

**Meeting:** Children, Education and Skills Sub-Committee

**Date:** 13 January 2022

**Title:** Update on Children's Exploitation and Developments in North Tyneside

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**Service:** HECS

**Wards  
affected:** All

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## 1. Purpose of Report

To provide an update to the Children, Education and Skills sub-committee in relation to work undertaken in 2021 around exploitation including: Missing, Slavery, Exploitation (both criminal and sexual) and Trafficked (MSET).

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

## 2. Introduction

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

In early 2021, the new MSET policies and procedures were agreed, and a copy of the Missing, Slavery, Exploited, Trafficked (MSET) Strategy 2020-2022 is attached. 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 the Social Work.

### **3. Details**

Assessment Teams (SWAT) along with an Improvement Officer and Northumbria Police. The training was well attended: 166 practitioners have attended since the start of 2021 and 105 of those are NTC staff.

The referral form for MSET was also updated to reflect Children's Social Care and Early Help's model of practice, Signs of Safety. Therefore, practitioners now scale risk as opposed to scoring it.

There are 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. These measures include:

#### **3.1 Daily updates**

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

#### **3.2 Strategy Meetings**

Where a young person has been missing for 72 hours, or sooner pending worries, a strategy meeting would be convened for a young person known to Children's Social Care or escalated into a statutory framework if unknown. This allows for information to be shared with all professionals, an action plan to be developed and an agreement as to when further meetings will take place. A young person displaying such missing behaviours would also be considered at Pre MSET.

#### **3.3 Weekly Missing Meetings**

This meeting is chaired by the Senior Manager Children in Care and attended by Service Managers from SWAT, Safe and Supported, Team Leader for Future Steps, Police, a Residential Manager and Advocacy Service. The purpose of these meetings is to provide coordinated multi agency oversight and scrutiny of all missing episodes for children that week. It ensures that Return Home interviews are completed and to understand the narrative behind the numbers. The meeting aims to identify vulnerable children by considering, multiple missing episodes patterns and themes and ensures a coordinated multi agency approach.

#### **3.4 Pre MSET**

This is a monthly meeting attended by the Service Manager for SWAT, a DS from Police, the Police Missing From Home Coordinator, a Residential Manager, the Future Steps Team Leader, a Health Professional, an Adult Social Care Team Manager and a Team Leader from Early Help. Referrals received from social workers and Early Help Practitioners are reviewed and all the professionals share their relevant information. Based on discussions within Pre MSET, professionals agree whether to review the young person at Full MSET or to identified specific actions for the social worker/ Early Help Practitioner, for example disruption activity.

### **3.5 Full MSET**

Chaired by Detective Inspector from the Police and attended by Pre MSET members and Youth Justice, and any other relevant professionals for specific children/ young people for example Education. Professionals consider further disruption activities including CAWNS (Child Abduction Warning Notification). MSET also consider any potential referrals to Future Steps.

### **3.6 Strategic MSET Group**

Chaired by a Detective Inspector with attendance from Children's and Adult's Service, Community Safety, the CCG and Youth Justice. This Group meets quarterly to develop and provide a strategic overview of exploitation, supporting a proactive partnership where those at risk are identified and safeguarded, and offenders are disrupted and prosecuted. (Terms of Reference attached.)

The above actions and forums have served to further strengthen and develop partnership working across services in response to the needs of children and young people at risk of exploitation.

### **3.7 Children and Young People at risk of or experiencing exploitation.**

We have a good knowledge and understanding of the young people in North Tyneside, and of those young people who are at risk of exploitation. We know that there is a small cohort of young people where we have worries about risk taking and safeguarding which are not always a response to the parenting and care they receive. Consequently, statutory Child Protection processes do not necessarily meet the needs of these young people. In order to consider the risk to this group of young people from a different perspective we have identified Contextual Safeguarding as one of our Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) key priority areas.

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

All missing episodes of children and young people are either responded to via the MASH (Early Help), if the child is unknown, or via their allocated worker if they are known to services. There were 419 missing episodes for children in 2020/21, reduced from 541 missing episodes in 2019/20. We have undertaken significant work throughout 2020/21 to streamline and improve our process for notification of missing episodes, the offering and recording of Return Home Interviews.

A total of 11 children went missing from care during July to September with a total of 24 episodes, 9 of those children were offered return home interviews (82%) and 6 accepted. In addition to offering RHIs, these young people are regularly visited by advocacy workers and some are now working with Future Steps. 6 children went missing from home during July to September with a total of 10 episodes, all of those children had a return home interview offered (100%) and 2 accepted.

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

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

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

All 6 young people are known to Future Steps, previously referred to as the Adolescent Service, a Team which has 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.

### **3.8 Service Development: Future Steps – Contextual Safeguarding Team**

Across North Tyneside there has been an increasing awareness through our MSET processes, of children/young people identified as being at risk of exploitation and harm outside of the family home. Future Steps is a new multi-professional service, closely linked to Keeping Families Connected and Youth Justice Services, designed to work intensively with those young people we are most worried about.

In line with contextual safeguarding practice, the overall aims of Future Steps are:

1. Target: prevent, identify, assess, and intervene with the social conditions of abuse in respect of an individual and/or peer group
2. Legislation: incorporate extra-familial contexts into child protection frameworks
3. Partnerships: with sectors/individuals strengthen the response of our partnership to issues of extra-familial harm
4. Outcome measures: monitor outcomes for success in relation to contextual, as well as individual change.

Access to the service is governed by the local partnership's Missing, Slavery, Exploited and Trafficked (MSET) arrangements, to ensure support is provided to those most in need and with collective partnership responsibility for the service offer.

The Future Steps Team consists of:

- Team Leader
- Social Worker
- Youth Justice Worker
- Early Help Worker (single point of contact)

The service has a very clear performance framework and is embedded within the LCS case management system to enable performance reports to be generated. The performance reports are tabled at the MSET Strategic Partnership meeting which hold governance responsibilities.

Future Steps went live on the 4th of October 2021. Through discussion with Social Work managers and using "exploitation makers" on case files and missing data, a group of 8 young people were identified and approached to work with the team.

Of the 8 young people, 5 are male and 3 are female and all 8 are aged 15 years or more. The 8 young people have the following experiences:

- 6 of the 8 cases have experienced/are experiencing neglect.
- 3 of the 8 cases have experienced a close bereavement of a main caregiver
- 6 of the 8 cases have experienced parental substance misuse.
- 7 of the 8 are children of offenders.
- 4 of the 8 are a cared for child or have previously been.
- 2 of the 8 are currently facing eviction.
- 3 of the 8 who are cared for are not staying at their identified accommodation.
- 6 of the 8 have an EHCP, the other has a learning disability but no EHCP.

Of the initial 8 young people identified to work with Future Steps, 5 are within the current cohort of young people whose missing behaviours are concerning. The other young person from the current cohort with high missing behaviours has now been referred into Future Steps. He shares similar characteristics to those young people identified above.

Although the average age being 15 years old, we are acutely aware of the necessity to have effective transition arrangements for those turning 18 in place with Adult Social Care. The Future Steps Team Leader is actively working with to consider how best to work collaboratively with the Interim Team Manager – Gateway Team/Adult Mash to work on a transition practice framework.

### **3.9 Future Steps Activity to date**

Each young person open to Future Steps has a specific plan over which they have had ownership in developing. This plan includes both objectives the young person has set and those of the worker. Some of the objectives the young people have set include:

- Help to find a job
- Help to set up benefits claims
- Help with parenting assessment so they can see their child
- Support with where they live
- Support attending ETE
- Activities such as music, arts, pool, fishing and cycling

The workers are also involved in a wide range of developmental activities which include:

- building up community links.
- taking the lead within the regional exploitation hub,
- mapping connections of those involved in exploiting young people,
- Identifying locations/hotspots
- Building close links with residential staff.

### **3.10 Future Steps Initial Impact**

Future Steps involvement has 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.

### **3.11 Conclusions and Recommendation**

Significant progress has 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 has created a Team which can focus on the risks presented by contextual safeguarding and which can work intensively with children and young people at risk of exploitation.

There are 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 are more effectively linked within the electronic recording system.

The recommendation to this sub-committee is to discuss and review this report and identify and outline any further assurances that members may wish to see in place around this group of children and young people.

#### **4. Background Information**

The following documents have been used in the compilation of this report and may be inspected at the offices of the author.

Documents used are listed within appendices below.

#### **5. Appendices**

- MSET Strategy
- Strategic MSET Terms of Reference.
- Future Steps Strategy