

Local Members Interest
N/A

Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee - Thursday 22 April 2021

Contextual Safeguarding and Vulnerable Adolescents

Recommendations

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Notes the considerable progress made on Contextual Safeguarding; and
- b. Receives the information set out in this report to provide them with a clear understanding of how the County Council is meeting the statutory requirements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are being exploited or at risk of being exploited.

Report of Helen Riley, Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities

Summary

1. Child Sexual Exploitation and Children and Young People Missing from Home or Care have been a key strategic priority for the County Council and its partners since 2014. Leadership and accountability for this work area is supported through robust governance and scrutiny arrangements across the wider Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent partnership. It continues to be a priority for Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) and regular reports are received through these arrangements as well as through Staffordshire's Safer and Strong Communities Select Committee and the Missing Strategic Board.
2. Following the OFSTED Inspection and subsequent report in March 2019 the recommendation made to the Local Authority was that:
3. *'the Local Authority's response to children exposed to contextualised risk is not well developed and joined up. For a small number of young people who are at high risk, the response is not robust enough.'*
4. Contextual Safeguarding is a theoretical response to safeguarding vulnerable adolescents outside of their family. Contextual Safeguarding has been developed by Bedfordshire University and this theoretical framework is fast becoming the practice model in safeguarding vulnerable adolescents. Working Together Revised Guidance December 2020 changed the definition of Contextual Safeguarding to "Abuse outside of the family home".
5. To support improvement within this area there is a Contextual Safeguarding Implementation Plan in place which is a live working document to ensure learning during development can be incorporated into the plan. Remaining actions from the

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Action plan and learning from the ECPAT* audits have been incorporated into the plan. (*EPCAT is a leading children's rights organisation working to protect children from child trafficking and transnational child exploitation). Progress on all these plans is reported below:

Report

Strategy

6. There is now a Child Exploitation Strategy shared by the Safeguarding Boards across the city and the county. Plans were in place to launch the strategy in March 2020, but this was delayed due to the pandemic. The strategy was officially launched on the 7th December 2020 at the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Virtual Child Exploitation Conference. We continue to be supported by the Contextual Safeguarding Network and Dr Carlene Firmin (founder of Contextual safeguarding) joined us at the launch of the strategy.

Training and Development

7. Extensive training has been delivered to all partners including but not limited to, local authority, police, health, schools, probation, voluntary sector, foster carers and commissioned services. Feedback on the training has been positive and this has helped shape future practice.
8. Work is now underway to develop level 2 Child Exploitation Training which will be available through SSCB to all partners.
9. The launch of the Child Exploitation Strategy on the 9th December 2020 involved over 250 professionals and focused on spotting and understanding the early signs of child exploitation. The launch involved people with lived experiences of exploitation and included the voices of parents and children. Plans are in place to repeat the conference on the 4th March 2021, due to the significant interest in this event.
10. We have several champions representing all children and family services across the Local Authority who are working with us to share specialist knowledge, embed good practice and raise professional awareness.
11. 'Top Tips' guides on what to look out for have been developed for Team Managers and the Police Harm Reduction Hubs. Additionally, 'Top Tips' guides have also been developed on the mapping of associations and safety planning with children to reduce the risks of exploitation.

Resources

12. To support the development of this work we have built some extra capacity within the existing service which means that there is now an additional CSE Co-ordinator and Administrator. Work is now underway to identify permanent funding for these additional posts.

Identification and screening

13. To ensure that we are identifying our vulnerable adolescents and considering all aspects of exploitation the existing Risk Factor Matrix (RFM) has been revised to include all exploitation. The Vulnerable Adolescents RFM and guidance can be found on the Safeguarding Board website together with the referral pathway. This RFM has been developed utilising best practice from Knowsley, recommended by Dr Carlene Firmin and has been adapted for Staffordshire. The RFM is continually reviewed with partners as our knowledge and experiences increases.

Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Panels (MACE)

14. These are the panels which will receive the referrals from a completed Risk Factor Matrix (RFM). Once the RFM has been received, all the information is cross referenced with intelligence and links made between vulnerable children and those causing them harm. Checks across various vulnerabilities are made across several systems which enables the panels to be informed about individual risk factors including SEND, Missing, Prevent, Safeguarding and Children who are in our care or known to other targeted services. Vulnerable locations are also identified. Eco maps are developed to support the identification of children at risk of exploitation. The focus of the panels is disruption and the core panel members will utilise the Home Office guidance on Child Exploitation to ensure that those causing harm to our children are prevented from doing so.
15. There are now 6 panels across Staffordshire in recognition that more children will be identified across more than one vulnerability. Panels are now held in Stafford, Moorlands, Newcastle, Burton/Utttoxeter, Tamworth/Lichfield and South Staffs. All panels are now live and operational. The panels are chaired by Heads of Service from Children and Family services and they regularly meet, to ensure that practice and chairing arrangements are consistent whilst considering local variances.

Pathways and Interventions

16. Our commissioned service for CSE and Missing is still available from Catch 22 and there is no change to this contract. Where children are identified as at risk of Child Exploitation, referrals to the YOS Prevention Service can be made.
17. Catch 22 has also received some short-term funding and has developed a pilot which has a targeted intervention programme for children at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation. This pilot commenced in March 2020 and is for 12 months. This programme is currently being evaluated.

Performance and Impact

18. We need to prove that what we are doing is making a difference and we are developing the performance framework so that we can demonstrate impact and identify areas for improvement, best practice and trends. To support this area of work we have established a strategic Child Exploitation Steering Group which will have responsibility for driving forward improvement in this key area. The Steering

Group reports into the SSCB and is working with the national Tackling Child Exploitation Programme to develop a partnership framework.

Moving Forward and Next Steps

19. We will be closely monitoring partners' engagement and evaluating impact of the panels with our partners. We are also developing internal data collection and reporting through the Power BI desktop, which will have the ability to cross reference this data with other vulnerability data such as missing, known to YOS, children known to have an Education and Health Care Plan. Additionally, an IT programme to support the development of the mapping process is being devolved which has identified funding to support the project.
20. Over the next 12 months we will be continuing to increase and promote professional awareness in relation to exploitation, so that practitioners become adept to spotting the early signs to prevent children becoming entrenched with gang association / involvement, being trafficked for the purpose of exploitation and to prevent them from being at risk of serious significant harm.
21. It is proposed that we will continue to strengthen an organisational culture of prevention and deterrence through workforce development both internally and via wider partnership training through the Safeguarding Board. We are continuing to work in partnership with all agencies to ensure that we continue to have a multi-agency approach towards disruption, promote a hostile environment to child exploitation and ensure that adults of concern who abuse our children are disrupted and prosecuted.
22. We will continue to not only consider and target adults of concern but locations of concern that require a multi-agency disruption response to creating safer spaces for both children and the community. We continue to build positive links with the district councils and housing who provide valuable contributions to this disruption.
23. We will continue to work with the national Tackling Child Exploitation Programme and the SSCB to fully develop the partnership performance framework.

Numbers of children

24. From November 2019 six panels were rolled out across the County. In March 2020 panels were suspended for a short period due to Covid 19 being reinstated on a virtual basis at the start of May 2020 at the point panels changed to MACE – Multi Agency Child Exploitation Panels to be aligned with the National picture.
25. Between May 2019 and April 2020, a total of 275 children were discussed at panel, which is an increase on the previous year of 103 children. This increase was expected given panels now consider all children who are at risk of exploitation rather than focusing on child sexual exploitation.
26. Most children discussed at panel are between the ages of 14-17. Young people who are over 18 are also considered with their consent.

Impact of panels

27. The information gained from individual referrals and multi agency intelligence is mapped so that professionals can agree actions to disrupt adults who present a risk to children. In addition, locations that are identified as posing a risk to child exploitation are identified and actions are agreed for a multi-agency approach to disruption.

Examples of good practice

28. Concerns were raised at a Partnership meeting following several incidents linked to exploitation in a specified location and a neighbourhood assessment was undertaken. This was led by a District Council and several changes were made to the location including changes to the physical location where appropriate, installation of CCTV, education for residents and advice and information for business owners and licensing departments.
29. Information from the MACE panels for individual children is demonstrating that the risks for children are reducing by focusing on disruption of the adults posing the risks and implementing support and safety plans for our children. A good individual example is a child who has been supported by a lived experience mentor through Catch 22, supported into training and community activities and the adults have been disrupted. This has led to a reduction in the risk of exploitation and the child feeling safe and supported.

Link to Strategic Plan

Outcomes

30. The people of Staffordshire will feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their local community.

Priorities

31. Ensure children and families have a network of support to help manage their own problems and stay safe.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

32. This report is a follow on from previous reports the Committee have received regarding the LA's approach to tackling child exploitation.

Community Impact

33. CIA has been completed according to LA requirements.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

None.

Contact Details

Report Commissioner: Chris Heeley
Job Title: Assistant Director for Early Help, Safeguarding and YOS
Telephone No.: 07976191118
E-Mail Address: christopher.heeley@staffordshire.gov.uk