

**Extract from Report “Child Sexual Exploitation – making a difference” Maggie Blyth
Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children’s Board June 2015**

There are two areas in particular that require further work involving the regulation and use of taxi drivers and the commissioning of services to provide help and ‘I have no doubt the Kingfisher team would have been very helpful to us if they had existed 12 years ago.’ Oxfordshire county council has set a high bar for ensuring the children it is responsible for are transported safely, but maintaining such standards requires robust strategic co-ordination across different departments within the county council. Oxfordshire licensing authorities (district councils) need to improve how they share information about drivers, delegate enforcement powers and require taxi drivers to complete safeguarding training as part of any knowledge test.

The regulation of the contracts to transport vulnerable children across Oxfordshire and the licensing of taxi drivers should be more robust.

The district councils are committed to sharing information to improve the regulation of taxi licensing across Oxfordshire and deal with safeguarding issues in a pro-active way. However, collaboration across all the district councils is needed, with monitoring of this, to overcome the challenge presented by licensing rules that make it increasingly common for a driver to be licensed in one area but drive a private hire vehicle in another area. This has the effect of cancelling out any council’s attempt to protect the public by raising the bar for its licensing criteria. Information exchange between licensing authorities needs to be set on a formal footing to enable the effective assessment of whether a driver passes the ‘Fit and Proper Person’ test. This determines whether a license is refused or revoked due to conduct.

We recommend that licensing of taxi drivers should be linked to mandatory safeguarding training across Oxfordshire and the rest of the country. Work has begun to co-ordinate practice across the district council areas and local police area command areas on the roll out of ‘Say Something If You See Something’ training to hotels, guest houses, door staff, parks and street scene staff and others who can act as ‘eyes and ears’ on the ground.

Oxfordshire county council and all district councils must work more closely together to ensure that the regulation of the contracts to transport vulnerable children and taxi licensing across Oxfordshire is more robust.

Summary of risks and gaps

There should be core national standards for the licensing of taxis and private hire vehicles which include safeguarding factors. This would help to eliminate risks because of differential standards across neighbouring licensing authorities. The standards should include mandatory safeguarding training and the requirement for a driver to prove that the majority of their work is in the area in which they are licensed.

For Oxfordshire County Council, with district councils, to develop a single joint operator framework covering all aspects of transportation of children and taxi licensing arrangements to ensure the highest standards of practice are in place to safeguard children.