



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -
7 NOVEMBER 2023**

**LEICESTERSHIRE'S RESPONSE TO TACKLING CHILD CRIMINAL
EXPLOITATION**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of the work and progress of the Child Exploitation, Missing and Modern Slavery Hub.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) remains a strategic priority for Leicestershire County Council, and the county council remains an active member of the Child Exploitation Regional Leads group. In 2019, Leicestershire County Council launched the Child Criminal Exploitation Framework 2019-2021, and this was adopted as the East Midlands Child Criminal Exploitation Framework. Leicestershire County Council are in the process of updating this framework so that it continues to underpin the commitment and response to young people who are victims of any form of Child Criminal Exploitation.

Background

3. Leicestershire County Council's Child Exploitation (CE) Service are located at South Wigston Police Station, which also houses the Police Child Abuse Investigation Unit, Child Exploitation Team and Missing Team. The Vulnerability Hub, as it is called, enables the succinct response to child exploitation by all agencies, creating a multi-agency response in line with the government's recommendations to combat the national threat of all forms of CCE and respond to the local prominence of incidents of CCE and Missing children and young people.
4. The multi-agency approach within the Hub continues to benefit children within Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (LLR) at risk of exploitation on a daily basis. The Terms of Reference for the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) partnership is currently being updated and provides a guide detailing the operating procedures for all multi-agency meetings held within the Hub (please see paragraphs 6 and 7 for further details). Audits of the meetings and child exploitation cases held within the Hub take place on a monthly basis to assess compliance and provide assurance of

improved outcomes for children and young people. The outcome of the audits is shared with the CE Operations Group and informs learning within the Hub.

5. A Daily Risk Management Meeting (DRMM) attended by representatives from LLR, the Police and Health partners is held at the Hub where all incidents of suspected exploitation or children going missing in the prior 24 hours are reviewed. If assessed as being high risk, the Hub assigns the child to a detective and a social worker.
6. To review the multi-agency and safeguarding response to high risk exploited children, a fortnightly Operational Review Meeting (FORM) is held. The same agencies involved in the DRMM's attend these meetings to provide updates on the safeguarding intervention that is taking place for children identified as being at high risk of exploitation, and to also provide multi-agency oversight and agreement if a child is downgraded to medium or low risk.

Activity and Updates

7. In May 2023, Sam Stone became the new Service Manager for the Child Exploitation Service and now represents the County Council in attendance at the regional meetings and CE Operations group.
8. Building on from the Harm outside the Home funding, the County Council are due to introduce a new child protection pathway for those children where it is clear the primary harm, they are experiencing is not attributed to the family home. The Community Safety Plan is a multi-agency approach to keep the child safe and address the issues of harm outside of the home.
9. The findings of the Peer Study (girls' group) have assisted the County Council's learning of supporting vulnerable children in friendship groups that are at risk of exploitation. Preventative intervention with young people and working closely with schools to provide early identification of these children is beginning to develop. Schools within North West Leicestershire and the Melton borough have engaged well with the CE Service.
10. The development of the child exploitation website, which draws together information on all aspects of child exploitation and extra familial harm is a project legacy from the Harm outside the Home funding. The website is updated regularly by the Team Managers within CE Service and is a useful resource for professionals and parents to gain further knowledge and access support if they have a concern about a child being exploited.
11. The development of the edge of care service is now complete and the team, now named Families Together, will begin working with children and families from 6 November 2023. The Families Together Team will be working intensively with children and their families to rebuild family relationships and provide stability for children whilst also ensuring their safety. The team will work closely with the Hub due to the links in family breakdowns and children going missing from home.

Performance and Activity

12. A range of data is collected on behalf of the multi-agency CE team on a quarterly basis and analysed by Leicestershire County Council's Business Intelligence Service. The data includes:
 - i. Child Sexual Exploitation referrals and outcomes
 - ii. Child Criminal Exploitation referrals and outcomes
 - iii. Risky Adults/Peer profiles
 - iv. Missing children
13. CSE data for Leicestershire in Quarter 1 recorded 32 referrals. The Child Exploitation Screening tool, previously known as a Risk Assessment tool (RAT) was completed for all 32 referrals. The data from this screening tool indicates that online exploitation remains the biggest concern within CSE, with the largest number of children falling into the 14-15 years age group. For the past three years data collated across LLR and the Police indicates CSE is prevalent within the 14-15 year age group.
14. CCE data for Leicestershire in Quarter 1 recorded 35 referrals. As with CSE the most common age group for this cohort of children is aged 14-15 years. The data collated using the Child Exploitation Screening tool, previously known as the Gang Assessment tool (GAT) reports that 31 children referred are living at home. In terms of area of residence Harborough has generated the most referrals with nine children and Blaby having the next highest referrals with six children. In respect of gender, 84% of referrals were for males.
15. The number of risky adults/peers profile reported in Quarter 1 was eight adults across LLR. Over the last year gender profiles have changed with an escalation of females being recorded in this area. In Quarter 1, three females were recorded as being risky adults/peers profile.
16. Missing data for non-looked after children (non-LAC), shows a slight increase since the last quarter with Quarter 1 recording 107 children going missing from home with 160 missing episodes recorded in total.
17. Missing data for looked after children (LAC) during Quarter 1 was 41 children, slightly lower than the last quarter. Looking at the detail 23 of these children were Leicestershire LAC with 111 missing episodes, whilst 18 children were out of area LAC with 51 missing episodes.
18. A total number of 268 missing return interviews were completed for Leicestershire children, with 257 of these interviews being completed within 72 hours.

Next steps

19. Preparation is underway for the eventuality that the service will receive a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTai) for Serious Youth Violence. Leicestershire County Council are working collaboratively with Health, Police and the Violence Reduction Network (VRN) to prepare for this possible inspection.

20. Leicestershire County Council is committed to accessing live data on those experiencing CSE and CCE. In partnership with the Violence Reduction Network, the County Council's Business Intelligence Service will link in to the VRN's dashboard to provide a system that highlights hotspots within Leicestershire, which will enable the CE Service to provide a targeted and timely response to those experiencing or at risk of child exploitation.
21. Improvements in adolescent services are being considered within an 11+ Transformation work stream. The focus is on ensuring that the policies, guidance and response that are in place reflect the changing nature of children's social care. The CE Service are involved in this planning with the aim to improve services for children who go missing.

Conclusions

22. The report highlights the positive partnership work that has continued to take place within the Hub and the ongoing work built on the Harm outside the Home projects. Moving forward the CE Service is focused on adapting to the changing landscape of child exploitation by improving data collection, so that live information can be used to target intervention where it is needed at the right time.

Background papers

23. Child Exploitation East Midlands:
www.childexploitationeastmidlands.org.uk

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

24. None.

Equality Implications

25. The Child Exploitation Service adheres to the Equality Act 2010 and aligns the practice with the Children and Family Services core values and behaviours that underpin everything that the service does do with children, young people and their families such as being aspirational, being curious, being collaborative, listening to what children and families are telling us, building relationships and improving outcomes for the children and families worked with.

Human Rights Implications

26. As with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, the Child Exploitation Service adheres to the Human Rights Act (1998) and ensures those using and delivering services are supported and respected under the principles of Fairness, Respect, Equality, Dignity and Autonomy. As such, the service is focused on ensuring that all agencies supporting a child being exploited, first and foremost see the child behind the behaviour and to move away from a "blaming" culture.

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