

HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR BY CHILDREN ANNUAL REVIEW 2023

Purpose of the Report

1. This is an annual report written for the Safeguarding Assurance and Information Group and the lead member for Children and Families. It provides an outline of the progress and challenges within the work being undertaken by the Local Authority and relevant partner organisations regarding sexually harmful behaviour by children during the last year (April 2022-March 2023) and the commitments for the following 12 months.
2. The Service Manager, Strategic Safeguarding and Independent Review, has strategic responsibility for harmful sexual behaviour and manages the Child Protection Co-ordinators who chair the Harmful Sexual Behaviour panels. The operational responsibility for work within Children's Social Care sits within the social work teams. The Service Manager role includes having strategic oversight and offering support in respect of harmful sexual behaviour across the wider system including early help and working with partner agencies.

Information

3. Nottinghamshire has adopted the NSPCC's definition of harmful sexual behaviour by children:
"One or more children engaging in sexual discussions or acts that are inappropriate for their age or stage of development. These can range from using sexually explicit words and phrases to full penetrative sex with other children or adults."
4. Nottinghamshire is committed to working together with partners to improve the lives and experiences of children, young people, and families by empowering them to make their own choices, being fair, open, and honest and building safe and nurturing relationships.
5. This includes children who display harmful sexual behaviour receiving a consistent multi-agency response focused on achieving the best outcome for the child and their family whilst reducing the risk of any further harmful sexual behaviour and addressing the needs of the child who has committed harmful sexual behaviour and those of the child who is the victim.

Governance

6. The partnership arrangements for assessment and intervention continue to be overseen by the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP). The Harmful Sexual Behaviour steering group with senior representatives from the involved organisations continues to provide the direct oversight of this work including the Harmful Sexual Behaviour panel, procedures, tools, and training. The panel ensures that there are sufficient trained staff to complete both specialist assessments and interventions as well as commissioned services where required. It considers learning from relevant practice and safeguarding reviews and the support across the system for harmful sexual behaviour in Nottinghamshire. Progress is regularly monitored by reporting to the NSCP Safeguarding, Assurance and Improvement Group (SAIG).

7. The membership of the group consists of a Consultant Paediatrician, Harmful Sexual Behaviour Specialist from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), the Safeguarding Children in Education Officer, the Police, the Youth Justice Service and the Service Manager for the Safeguarding Partnership. The steering group continues to maintain close relationships with third sector partners who offer support to both children who commit harmful sexual behaviour and those children who are victims although they do not attend every meeting.

How We Work and What We Do

8. Two Child Protection Co-ordinators (CPCs) continue to take the lead for chairing Harmful Sexual Behaviour panels and advising Team Managers whether presentation of a child's circumstances to panel is required. The panel is made up of partner agency representatives.
9. Panel is held monthly as standard but due to the volume of referrals some additional panels have also been held throughout the year. This appears to have addressed the delay in children waiting for panel. In the quarter running from January to March 2023 the average wait time had reduced to approximately 8½ weeks, from the date it was identified a panel was required. This is about the time it takes to undertake a thorough and quality assessment. Some children are waiting longer, but this is usually because of delay in the assessment being completed in a timely manner. Panels have now returned to taking place monthly.
10. 132 children were assessed in relation to Harmful Sexual Behaviour during 2022-2023 and 102 of these went to panel. This compares with 149 the previous year and 123 going to panel. Anecdotally it is felt there have been less enquiries raised for Harmful Sexual Behaviour within the last 3-6 months. Over the year 2022 -2023 there has been a marginal decrease in numbers in comparison with the previous financial year. This suggests that children and young people who had been less visible because of Covid restrictions have now moved through services, and referrals have started to return to pre-pandemic levels.
11. 11% received interventions from the preventative team in Youth Justice, 8% from Head2Head, 6% from the Safer Living Foundation and 25% from the Family Service of Children's Social Care.
12. The Local Authority has identified three Lead Social Work Practice Consultants who have developed specialist knowledge in Harmful Sexual Behaviour and are linked to specific social work teams to provide advice, consultancy, and support and to co-work specialist assessments. This has assisted in both improving practice within Children's Social Care and with shortening timescales for assessment and panels. It has assisted with ensuring the correct children are being heard at panel at the right time. The Practice Consultants are also responsible for quality assuring the work being presented.
13. The lead Child Protection Co-ordinators continue to work closely with the lead Social Work Practice Consultants and panel members to ensure consistency of practice around thresholds and decision making, to ensure information sharing with practitioners is timely and effective, and to support the development of policy and procedures along with the Harmful Sexual Behaviour steering group.

14. IMARA¹ are now attending certain panels where it is felt appropriate based on the individual child's circumstances. This also ensures the voices of the victims are being heard, and how the impact upon them is considered and what support is required.

Our Statutory Duties

15. NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellent) guidelines published in 2016 state Children's Social Care should refer children and young people who display inappropriate sexualised behaviour for an early help assessment, in line with local thresholds and referral procedures and coordinate early help and subsequent assessments and develop the care plan to avoid unnecessary or repetitious assessments that may be stigmatising.
16. If harmful sexual behaviour is displayed, professionals should refer to harmful sexual behaviour services, child protection services and the criminal justice system, if necessary.
17. Responsibility for co-ordinating the multi-agency group rests with three safeguarding partners (local authority, clinical commissioning group for an area, and chief officer of police for a police area) who have a shared and equal duty to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in a local area.

Reflecting on our Achievements and the Impact of this Progress

18. Over the last 12 months we have continued to embed strength-based practice within assessments undertaken with families and panels.
19. The membership of the Harmful Sexual Behaviour steering group has been extended to include the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Service Manager, a Consultant Paediatrician from Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, and the Safeguarding Children in Education Officer. There is a wide variety of different agencies represented on the panel and agency attendance continues to be good.
20. In last year's annual report, we intended to make changes to the process to implement a risk management approach to safeguard children, alongside reducing the wait times for panels. However, we have successfully managed to reduce panel waiting times by increasing the number of panels per month for a period. The work undertaken by the Lead Practice Consultants has supported area teams and appears to have improved social workers and managers knowledge of how to identify if a child would benefit from the support provided by the Harmful Sexual Behaviour panel and has improved the timeliness of the assessments being presented at panel.
21. Head2Head CAMHS are providing specialist assessment and intervention for young people with complex unmet needs that present within Harmful Sexual Behaviour including online harm. The specialist assessments that Head2Head offer are AIM3 Under 12's and AIM3 Technology Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviour assessments as well as various specific Harmful Sexual Behaviour assessments focusing on risk. They also provide specialist safety planning so that young people can remain in an environment that best suits their needs – this can include home, school and residential settings.

¹ [Imara](#) is an independent specialist service that supports children, young people and their safe family members following a disclosure or discovery of child sexual and domestic abuse.

22. All young people referred to Head2Head receive a global CAMHS assessment to identify their needs including mental health, emotional, neurodevelopmental, learning needs and conduct. From this assessment further specialist CAMHS assessments can be completed including screening for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), assessments for autism and autism spectrum disorder, speech and language assessment and access to a CAMHS medic for a medication review. In 2022 three children were assessed for Autism by Head2Head, out of the 10 new referrals received that year. Five children already had pre-existing diagnoses.
23. This work is supported by specialist consultation from Harmful Sexual Behaviour practitioners including attendance at the panels, so oversight and guidance is offered to all Harmful Sexual Behaviour cases as well as specific Harmful Sexual Behaviour consultation to cases referred to Head2Head. In the last 12 months this service has continued to offer this Harmful Sexual Behaviour service to everyone referred with no waiting list and no restriction on service, despite increased demand. There have been occasions where individual children may have fallen outside the usual Head2Head process and there have been direct conversations between Children's Social Care and Head2Head service. This has been as a direct result of the working relationships between Head2Head and Children's Social Care, focusing on the needs of children rather than being driven by process.
24. The commissioning arrangements for Head2Head contracts are currently under review to include a joint arrangement with Nottingham City and the Integrated Care Board in relation to neurodiversity assessments.
25. There has been improvement in the timeliness of assessments being completed. This is currently at 59% whereas for the previous year this was around 46%. This is an area of work we wish to continue to improve upon over the coming year and would aim to have the number of assessments being completed in timescale to increase by a further 15% over the next 12 months.
26. Timelier panels have reduced previous difficulties in respect of consent, which meant whilst waiting for panel, families may not be willing to agree to ongoing social care intervention for extended periods of time. The decrease in panel has resolved this in most circumstances.
27. The system has demonstrated an ability to be flexible and respond to an increase in demand, allowing for assessments and panels to be completed and respond to individual need and reduce delay, and for children to get the right levels of support and intervention at the right time.

Training and Workforce Development

28. We have continued to promote our training offer and the identified Lead Social Work Practice Consultants are delivering three different Harmful Sexual Behaviour focused training sessions on a rolling programme. This is aimed at frontline social work teams.
29. The programme for the NCSP Training for Harmful Sexual Behaviour recommenced from January 2023, with further training scheduled over the coming months. Again, uptake is good with several different agencies, including schools, foster carers, Adult Social Care and Early Help services being represented.

30. There is no proposal to increase the training offer currently. There is a need to ensure that the uptake is there, how this is then translated in to practice and how we evidence the success and impact of any training delivered in our interventions with children and young people.

Voice and experiences of children, young people and their families

31. The voices of children and young people presenting with harmful sexual behaviours are being heard by professionals and there is a wider understanding of the issues affecting them. The voices of victims also form part of the holistic assessment.
32. This is an area of focus for development over the next 12 months to work with children and young people to gain understanding of their experience of our services and to use this to inform improvement and development of practice and services across the system.

Evidence of Challenges and Impact

33. The challenges continue to be in respect of availability of resources for young people who sexually harm. The Safer Living Foundation is currently not accepting any further referrals and the mentoring programme has ended. Challenges around waiting times for panel have begun to resolve themselves but for several families they had to wait some time before a decision has been able to be made. This results in families remaining open to Children's Social Care longer than necessary.

What Are Our Ambitions

34. Over the coming months a needs assessment is being undertaken by Public Health. This will look at the numbers of young people in Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire engaging in harmful and /or problematic sexual behaviours and any relevant trends; any wider health issues of this cohort; current service provision and best practice as well as any unmet needs or gaps in service. It will consider the voices of children and young people. The focus will be on the period from January 2019 – December 2022 to allow for a comparison of pre and post pandemic numbers. This is due to be completed mid/end July 2023 and will inform future work plans and priorities across the partnership.
35. Initial conversations with the Office of the Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner have taken place and once the needs assessment has been completed, further discussion around the role they may take in relation to the prevention of harmful sexual behaviour across Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City.
36. The NSPCC is undertaking a piece of work that will focus on early intervention work in respect of problematic sexual behaviour with a focus on delivering on this work to schools across Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City. They have consulted with the Local Authorities and partners in respect of this.
37. Work is being undertaken to understand and improve the journey a child takes through Children's Social Care when an assessment for Harmful Sexual Behaviour is undertaken. This includes consideration of the number of transfer points a child experiences and how this can create delay.

Our Commitments for the Next 12 Months

- To continue to improve social work practice in respect of timeliness of assessments and panels including improving a child's journey of support for harmful sexual behaviour through the social care system.
- To consider the recommendations of the needs assessment once completed across the partnership and with Nottingham City and agree a work plan for the steering group.
- To work with partners (including the third sector) and Nottingham City to improve the early help offer in respect of problematic sexual behaviour particularly within schools.
- To improve the gathering and influence of the voices of children and young people who have lived experience of harmful sexual behaviour.

The steering group will develop a detailed action plan in relation to the above ambitions and the measures for progress.

Jennifer Campbell
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Strategic Safeguarding and Independent Review
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