we are deeply concerned that Government policy-making is overwhelmingly focused on planning and accommodation issues. Other important areas of public policy and service provision seem to consist of small-scale projects that are funded for a short time and then not taken forward strategically.

Specialist support in education and health that has been put in place has not been sustained and is increasingly reliant on small, voluntary agencies. We have found that trust is low between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and public services, due to historic and ongoing discrimination. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people feel that they are, at best, ignored and, at worst, actively discriminated against in public services and policy making. While pockets of good practice exist, these tend to be driven by committed individuals developing creative solutions to overcome barriers. When individuals move on, the trust that has been built up dissipates, along with any progress that has been made.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have every right to live their lives according to their values and beliefs within the law that that applies to every UK resident. But we have concluded that actions that fall outside the law are not as effectively tackled by local authorities, law enforcement agencies and other public bodies as they are for settled communities. This creates unnecessary tensions and prejudiced attitudes. This also lets down vulnerable members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, especially those suffering domestic abuse and children who are not receiving their legal right to education. This is completely unacceptable and must be addressed through both sensitive work by public bodies and through the Communities being willing to work with them in good faith.

See also [See also https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/news-parliament-2017/grt-report-published-17-19/](https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/news-parliament-2017/grt-report-published-17-19/)

Membership of the Review Panel

Independent Lead Reviewer / Report Author: Malcolm Ward

Panel Chair: Director of Corporate Parenting, Children's Social Care, Surrey County Council

Surrey County Council Representatives

Service Manager, Surrey Social Care Family Safeguarding Service

Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Service Manager

Area Schools Manager, Surrey County Council

Principal Lawyer, Surrey County Council

Manager Surrey Council Traveller Sites

Surrey Police

Statutory Review Lead, Public Protection Support Unit,

Surrey-wide CCG Designated Doctor for Safeguarding

Safeguarding Manager Surrey NHS Services

Children and Family Court Advisory Support Services

Manager

Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership

Development Manager

Senior Team Administrator

The Panel Members were all independent of the management of the case

July 2021