

Children, Education and Skills Sub Committee

Thursday, 13 January 2022

Present: Councillor M Thirlaway (Chair)
Councillors J Cassidy, H Johnson, C Johnston,
P McIntyre, J Montague, A Newman, S Phillips and
M Wilson

Rev M Vine – Church Representative

Apologies: Councillors M Madden, P Oliver and E Parker-Leonard
and Mr S Fallon

CES20/22 Appointment of substitutes

There were no substitute members

CES21/22 To receive any declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

CES22/22 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 November 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CES23/22 Update on Children's Exploitation and Developments in North Tyneside

The Committee considered a report in relation to work undertaken in 2021 around exploitation including: Missing, Slavery, Exploitation (both criminal and sexual) and Trafficked (MSET).

The report detailed the current key priorities, work that had been completed to date by North Tyneside and Partners in response to exploitation and provided an overview of the current cohort of children and young people at risk of exploitation and the interventions being completed with them.

Throughout 2021 significant progress had been made by Children's Social Care and all partners to build on the actions taken in 2020 to strength the response to all children at risk of exploitation.

In early 2021, the new MSET policies and procedures had been agreed, and copies of the Missing, Slavery, Exploited, Trafficked (MSET) Strategy 2020-2022 had been circulated with the Report. Training for social workers, Early Help Practitioners and other professionals in

relation to the new policies and procedures was facilitated by the Service Manager for Social Work.

There were robust measures in place to identify, monitor and review children and young people who go missing and to consider proportionate and proactive responses to their missing behaviours in light of the risks of exploitation.

Children's Social Care and Early Help managers received daily information about any child/ young person resident in North Tyneside who had gone missing in the previous 24 hours. This allowed for early identification and close monitoring of repeat missing behaviours and ensured all workers and managers were sighted on young people who were at risk of exploitation.

Between January 2021 and 7 December 2021, there were 982 reported missing incidents by 367 young people. This referred to all children and young people resident in North Tyneside, so included children/ young people missing from home, children and young people missing from North Tyneside care and children and young people placed in the North Tyneside area by other Local Authorities.

All missing episodes of children and young people were either responded to via the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) (Early Help), if the child was unknown, or via their allocated worker if they were known to services.

In reply to a question regarding North Tyneside's number of missing incidents compared to other Local Authorities it was noted that North Tyneside had traditionally had high numbers due to over reporting and changes had been made to reporting and there were 419 missing episodes for children in 2020/21, reduced from 541 missing episodes in 2019/20. However the number of missing episodes were high this year and a comparison with other Local Authorities could be provided when the national data was available.

Significant work had been undertaken throughout 2020/21 to streamline and improve the process for notification of missing episodes and the offering and recording of Return Home Interviews (RHI's).

Where the child was looked after, an independent Return Home Interview (RHI) was offered and facilitated if wanted via the Advocacy service. Where the child or young person was consistently missing and at risk of significant harm, swift action would be taken via a Strategy Meeting with a disruption plan put in place. If the risk increased, the concerns would be presented to the multi-agency MSET panel.

Children's Services were seeking to strengthen the robustness of the RHI process by ensuring that the electronic recording system linked the missing incident with the RHI. This would ensure that there was a linked RHI for every reported missing incident.

There were currently 6 young people whose missing behaviours were of significant concern. All

6 young people were known to Children's Social Care: 5 of the young people were children in care and 1 young person was subject to a Child Protection Plan. The safety, wellbeing, risks and future plans for all 6 young people were reviewed within the relevant statutory framework with the oversight and scrutiny of the Independent Reviewing Officer. All the young people were known to and monitored by Senior Managers and the Assistant Director.

All 6 young people were known to Future Steps, previously referred to as the Adolescent Service, a Team which had been developed as a direct response to the identified need to work with a specific cohort of young people in a different way to respond to and reduce the risk to them from exploitation.

Future Steps was a new multi-professional service, closely linked to Keeping Families Connected and Youth Justice Services, designed to work intensively with those young people the Service were most worried about.

Each young person open to Future Steps had a specific plan which included both objectives the young person had set and those of the worker. Some of the objectives the young people had set included help to find a job, help to set up benefits claims, help with parenting assessment so they could see their child, support with where they live, support attending education, training or employment and activities such as music, arts, pool, fishing and cycling.

Future Steps involvement had already resulted in some clear outcomes for children and young people:

- Significant increase in the level of contacts with young people (average 8/10 times weekly)
- Increase in attendance in Education, Training or Employment.
- Reduction in missing episodes
- Reduction in the frequency of offending
- Improved understanding of the perpetrator networks/individuals.
- Development of relationships with community-based provision to aid exit strategies

Significant progress had been made during 2021 in embedding the strategic and operational oversight and scrutiny required to identify, monitor and review children and young people at risk of exploitation. The establishment of Future Steps had created a Team which could focus on the risks presented by contextual safeguarding and which could work intensively with children and young people at risk of exploitation.

There were future actions identified for 2022 to build on the progress to date:

- The development of a Strategic Action Plan around exploitation across the partnership and across both children and vulnerable adults
- The recruitment of a dedicated Missing Coordinator to coordinate the completion of RHIs and ensure even more robust monitoring of missing episodes and emerging themes and concerns
- The Review and Evaluation of the Future Steps Team

- Implementation of system change to ensure that missing incidents and missing return interviews were more effectively linked within the electronic recording system.

A Member asked if any particular issues had developed during the pandemic and it was confirmed that young women at risk of sexual exploitation were a small cohort whose missing behaviours were concerning, post lockdown the focus was on criminal exploitation by parents and there had been a slight increase in violent offences.

In relation to child protection, reference was made to a recent case involving the death of a child in Bradford where there had been anonymous referrals and the serious case review was yet to be published. It was noted that North Tyneside Council received anonymous referrals and had an escalation policy across the partnership and there was a process in the Front Door whereby three referrals in a six month period would be a trigger for a partnership meeting.

It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report.

The Chair thanked the Senior Manager Children's Safeguarding and the Assistant Director Safeguarding and Children's Services for the informative report and for attendance at the meeting.

CES24/22 Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Policy and online safety

The Sub-Committee considered a report on the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Policy, online safety concerns, the Ofsted review main findings and work being done as a result of the findings of a recent safeguarding audit sent to schools on peer on peer abuse.

To help children and young people to learn the skills and knowledge to live healthy, safe and happy lives in modern society, in September 2020, the Department for Education (DfE) made Relationships Education compulsory in all primary schools, Relationships and Sex Education compulsory in all secondary schools and Health Education compulsory in all state-funded schools.

In 2020, a website called Everyone's Invited was created, aimed at providing a safe place for young people who had experienced sexual violence and sexual harassment in education settings to share their experiences. The anonymous testimonies of thousands of young people uncovered the prevalence of sexual violence, sexual harassment including online sexual abuse, in schools, colleges, universities and society generally. This predominantly impacted on girls and young women but was experienced by young men too.

As a result of the Everyone's Invited Campaign, Ofsted were asked by the government to carry out a rapid review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges. The review included visits to 32 settings, interviews with over 900 children and young people and conversations with

school leaders, teachers, parents, governors and Local Safeguarding Partnerships (LSPs).

The Ofsted review highlighted the prevalence of online sexual abuse that children and young people experienced, especially being sent sexual pictures or videos that they did not want to see.

Following this review, Ofsted made a number of recommendations for schools and college leaders, multi-agency partners, the government, inspectorates and Local Safeguarding Partnerships. The DfE guidance on Keeping Children Safe in Education was updated in 2021 to reflect these issues. This was underpinned by the reviewed 2021 guidance on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between children in schools and colleges. Subsequently, the Ofsted framework was updated to ensure schools addressed peer on peer abuse, sexual harassment on and off line and sexual violence.

The recommendations made by Ofsted have been shared with schools in North Tyneside through head teacher briefings, Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL's) briefings, PSHE lead networks and electronic communications.

The importance of the PSHE education curriculum in preventing sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools has been highlighted and curriculum resources provided to help schools strengthen this provision. PSHE networks have been used to discuss how to address this issue and schools have had the opportunity to share good practice.

The 'RSE Ready?' survey highlighted the need for further staff training particularly in secondary schools. Colleagues in both primary and secondary schools reported they would benefit from training and support in dealing with and education about peer on peer abuse, sexual violence and harassment and online safety and relationships.

Work underway to support the White Ribbon Accreditation in North Tyneside had highlighted a need for more targeted work with boys and young men as part of PSHE education. Teaching resources that promoted positive male role models and challenged old fashioned male stereotypes had been sourced and shared with schools.

Online safety teaching was within the computing curriculum and the teaching and training materials used by the Authority were regularly updated to consider new trends or report finding. Advice and support about any national trends were shared with schools, usually in conjunction with the Safeguarding team as not all schools choose to access the wider computing support.

The Designated Safeguarding Leads DSLs (and Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads DDSLs) had access to termly Designated Safeguarding Lead briefing and termly newsletters. All aspects of safeguarding in schools were shared with DSLs through these forums.

The DSL briefing in June 2021 gave an update on the reviewed version of DfE Sexual violence and Sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges. This guidance was reviewed in line with the findings from the Ofsted review on Sexual Abuse in Schools. The updates focussed on ensuring schools recognised and addressed the issues and were starting to move towards a culture change. Schools were also guided through the updated 'Sexting' guidance which had now been updated to 'Sharing of Nudes and Semi Nudes'

which was the sending or posting of nude or semi-nude images, videos or live streams by young people under the age of 18 online. This information was reiterated through the publication of the September 2021 DfE Keeping Children Safe in Education and the full content of this was discussed with DSLs at the briefing the same month. Schools were also supported to update their child protection policy at that time.

Following discussions regarding all the above issues, meetings were initiated with the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Partnership (NTSCP) to begin to formulate a local response that would support schools but also be underpinned by a multi-agency approach to peer on peer abuse. For the partnership to understand the issues schools were facing, a survey was sent out to schools and the following was received:

- Schools fed back that children needed to be well prepared and supported so they had a clear understanding of how to stay safe online.
- Issues for younger children tended to be facilitated through phones, messaging groups, gaming platforms aimed at younger children or popular platforms e.g TikTok.
- As children progressed through primary school, social media became a factor.
- Primary children used derogatory language which they heard online or at home and brought into school to 'test' out.
- Some schools also reported homophobic or racist incidents.
- Sexualised name calling began to emerge at Primary school level with one school reporting they have had an incident of a pupil sending a semi-nude image.
- As pupils move to secondary age, issues were around sexual inappropriateness, online harassment, inappropriate sexual name calling/sexualised language, unwanted touching, sharing nude and semi-nudes sometimes with malicious intent.
- Issues for older pupils happened during unstructured times of the day or out of school especially online and on school transport.
- In terms of support, most schools outlined that they would benefit from support with training, shared resources, support from external organisations, support with policies, involvement of multi-agency partners, training and support on mental health, trauma and counselling.
- Schools would like support on how to better work with parents. They also felt they would benefit from a proven working model with evidence of success to ensure consistency, mechanisms to develop staff confidence and have a common language around these issues to be able to shift the culture in school.

A number of issues were raised at the Head Teacher briefing:

- Children discussed their experiences as seemingly thinking they were safe online but when adults dig deeper, they were unaware of the wider risks.
- Anonymity caused many issues as do 'pop ups' with links to other sites.
- Children seemed to be more comfortable reporting to school staff rather than parents.
- The pandemic had not helped as it was difficult to teach PSHE through online lessons and children had spent more time online.
- Schools felt online platform reporting systems and safety regulations needed to be reviewed.
- Parents needed to be more on board as it was difficult to get them to understand the issues and the scale of the problem. They reported that their children had more skills and knowledge than they did. Parents appeared to feel their children were safe as they were at home but they were often shocked at their child's online activity when an issue came to light.

- Support organisations and other safeguarding partners such as the police could not always offer proposed interventions due to capacity. Schools felt the government should recognise this better at a national level and provide more support and funding.

The findings locally showed that North Tyneside schools, teachers and pupils were saying the same issues existed for them as those evident in the Ofsted review.

In order to address this complex issue, joint working between partners, schools and school improvement should ensure the issue was seen as widespread therefore all should know how to address it and a full system approach is implemented.

Joint training should be offered for a consistent approach which should involve schools and Local Authority staff working together. A standardised assessment format should be used across the Authority so schools can share practice and multi-agency partners understand the process that has been implemented in school before cases are escalated to a higher level of support.

This should be underpinned by a whole school approach including an effective curriculum, a well embedded culture of online safety for all stakeholders and meaningful and well-understood policies and procedures. This should be overseen, supported and endorsed by the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Partnership (NTSCP).

The Sub-Committee discussed the issues and in the course of discussion raised the following points:

- A Member asked if the issues outlined in the report were getting worse and it was noted that there was a huge challenge for schools and the demographic was shifting to younger children and the issues affecting primary school children.
- The importance of schools setting the ethos, recognising and addressing the issues and leading on what was acceptable and challenging what was not acceptable was discussed.
- In reply to a question asking if the police were involved when posting of a nude image by a young person under the age of 18 occurred online, it was confirmed that schools would need to make a referral/call to the Safeguarding advice line.

It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report.

The Chair thanked the Interim Assistant Director SEND and the Senior Advisor Health and Wellbeing Primary Schools Support for the informative report and for attendance at the meeting.

CES25/22 Signs of Safety

The Sub-Committee considered a report on Signs of Safety which North Tyneside Children's Services had adopted as their agreed model of practice in 2017.

The Signs of safety approach was a relationship-grounded, safety-organised approach to

child protection practice, created by researching what works for professionals and families in building meaningful safety for vulnerable and at-risk children.

The purpose of the approach being:

'To enable professionals to undertake all child protection practice with a rigorous focus on child safety by equipping agencies to establish their practice, policy, procedures and organisation so that professionals can do everything humanly possible to put the parents, children and everyone naturally connected to the children at the centre of the assessment, decision-making and planning and give them every opportunity to come up with and apply their ideas before the professionals offer or impose theirs.'

It was an internationally used model and was the model of practice in the majority of local authorities across England and Wales.

The oversight of Signs of Safety Implementation was via a monthly Steering Group which was chaired by the Senior Manager for Social Work Practice. Representatives from all the service areas and workforce development attended the Steering Group. The Group agreed the priorities for the year ahead, monitored progress against them, agreed the training calendar and was also responsive to emerging practice needs and issues. In the last 12 months the priorities had focused on Networks, Supervision, Early Help and Harm Risk Matrix in the Front Door.

Since 2020 there had been a strong focus on the use of networks in the Children's service's practice. Having a network of people who could help and support a family and in so doing build more safety for the child / children was a real strength of the Signs of Safety approach. This was challenging for both parents and practitioners as it required a family to be open and honest about what the worries were, what the safety goals were and what the bottom lines were. Parents needed to use the network not just to help and support but also to demonstrate that the child / children would be and were safe.

During the Covid-19 Pandemic the use of networks had been a key feature in building safety for children when professional oversight was more limited. Practitioners in North Tyneside were both creative and innovative about the use of networks and while there was further work to do, practice with regards to networks, was now very well embedded.

North Tyneside Children's Services were approached by the DfE to do some further study and analysis around lessons learnt from working during the pandemic, that could be shared and used across the sector. In partnership with Professor Eileen Munro, Professor Andrew Turnell and Marie Devine, the Council worked with three other local authorities to explore:

What helps and hinders practitioners build safety through naturally connected networks during a pandemic when professional contact is limited?

The study was small in size and consequently the findings were tentative but do support the hypothesis that the use of networks makes a worthwhile contribution to improving children's

safety and wellbeing.

Supervision was a key task in any social work system and the focus over the last twelve months had been further embedding of the Signs of Safety approach to group supervision. The process involved a worker who brought a child's case to discuss and was designed for a worker to get direction when they were experiencing challenges or barriers. Both managers and practitioners had fed back positively on the use of group supervision and the benefits and impact it had for moving forward positively.

Training had been delivered around group supervision and the Practice Development Team had delivered and observed group supervision sessions to all the teams.

The Early Help teams also used the Signs of Safety approach and over the last twelve months had completed work on safety planning and the use of networks. There had been a focus on how practice was supported by the electronic case recording system EHM and having completed improvement work they were now involved in leading a group across Early Help Services in other local authorities who also wished to implement these changes.

The Harm Risk Matrix helped the Service to gather specific, detailed information about the harm when assessing child abuse and neglect. It clearly identified the harmful behaviour, its severity, frequency and impact on the child. It was designed to help professionals gather detailed information from referrers.

In the last 12 months training had been adapted to online delivery and both 6-day intensive workshops and 3-day introductory training had been delivered.

Alongside this, Practice Leader events were held every six to eight weeks. Every service, and in many instances, every team had an identified Practice Leader. Their role was one of dissemination of practice and to provide advice and guidance around the model. In the last 12 months the sessions had looked at themes including Exploitation, Non-Accidental injury, Networks, Safety Planning and working with children with complex needs. This work was then followed up within the teams to provide practical support for application of the learning.

During the pandemic, four weeks of 'bite size' sessions had also been delivered. These were short sessions that focussed on a different area of the model each day for a two-week period.

The Signs of Safety plan was implemented right across the partnership in North Tyneside and was an ongoing continuous process.

Over the next 12 months the following priorities had been agreed: -

- Systems work around embedding the new Children in Care forms that better support practice.

- Ongoing focus on group supervision
- Safety Planning
- Language
- Timeline and Trajectories – enabled planning and progress to stay on track

Members acknowledged the priority to ensure children's safety and that Early Help was a key part to keeping children safe.

In reply to a question relating to whether there had been any savings following the use of the Signs of Safety practice, it was confirmed that prior to the Covid pandemic the Council were beginning to see reductions in the number of children in care but due to the Covid pandemic the number of children in care had increased due to the lockdowns, mental health issues, substance misuse and domestic abuse.

It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director Safeguarding and Children's Services for the informative report and for attendance at the meeting.