

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



PLYMOUTH
CITY COUNCIL

Date of meeting:	16 February 2022
Title of Report:	Child Exploitation Update and Child Evidence
Lead Member:	Councillor David Downie, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Children and Young People
Lead Strategic Director:	Alison Botham (Director for Childrens Services)
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Your Reference:	Click here to enter text.
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

Information in response to a request from Panel

Recommendations and Reasons

The Committee is asked to note this update on Child Exploitation issues within Plymouth.

Alternative options considered and rejected

None – This report is for information only

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

Relates to Caring council agenda-

- Keep children, young people and adults protected.
- Focus on prevention and early intervention.
- People feel safe in Plymouth.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Information only

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

No issues identified

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

This relates to risk management for the young people at risk of child exploitation in Plymouth. Child exploitation has a significant adverse impact on vulnerable and socially isolated young people, including children in care.

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref. Title of Appendix		Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Definitions of child exploitation							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)		Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Click here to enter text.											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes  Date agreed: 04/02/2022											

Cabinet Member approval:

Councillor David Downie

Date approved: 07/02/2022

1.0 Introduction

This briefing report has been produced at the request of Scrutiny Panel to provide an update on Child Exploitation issues within Plymouth. It builds on the previous report to Scrutiny Panel dated 03 March 2021 (appendix A). Definition of Child Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation are appended for ease and reference. The report gives an overview of how agencies respond to children who go missing. It goes on to give an update on how we as a city respond and tackle child exploitation and gives an update of the Adolescent Safety Framework.

2.0 How we respond to children who go missing in the city

The Reducing Exploitation and Absence from Care and Home team (REACH) are a team of Professional Youth Workers who work with young people who are reported missing. They undertake a Return Home Interview with the young person and direct work with those who may be at risk as a result, including at risk of exploitation.

The Reducing Exploitation and Absence from Care and Home team will complete a Child Exploitation Tool (CE Tool) for every young person who is reported missing unless there has been a recent tool completed and the risks have not changed. This is reviewed by the Senior Professional Youth Worker / Manager.

The team will contact every young person and their parent / carer within 24 hours of the found report to offer and undertake the visit; not all agree to this. Where children/young people are already known to Children Young People and Families Service (CYPFS), the allocated social worker or other professional that has a positive relationship with the young person will be asked to follow up with the young person if they have declined a formal return home interview with the REACH worker.

During completion of the Return Home Interviews, workers are able to gather information and intelligence that can be used to signpost young people and their families and / or carers for appropriate support to reduce the risk of further missing episodes and exploitation as well as alert partners to those people who pose a risk to our young people. This may result in our police colleagues taking direct action to protect children and young people, implementing disruption tactics and targeting risky adults who pose risk to children. This also enables the city to target specific support to specific groups of young people and locations in order to reduce risk.

Since April 2021 there have been 657 missing episodes reported. These missing episodes were attributable to 388 young people. 276 of these young people were open to Children, Young People and Families. 135 were Looked after Children, 21 were on a Child Protection Plan and 120 were on a Child in Need Plan.

The data suggests that the number of young people going missing remains stubbornly consistent over the last year with a number of young people being reported missing on numerous occasions increasing the risk of exploitation. As a result a full review of the interventions and resources available to work with young people has begun so we can understand how we can work best to reduce the risk to them.

The REACH service has recently been moved to sit under the umbrella of the Youth Justice Service in order to improve the response to children and young people at risk of exploitation. Last year 61% of the young people working with the Youth Justice Service (both on statutory orders and voluntary contact)

were reported missing on at least one occasion. The Youth Justice Service aims to prevent young people entering the Youth Justice System service at the earliest opportunity. The IMPACT project aims to work with young people who have been identified as vulnerable to criminality and exploitation. This is a multi-agency approach to engage young people and has a range of specific interventions to assist them to make positive life choices.

3.0 Missing and Child Exploitation Sub Group

The Operational Missing and Child Exploitation (OpMACE) group meets every two weeks to discuss those young people most at risk of exploitation. The meeting is chaired by a Service Manager in the Children Young People and Families Service and is attended by a range of partners including the Police, Education, Youth Justice Service, REACH and Health and 3rd sector agencies.

The Operational MACE's responsibility is to identify those young people most at risk and ensure information is shared effectively across agencies to reduce risk. The group will also identify themes, locations and adults that pose a risk to children so that a multi-agency response can be developed to disrupt activity and protect young people.

Those children who are considered at most risk can be discussed at the meeting. Referrals into the Operational MACE can be brought by the Local Authority and partners.

Below are examples of some of the interventions and disruption tactics identified at OpMACE -

- Police primary tasking will often end up being created with intervention work coming from multi-agencies. For example over the summer concerns were raised regarding young people congregating in a specific area. The OpMACE co-ordinated a response that included detached youth workers, SHARP and Police working together to be present in the area and speaking to young people offering support and advice.
- Representatives from one school in Plymouth raised concerns about 2 large groups of young people who appeared to be organising fights and drug dealing. As a result a police operation was commenced. All young people involved were referred to the IMPACT project run by the Youth Justice Service to offer interventions to both the young person and parents. Joint visits were undertaken by the YJS worker, Police and Community Connections worker. Three of these young people were identified as the most at risk of offending and actions plans agreed by the Child Centred Policing Team were developed to tackle their behaviours.
- Having identified a pattern of concern relating to Child Sexual Exploitation in one area of the city brought to OpMACE following a Return Home Interview, the police were tasked to undertake disruption visits to the identified address of concern. Young people of concern were offered support given by First Light.
- Community Protection Notice warning letters can be issued as a result of information passed in the OpMACE relating to young people being exploited by adults. Evidence gathered from agencies that attend the meeting assists with this. The letter is jointly issued by Plymouth Community Connections and Police.

Child Exploitation is ever changing and how we as a city respond to this needs constant review to ensure the correct interventions are in place. A review of activities of the OpMACE meeting is currently being undertaken to identify best practice moving forward.

4.0 Plymouth's Adolescent Safety Framework and Adolescent Safety Hub

What is the Adolescent Safety Framework (ASF)?

The Adolescent Safety Framework (ASF) is Plymouth's multi-agency response to exploitation & extra-familial harm (sometimes referred to as contextual safeguarding). The framework has been fully operational since 4th January 2022.

The primary aim of the ASF is to ensure that young people feel and are safe outside their homes both in our community, and with their peers and sets out the responses for;

- Individual children
- Spaces and places in our communities and neighbourhoods where harm can occur
- School or college spaces and/or environments
- Peer groups
- Adults of concern who may be a risk to children and young people

The ASF is intended to;

1. Improve the quality of co-ordinated multi agency safety planning when an adolescent is at risk for which their parents are not culpable in respect of significant harm (for instance serious risk associated with gangs, peer group risk, county lines, CE, drug and alcohol misuse).
2. Ensure consistent safety planning support when key risks are identified.
3. Identify adolescents of concern early to intervene as a partnership to reduce risk and prevent further harm.
4. Ensure evidence-informed and consistent multi agency interventions.
5. Ensure linkage between strategic and operational issues affecting adolescent risk.

The Framework includes;

- An underpinning theoretical approach to multi-agency working with extra-familial risk
- A revised and unified model of Multi-Agency Coordination
- A clear pathway for the assessment of need and provision of help
- A comprehensive toolkit for professionals undertaking;
 - Referrals and screening
 - Assessment processes
 - Planning and review
 - Support, help and intervention
- A comprehensive document suite for all meetings and key elements of the framework.
- A multi-agency workforce training plan delivered by the PSCP
- A monitoring and evaluation plan

The ASF has been developed from best-practice evidence and evaluated models, in particular the Contextual Safeguarding Network Approach (University of Bedfordshire, Hackney, Carlene Firmin et al), Research In Practice Core Principles and Achieving Change Together (ACT Rochdale) model and embodies our commitment to a Trauma-Informed, Restorative and Strengths-based approach that understands children, young people and their families as experts in their own experiences, and ensures their inclusion in keeping them safe. It promotes a developmental approach to understanding and working alongside young people.

The Adolescent Safety Hub (AS Hub)

The AS Hub is co-located within the MASH. This new triage and coordination service has been created to receive contextual safeguarding concerns and referrals, ensure a same-day response for children who may be at immediate risk of harm and to determine, with partners, what further assessment, support or intervention is needed to improve safety.

A Safer Me assessment is the foundation tool for supporting decisions and allows professionals to clarify concerns in a holistic way.

The Safer Me assessment can be completed by any relevant professional and provided to the AS Hub for consideration. The assessment is a collaborative, multi-agency response to contextual safeguarding and can be completed by more than one professional. It must include the views of the young person/people and family wherever it is safe to do so.

Once the assessment is reviewed, the AS Hub Coordinator and Project Coordinator work with the referrer and / or Lead Professional to prioritise the extra familial concerns and agree the right multi-agency response.

Where concerns about spaces, places, education settings and/or peer groups are significant, this may include mapping meetings, community-based conferences, school based conferences or peer-group conferences, all of which bring together key stakeholders who can influence the context in which harm may be occurring.

Plymouth AS Hub |

The Safer Me Assessment is submitted to the Adolescent Safety Hub where it triaged

If Individual Safeguarding concerns are identified the MASH is notified.

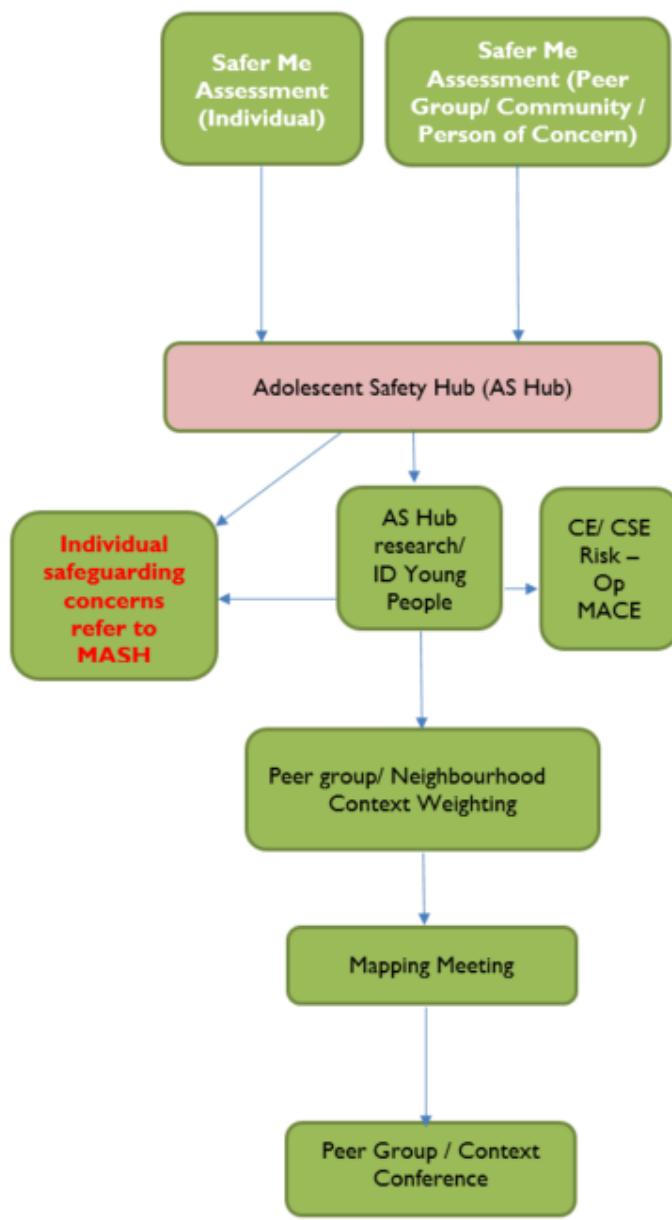
The AS Hub researches the Young Person / Peer Group / Person of Concern

When it is clear there are exploitation concerns the AS Hub will refer this to the Missing and Child Exploitation Group

'Context Weighting' is carried out in the AS Hub. This is where the *primary concern* is identified (eg. place / substance / weapons /persons of concern / exploitation)

A mapping meeting is organised with professionals to map out the concerns and the links between people and places.

Peer Group conference or a Context Conference is arranged once the concerns and risks have been mapped out, in order to explore the appropriate interventions and resources partners can offer to safeguard young people



The AS Hub also supports partner agencies with embedding a contextual safeguarding approach within their settings and assessing extra familial risk. Safer Me assessments are currently being completed alongside our partners to help build confidence in the approach.

The AS Hub is partnering schools and community services in using the Safer Me assessment to self-assess the spaces and places in their settings and there are comprehensive advanced assessment tools to support this, including ways of supporting wider community engagement and contribution. These tools can be downloaded from the PSCP website.

Responses to Individual children

The Safer Me assessment also supports decisions about what kind of support individual children need. For some, an Early Help response may be the most effective approach - building on and working within established and trusted relationships with young people and their families.

Where the risk of harm indicates a need for additional support and advice to ensure safety and/or the child's presentation, associations or changes in presentation suggest they may be or are at risk of suffering significant harm, and require a multi-agency child in need or child protection response, the requirements set out in Working Together 2018 apply and individual social work assessment and multi-agency planning will take place. In these cases a 'Safer Me' approach will be taken to ensuring young people and families are central to understanding and planning to support safety.

How we will know that young people feel and are safe outside their homes both in our community, and with their peers.

The ASF is currently in an implementation phase. Dissemination and awareness remain a primary activity to ensure stakeholder awareness, as well as embedding practices into assessment and intervention activity.

The AS Hub will capture a wide range of information and data regarding contextual safeguarding concerns in the city and will provide this to the operational and strategic Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE). These groups analyse available intelligence and identify and deploy responses to operational and strategic threats and opportunities as well as ensuring the effectiveness of our contextual safeguarding response, including the Adolescent Safety Framework.

As part of its development, evaluation and wider learning for practice, Plymouth and Devon are working with colleagues from Bedfordshire and Kent Universities as part of the Innovate Project. They will be working over the next 2 years to explore the impact of contextual responses on practice in our local area.

Appendix A

I.1 What is CSE?

- I.11 Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside clothing. It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).
- I.12 Child sexual exploitation is a crime with devastating and long-lasting consequences for its victims and their families. Childhoods and family life can be severely affected, and this is compounded when victims, or those at risk of abuse, do not receive appropriate, immediate and on-going support. The first response to children, and support for them to access help, must be the best it can be from social workers, police, health practitioners and others who work with children and their families. Serious case reviews show that the language and approach of professionals is highly significant in influencing when and how children will tell adults that they have been abused. Insensitive language can place “blame” with the victim and result in them being seen, and treated by safeguarding professionals as “adults”.
- I.13 The definition of child sexual exploitation is as follows:
- Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology¹.***
- I.14 Like all forms of child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation:
- can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years, including 16 and 17 year olds who can legally consent to have sex;
 - is still abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual;
 - can include both contact (penetrative and non-penetrative acts) and non-contact sexual activity;
 - can take place in person or via technology, or a combination of both;
 - can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence;
 - may occur without the child or young person’s immediate knowledge (through others copying videos or images they have created and posting on social media, for example);
 - can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults.
 - can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time, and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse; and
 - is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse. (Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources).
- I.15 One of the key factors found in most cases of child sexual exploitation is the presence of some form of exchange (sexual activity in return for something); for the victim and/or perpetrator or

¹ DfE, Child Sexual Exploitation. Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders, and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation (Feb 2017)

facilitator. Exchange can include both tangible (such as money, drugs or alcohol) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived love or affection). It is critical to remember the unequal power dynamic within which this exchange occurs, and to remember that the receipt of something by a child/young person does not make them any less of a victim. It is also important to note that this can also be the prevention of something negative, for example a child who engages in sexual activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm his/her family.

I.2 What is Child Exploitation?

- I.21** We know that children can be exploited in a number of ways other than sexual exploitation, including criminal exploitation (for example shoplifting to order), “County Lines” drug supply networks, or human trafficking. There can often be cross-over between different types of exploitation and the experience of a young person does not always fall neatly into one category. Increasingly policy makers and professionals have recognised this, and now refer to “Child Exploitation” rather than concentrating solely on child sexual exploitation in order to ensure all risks to children and young people from this activity are recognised.
- I.22** In line with other LA areas nationally, Plymouth now considers child sexual exploitation as part of the wider concern of child exploitation.