

26th July 2021

Agenda Item: 4

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE: ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

Purpose of the Report

1. Members requested an annual report to the Children and Young People's Committee following high profile enquiries into child sexual exploitation and missing children in several local authorities. This report provides an update against the Council's 2020/21 priorities and analysis of the statistical data for the year end 2020/21.
2. The report seeks approval for the Committee to receive quarterly performance data, to be included in the quarterly performance reports to this Committee, and further annual reports providing an overview of the work to address the threat of child sexual exploitation and children missing from home and care in Nottinghamshire.

Information

Strategic Partnerships, Governance and Service Provision

3. Child sexual exploitation and children missing from home and care continue to be high priority areas of work by partner agencies in Nottinghamshire. There is an inevitable link between children missing from home and care and the threat of child exploitation; not all children who go missing are harmed but children who are exploited are often reported missing or found to have been missing not reported.
4. The Child Sexual Exploitation Cross Authority Group has been replaced by a Cross Partnership Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Management Group. The purpose of the group is to provide overarching governance of the various work streams for children where risk of harm is located outside of the family or home. The early focus of the group has been to oversee a 'tackling child exploitation programme' led by Research in Practice which has supported the Council to develop thinking towards an integrated approach to children who experience extra-familial harm.
5. The statutory guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (*Working together to safeguard children 2018*) was updated to highlight the need for assessment of risks to children outside the home. Child sexual exploitation is one form of an extra-familial threat, others include child criminal exploitation including county lines, human trafficking, online abuse, teenage relationship abuse and radicalisation.

Professionals are reminded of the importance of considering all types of exploitation to which children may be exposed and the interrelated nature of these.

6. Work concerning Children Missing from Home and Care is overseen by the County Missing Children Steering Group which meets quarterly and takes a strategic lead in the coordination of inter-agency work as defined in the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership/ Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership Children Missing from Home and Care Joint Procedures.
7. The Cross Partnership Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Management Group and the Missing Steering Group report into the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership. Statistical information for both service areas is reported quarterly and annually to the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership.
8. Nottinghamshire has recently recommissioned child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse support to children and their families. The Children's Society, who fulfilled the previous contract, were successful in their new bid and awarded the contract for this work.

Children Missing from Home and Care

9. There has been a slight downward trend over the last couple of years in the total number of incidents of children reported missing from home but the incidents of children reported missing from care (including the Council's Looked After Children and Other Local Authority children placed in Nottinghamshire) has remained similar (see **Appendix 1**). More children go missing from home than from care, however individual children in care go missing on average up to three times more than a child missing from home. Children in the care of the Local Authority have complex issues and their missing episodes reflect this. Children placed in residential care and supported accommodation are more likely to go missing on multiple occasions.
10. There are robust interagency processes and procedures in place for children who go missing from home or care and close interagency working between the Police and the Local Authority particularly to locate and return a child to safety. When a child is found then a return home interview is completed to establish the reason for the missing incident and assess any risks to the child. Where a child goes missing for a significant period (more than 72hrs) or frequently (3 times in 90 days) then a multi-agency meeting is held to consider the child's support needs and risk issues. A Police-led multi-agency 'Missing and Hotspots' meeting is held monthly to review and address the risks to children who go missing most frequently with the aim to reduce missing incidents. Increasingly, the children reviewed at this meeting are also the children listed for review at the monthly child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation panels; this is expected as work improves to identify and support children at risk of exploitation.
11. There appears to be a significant reduction in reports of children missing from home in the year 2020/21 (see **Appendix 1**, Figure 1) and this can largely be explained by periods of national lockdown due to Covid-19. The decrease in children missing from home is likely to be linked to the reduction of opportunities for movement due to lockdown restrictions and due to parents being at home and able to offer greater supervision and boundaries. However, the continued number of children missing from care could be due to these children responding less well to the restrictions imposed by Covid-19 because of their vulnerability and experience of trauma. Despite this, the missing from care rate remains below that of both national and statistical neighbours (see **Appendix 1**, Figure 2).

12. Return home interviews are a key tool for understanding the child's missing experience and are offered to children upon their return home. The main reasons provided by children and their carers for missing occurrences remains due to boundary issues within the home/care setting. Other common reasons include relationship difficulties between parent and child, friendship issues or children's drug or alcohol use. The guidance for completing return home interviews with children is to complete these away from their home to provide opportunity for candid responses, and any issues are addressed on a case by case basis. Due to lockdown restrictions, a blended approach to completing return home interviews has been adopted including some face to face contact but also some virtual contact via telephone or video conferencing platforms (Microsoft Teams/Zoom/FaceTime). This is not the preferred method for engaging with children but there have been some positive reports by social workers that this has worked well for some children, resulting in better engagement.
13. Over 90% of reported missing occurrences required a return home interviews. The return home interview is a key opportunity to understand a child's missing experience but not all children will engage with this process, hence the low figures represented for return home interviews completed with input and engagement with the child (see **Appendix 1**, figure 3). The figures are slightly lower for the reporting period of 2020/21 compared with previous years due to national lockdown restrictions in place. Nevertheless, 83% of children who required a return home interview were offered one and where some chose not to engage, others were given advice and support. Importantly, for the vast majority of return home interviews, the professionals undertaking this piece of work had opportunity to gather intelligence around the missing occurrence to form a view about any risks to the child even if the child chose not to engage with the process.
14. Most children who go missing from home and care are missing for less than four hours at any one time. However, some children do experience harm during their missing episode and they can be exposed to potential risks which they are more vulnerable to outside of the family home or care setting. The main potential risk issues identified for individual children missing from home and care in 2020/21 include adults who may pose a risk to children, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and offending behaviour.
15. For those children placed in Nottinghamshire by other local authorities, it is the responsibility of the placing authority to complete return home interviews. Information about return home interviews required for other local authorities children missing in Nottinghamshire has improved slightly but further improvements are required. Other local authorities children account for 19% of the total missing children occurrences which relates to 15% of the individual children missing. As not all local authorities provide a return interview for children assessed by Police as low risk, this results in ongoing difficulties in obtaining return home interviews from some other local authorities despite the expectation being that they follow the missing protocol of the local authority in which the child is placed. A joint protocol agreed by East Midlands regional partners has gone some way to addressing this and further amendments to this protocol are currently being made to provide clearer escalation processes and promote compliance with the regional agreement.
16. A children missing from home and care e-learning training package was developed in January 2021 which can be accessed by Local Authority staff and partners via the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership. This has been particularly useful during a year of online working. It is anticipated that this will increase understanding of the processes and procedures in place and provide an improved response to the

completion of return home interviews. To date, 208 colleagues have completed the training package and it is one of the priorities for the Missing Steering Group to raise awareness of the programme across the partnership and increase uptake.

Child Sexual Exploitation

17. The most recent Police Problem Profile (November 2020) notes a 19% decrease in crime from 2019, however there was a 12% increase in demand on the Sexual Exploitation Investigation Unit (i.e. safeguarding and disruption work). Perpetrators of child sexual exploitation are 82% male and the victims are 90% female with a mean age between 15-16yrs. The profile identifies that there were 182 victims of child sexual exploitation across Nottingham City and County for the reporting period.
18. Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns have had a direct impact on child sexual exploitation crime and demand in Nottinghamshire. The Sexual Exploitation Investigation Unit (SEIU) has seen a decrease in crimes being recorded. After an initial dip during the beginning of lockdown, the Police Online Investigation Team has seen increases in referrals month on month, which is continuing. The Police problem profile for this period identifies that at least 312 children have been safeguarded through the work of the Police Online Investigation Team in Nottinghamshire.
19. In Nottinghamshire County, a total of 438 children were identified as potentially at risk of child sexual exploitation during this period; 308 of those children were new referrals to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (see **Appendix 2**). Referrals to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub for child sexual exploitation concerns dipped in 2020/21 which reflects the Police statistics for a reduction in crime reports. Nevertheless, a total of 430 child sexual exploitation risk assessments were completed as the Local Authority has provided a proactive service to children where there are potential child sexual exploitation concerns.
20. There is a robust system in place between Police and the Local Authority to verify victims of child sexual exploitation, and the children considered most at risk of child sexual exploitation are listed for strategic review at the monthly Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation panel. There has been a reduction in the number of children listed for review at the Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation panel during this period; this is reflective of the reduction in child sexual exploitation recorded crimes.
21. After an initial spike in 2017/18 for numbers of children considered at child sexual exploitation strategy meetings, these have remained stable (see **Appendix 2**, figure 5). This includes over the last year though with a slight reduction, particularly for children subject to child protection meetings (where there are concerns about parents' ability to meet the needs of their child). The exploitation of children is largely a risk that is located outside of the home and so the restrictions in movement is likely to have increased parental supervision whilst reducing opportunity for external contact with perpetrators.
22. The peak age range for children affected by child sexual exploitation remains similar to previous years. The Children's Society is commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council to provide focused support to both children and their families most affected by child sexual abuse including child sexual exploitation. The Children's Society has supported 75 children affected by child sexual exploitation during this period including support to parents and carers via remote education sessions. This contract was re-commissioned in June 2021 for a further three-year period until August 2024 after a renewed tender process. The East Midlands Children and Young People's Sexual Assault Service continues to provide medical care and assessment to those children who have

been sexually assaulted and access to the Children's Independent Sexual Violence Advisors who offer support and advocacy.

23. Children's Social Care continues to undertake preventive and keeping safe work with children and their parents/carers who meet the threshold for Social Care involvement. The Family Service undertakes preventive and keeping safe work with those children not meeting the threshold for Social Care involvement but in need of intervention. The Tackling Emerging Threats to Children team works with children in primary and secondary schools to address issues of online safety and harmful sexual behaviour.
24. Child sexual exploitation training was successfully transferred to an online format for Local Authority staff and partner agencies to complete during a year where there has been no direct child sexual exploitation training due to Covid-19 restrictions. The previous one-day course has been divided into four sessions, addressing the different areas professionals need to be aware of. The total number trained on virtual events is 436 and a further 949 colleagues have completed an e-learning package.
25. Where children are found to experience both child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation, the pathway for the predominant risk is followed while ensuring all risks are addressed in the work undertaken. There has been much development in the work to address children at risk of criminal exploitation. Work streams are now embedded which are akin to the child sexual exploitation processes and procedures and there have been three virtual training sessions for the Local Authority and partner agencies which were well received. A priority for the coming year is to develop an integrated approach to children at risk of exploitation.

Progress against key priorities for 2019/20

26. These key priorities were identified in the annual report, previously presented to Committee, for the year 2019-20. Below are those priorities along with the updated position.

Working with the wider cross authority Children at Risk of Exploitation agenda to further integrate our response to children facing different types of exploitation	The Tackling Child Exploitation programme is now complete and will be used as the basis to explore further a cross authority integrated approach to children who experience extra familial abuse through exploitation in their communities.
Work to further develop reporting from the Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation panel	Work on this specific priority has been absorbed into the tackling child exploitation programme as we seek to establish an integrated approach to child exploitation.
Work to develop a Mosaic 'step' to record Return Interviews and Multi-Agency Meetings	New Mosaic step completed
Continue to work to increase the completion rate and quality of return home interviews	Work has continued in this area. The issues with return home interviews is located largely in the timeliness of reporting and in effective engagement with children rather than work not being undertaken. This will continue to be a priority area.
Work to improve Multi-Agency Meetings completion	There have been no issues raised about these meetings not taking place as required.

	Furthermore, due to multi-agency meetings moving to an on-line platform due to Covid-19 restrictions, partner agency attendance has been reported to have improved.
Engage the Regional group to address and improve missing amongst other local authorities	Nottinghamshire County Council have led on this work within the Tier 3 regional group. Amendments have been made and due to be signed off.
Explore early intervention to reduce the numbers of children missing from home	The main reason for missing reports is linked to the parent-child relationship and effective boundaries therein. The pathway to provision outlines a clear tiered level of support for children and families in need of support. Any focused work in this area has been impacted by the pandemic, however, early intervention for children at risk of exploitation will be considered as part of the outcome from the tackling child exploitation support programme.
Explore and address multiple missing episodes for children in supported accommodation.	Any focused work in this area has been affected by the pandemic. However, children who go missing frequently are considered at multi agency meetings on a case by case basis and subject to review at the monthly 'multiple missing and hotspots' meeting if they meet the criteria. Additionally, similarly to above, children at risk of exploitation in supported accommodation will be considered as part of the outcome from the tackling child exploitation support programme.

Key priorities for 2020/21

27. Priorities for the forthcoming year:

- increase the numbers of Local Authority staff and partner agency completions of the e-learning Children Missing from Home and Care training programme
- work to continue to address and improve missing amongst other local authorities
- review the cross-authority missing from home and care procedures
- work to improve connectivity between the monthly 'multiple missing and hotspots' meeting with other monthly child exploitation review panels
- work to develop a cross-authority integrated approach to children who experience extra-familial abuse through exploitation.

Other Options Considered

28. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

29. Agree future arrangements for the Committee to receive performance data and information on this work.

Statutory and Policy Implications

30. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

31. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That Committee:

- 1) agrees to receive quarterly performance data included in the quarterly performance reports to the Committee
- 2) agrees to receive annual reports to provide an overview of the work to address the threat of Child Sexual Exploitation and Children Missing from Home and Care in Nottinghamshire.

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Constitutional Comments (LW 01/07/21)

32. Children & Young People's Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of the report.

Financial Comments (CDS 01/07/21)

33. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

[Child Sexual Exploitation and Children Missing from Home and Care: annual report 2019/20](#) – report to Children & Young People’s Committee on 21st September 2020

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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