

## Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



### CHILD EXPLOITATION UPDATE

#### Adolescent Safety Framework:

The Adolescent Safety Framework (ASF) was created as Plymouth's approach to supporting older children and young people experiencing harm from outside the home. The ASF is a way of responding to and supporting older children and young people aged 11 – 18 (aged 25 for care leavers). It aims to understand the different needs of this age group and is designed to respond to harm experienced outside the family home. These contextual risks and threats to young people's safety can include, child sexual exploitation, peer exploitation, child criminal exploitation, gang activity (county lines) and online exploitation.

This model of working at the individual level is through 'Safer Me' at an early help and child in need level and through 'Safer Me Plus' at a child protection level. It is designed to give a focus around the risks outside of the child's home. This is achieved through the Peer Group, Neighbourhood (Location) and School Context Conferences, which are facilitated by independent Safeguarding Chairs, Safer Plymouth Chairs, and Headteachers or Designated Safeguarding Leads respectively.

#### Current Situation:

The Daily Intelligence Briefing (DIB) is a multi-agency meeting that takes place daily to discuss every child deemed to be at risk of exploitation who has been reported missing, remains missing, or any child arrested in the previous 24 hours. The aim of the meeting is to share information relating to the child to agree immediate actions required and put in place a multi-agency plan. The meeting also discusses adults of concern, emerging themes and locations and this information is shared with the chair of the Operational Mace in order to discuss disruption plans. Examples of recent disruption activity include:

1. Citywide action on children using THC in vapes and distributing this. This involved work with the police and schools to educate school leaders on risk and identification and police disruption activity. This includes linking with public health and the hospital.
2. A number of children located in a house of multiple occupation in Plymouth. Children were reporting use of drugs, sexual abuse and unknown adult males attending the address. The police attended and made arrests. The children are working with REACH to support understanding and risk management.

Attendance at the DIB is good with The Edge of Care Team, Youth Justice Service, REACH, Police, MASH, Education, Health, SHARP (Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service) and ACE schools represented. This enables us to have a co-ordinated response in place to prevent a disjointed approach or an issue where everyone thinks someone else is responding. The DIB is currently chaired by the Edge of Care Manager and covered by REACH or Youth Justice in her absence and feeds directly to the Youth Justice Service manager and Chair of Operational MACE.

Where there are safeguarding concerns for a child who is not open to Children, Young people and Families Service, a referral will be accepted by the MASH who are represented daily. There may be some work to understand the risk undertaken by the REACH staff in the first instance.

The DIB has taken on much of the work previously managed in the MACE and offers us a more immediate response to exploitation. A strong element of the ASF is the mapping of children to identify and devise proportionate responses to groups at risk of exploitation. The quality of information provided by the police in this mapping exercise is excellent however there is a resource issue that causes delay in the production of this of up to 2 weeks, but we know that two weeks in a child's life is a long time and this has been raised in the recent strategic MACE to identify resource to address the time delay.

Operational MACE sits monthly and will discuss those children at the highest risk to ensure that plans are robust and reviewed. Themes, location and adults of concern are discussed at this meeting and multi-agency decisions made on disruption activity.

Strategic MACE sits quarterly and reports to the PCSB. Strategic MACE review data alongside themes and risks to ensure that as a city we are reacting appropriately to concerns.

### **Reducing Exploitation and Absence from Care and Home (REACH)**

The REACH team is responsible for undertaking Return Home Interviews for all children who are reported missing. The team receive police notifications daily and will make contact with the child within 24 hours to offer an RHI within 72 hours. This is voluntary and the workers will need to draw on their skills to build quick relationships to encourage take up. During this assessment the worker will assess for any exploitation concerns.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Missing Children</b>	<b>Missing Episodes</b>	<b>Children in Care - Children</b>	<b>CIC Episodes</b>	<b>RHI offered to take place within 72 hours</b>	<b>RHI completed inside 72 Hours</b>	<b>Exploitation CE and CSE</b>
April 23	33	69	14	40	93.9%	68.3%	12
May 23	59	90	23	40	96.6%	69.3%	21
June 23	61	94	23	39	98.4%	71.4%	27
July 23	49	70	17	28	98%	61.2%	20
Aug 23	44	78	23	47	100%	56.7%	19
Sep 23	66	119	23	54	95.8%	60.5%	24

We have recently started to monitor those children who have their RHI outside of the 72 hours and the reasons for this. In September 20 RHIs were completed outside of 72hrs. Of these, 12 were requested by parents and 4 by children to be arranged as such. Three were delayed to outside of the timeframe because the child was in hospital, and one was due to multiple missing incidents being covered in the latest RHI.

Patterns and themes are identified through the RHI's. Most recent themes relate to children being found with street homeless who drink. When this occurs, the police are informed immediately and will disrupt.

Air B&B's remains an issue with parents / adults booking an Air B&B for children to have a party. The police have made attempts to address this directly with Air B&B however it is not a UK based company, and this has proven a challenge and therefore a program of education is being developed to include possible press release.

Car parks in the city remain a place for children to come together – when this is identified police will disrupt however we know this just moves children to the next space.

THC in vapes remains a concern and we continue to provide education.

Over the last 3 months we have worked with 90 children who have identified being at risk of criminal and or sexual exploitation (37 sexual exploitation and 54 criminal exploitation) all of which have been offered interventions from the REACH workers.

### **Safer Me Assessments**

The Safer Me assessment supports decision making on the type of risk, level of harm and how to seek additional support, either through the Individual or Context pathways. The Safer Me and SaferMe+ approach is used alongside statutory safeguarding processes to ensure extra-familial contexts are being considered within and alongside traditional child protection processes. 44 Safer me assessment have been completed since April 2023 and there are 54 children with an open safer me compared to 41 in April 2023.

### **County Lines**

Currently, we are mapping and monitoring 4 groups in the city involving 40 children and 10 adults linked to county lines. The Alpha and Bravo groups activities have now been disrupted involving Police operations, these children are still monitored weekly to ensure they are safe. The Charlie and Delta groups are still active. 4 adults are currently in custody, either on remand or recalled following activities to disrupt these groups. The group maps are reviewed weekly and individual children discussed daily at the DIB if risk remains. Any children requiring a NRM is then discussed with the MACE chair and referrals made by the allocated SW.

### **Learning to date and next steps:**

The Adolescent Safety Framework was introduced to Plymouth after it was launched in Devon. Recent conversations with Devon have highlighted similar concerns raised in Plymouth and we will take this learning and make the decision to streamline our approach to ensure all partner agencies feel able to be on board with safeguarding our children against contextual risks in the city.

As we develop our practice and understanding of exploitation across the city, we are seeing an uplift in concerns raised for children which follow national trends. There are examples of very good practice and multi-agency working when there is a need to respond to crisis situations however there is a gap in working in a more co-ordinated way to prevent concerns escalating.

Exploitation is a difficult risk to manage and relies heavily on relationship-based work to build trust. We need to support our workers across the city but mostly within social care to feel confident and safe to identify risk and intervene.

*The launch of the ASF took place January 2021 with the training delivered widely across the partnership but highlighted the need to clarify our approach with professionals.*

- A task and finish group are now in place to amend the Adolescent Safety Framework following feedback from partner agencies and experience of other local authorities also using the framework and embed this across the partnership.

*Partners report that the framework needs to be clearer with stronger co-ordination and a more focused assessment, coupled with professionals feeling that they need more support and development to manage the risk more confidently and this would lead to ineffective planning.*

- The task and finish group will develop a simple screening tool for all professionals for exploitation and provide advice and guidance on how to use it alongside the Building Support thresholds,
- Maintain the current model of the DIB that includes a co-ordinator role that ensures we can collect data and monitor all exploitation across the city.
- Develop a training package for all professionals to ensure we can identify risk and be better equipped to respond.

*The Safer Me assessment needs to be used more consistently and needs to be more focused.*

- The task and finish group will develop a simple assessment framework and guidance that will compliment Early Help assessments.

The Task and Finish group are meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023 to agree membership and plan the following work.

<b>Action</b>	<b>By who</b>	<b>By when</b>
The ASF is reviewed and refined to simplify the process	HoS TS and YJS	Dec 2023
A screening tool is developed for all professionals to use to identify exploitation (with guidance.)	HoS TS and YJS	Dec 2023
The Assessment Tool is reviewed and refined to ensure it is focused.	HoS TS and YJS	Jan 2024
Develop workshops / training sessions to increase knowledge and confidence of exploitation and how to respond across the partnership	HoS TS and YJS	Jan 2024
Produce an Exploitation Strategy	HoS TS and Partners	Jan 2024

Name: Martine Aquilina

Position: Head of Service

Date: 03.10.23