

People Scrutiny Commission

14th October 2019



Report of: Ann James, Service Director Care & Support, Children & Families

Title: Contextual Safeguarding

Ward: Citywide

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Recommendation:

That Scrutiny note the report on the prevalence of complex risks and the development of services to build contextual safeguarding for children and young people in the city.

The significant issues in the report are:

This report seeks to help scrutiny understand the emerging landscape and definition of contextual safeguarding. It sets out Bristol's approach including recent developments in response to Serious Youth Violence and other complex safeguarding risks. It also highlights the approach taken by Avon and Somerset Constabulary in the delivery of Operation Topaz.

Whilst Bristol has seen a rise in serious youth violence over recent years, the response of the multiagency partnership and strategic leadership of the city builds on strengths in our current approach, is based in best practice from elsewhere and has invested in prevention and developing trauma informed approaches to aid recovery as well as disruption of perpetrators of abuse. There are indicators of impact that we will continue to evaluate as our approach develops further.



1. Definition

- 1.1 Contextual Safeguarding is a developing approach to safeguarding children at risk of extra-familial abuse. Extra-familial abuse includes issues such as child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, trafficking, radicalisation, hate crime, bullying and online abuse. It recognises all of these issues as safeguarding issues which require a child welfare response.
- 1.2 A contextual safeguarding approach suggests that children are better safeguarded when there is a focus on responding to locations, peer groups, neighbourhoods and school environments where the harm happens rather than individual children in their family context. This challenges what is a more traditional family focussed approach to social work that is set out within social work legislation and designed around the assessment of a child and their family rather than a group of unrelated children or a location.

2. National Policy Context

- 2.1 The concept of Contextual Safeguarding was adopted by the government in the publication of Working Together 2018. Working Together 2018 is the national guidance which sets out how multi-agency partners should work together to safeguard children. The adoption of the term Contextual Safeguarding in this legislation strengthens existing legislative expectations that the local authority works with other partners to safeguard children where the harm exists beyond the family.
- 2.2 Nationally, there is a growing body of evidence that shows existing Child Protection processes are not as effective for extra-familial abuse as they are for intra-familial abuse. The evidence is that, in response different local authorities and their partners have developed different responses as they innovate and redesign safeguarding approaches to better meet these children's needs.
- 2.3 In 2015 the Government set up a National Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse under the Inquiry Act 2005. The purpose and scope of the Inquiry are set out in its Terms of Reference, which states that its role is:

'to consider the extent to which State and non-State institutions have failed in their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation; to consider the extent to which those failings have since been addressed; to identify further action needed to address any failings identified; to consider the steps which it is necessary for State and non-State institutions to take in order to protect children from such abuse in future; and to publish a report with recommendations.'
- 2.4 Bristol is one of six named areas in the Inquiry's investigation into Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks. The Local Authority is a core participant of this Inquiry and has supplied information in relation to this investigation. **Significant resource has been committed to providing the evidence required by the investigation.** The hearing into this strand of the Inquiry will be held in Spring 2020.

3. Our approach

- 3.1 Services in Bristol have a strong background in protecting adolescents at risk of extra-familial harm. Since 2014 we have been building on our learning from Operation Brooke (a large scale investigation into organised child sexual exploitation) and developing our approach to extra-familial harm. Practitioners have a good understanding of extra-familial abuse as a safeguarding issue and many children, their siblings and their families receive support through our Children social care and Families in Focus services.

- 3.2 We are joint-commissioners of a pan-Avon and Somerset specialist Child Sexual Exploitation Service delivered by Barnardo's. This service works with around 45 of our most vulnerable children at any one time providing an intensive integrated victim care response which includes co-located sexual health services, specialist CSE CAMHS nurse and drugs and alcohol drop-in. The Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner supported a bid to the Home Office by Barnardo's to provide a parallel service to child victims of child criminal exploitation and serious youth violence. This service launched in January and is delivered in partnership with Learning Partnership West. Bristol City Council also fund a 18-25 Sexual Exploitation Transitions Worker who supports young adults at risk of sexual exploitation or those who are recovering from childhood sexual exploitation.
- 3.3 Following Operation Brooke¹ the partnership recognised a need for a more proactive policing and disruption approach. Avon and Somerset Constabulary funded the specialist Operation Topaz team in 2017. The team is responsible for finding opportunities to disrupt or prosecute perpetrators of Child Sexual Exploitation and has resulted in increased rates of prosecution.
- 3.4 In October 2019 Avon and Somerset Constabulary will expand the Operation Topaz team to respond to child criminal exploitation and trafficking for county lines. Bristol City Council support the team through provision of intelligence, close joint working on individual cases, and access for the police analyst to the Think Family Database to build profiles of risk and vulnerability.
- 3.5 Bristol City Council also commission preventative services through the Creative Youth Network targeted youth work service, mentoring programmes, Families in Focus evidence-based parenting programmes for adolescents, the Safeguarding Education Team's support of school-based prevention interventions and Team Around the School approach.

4. Contextual Safeguarding Scale Up

- 4.1 Bristol City Council successfully led on a Bristol Safeguarding Children Board (now Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership) bid to partner with the University of Bedfordshire on the Contextual Safeguarding Scale-Up Project². The project was launched in April 2019 and will help us implement system change across the child protection and safeguarding system with the aim of improving our response to extra-familial abuse.
- 4.2 It includes trialling models such as peer and location assessments rather than child and family assessments, and interventions which target groups. It does not set aside the importance of a social work approach, but will draw on a range of disciplines that support and enable community and family safety. The project includes a team of embedded researchers who will support us to review our current system and identify ways in which we could use our existing resources to more effect. The observation phase of the research is underway. This will inform the co-design of system change pilots from early December 2019 that will be implemented and evaluated over the forthcoming two and a half years.

5 Regional approach

¹ <https://bristolsafeguarding.org/children-home/serious-case-reviews/bristol-scrs/operation-brooke-2016/>

² <https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/>

- 5.1 The Scale Up Project will also inform our regional approach through the Avon and Somerset Safeguarding Strategic Partnership. Bristol City Council’s Director of Children and Families Services chairs a newly established regional group under the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership and Avon and Somerset Safeguarding Strategic Partnership arrangements. It has responsibility for developing improved cross-border intelligence and responses to extra-familial abuse.

6 Serious Youth Violence and Safer Options development

- 6.1 Safer Options is Bristol’s Violence Reduction Unit established for East Central Bristol from September 2018, it is now growing and being implemented citywide. It takes an intelligence led and evidence informed approach to identifying, coordinating and acting to prevent/help children recover from serious youth violence and associated adversity.
- 6.2 Safer Options is a coordinated Multi-Agency response to serious youth violence, gang affiliation and knife crime. It cannot be and is not entirely separate from wider contextual safeguarding risks such as child criminal and sexual exploitation and county lines.
- 6.3 There has been a general rise in serious youth violence and child criminal exploitation (CCE) in Bristol over the past three years. In the last 12 months Bristol has seen a 28% increase in robberies, 28% increase in violence using a weapon and a 14% increase in offences of violence without injury.
- 6.4 Whilst overall youth offending is reducing, the level of serious incidents has increased. Commensurate with this is an increase in the use being made by the courts of secure remand. In addition to the social issues that are involved, this brings an associated cost pressure to the Local Authority in excess of £1m.
- 6.5 Nationally a rise in serious youth violence and CCE has also been seen with an increase in county lines and the use of children by criminal gangs to move and deal drugs in other areas and cities. It is important that schools and universal settings work with us to include and protect children. We have developed a team around the school offer and employed education coordinators with the aim of supporting our schools inclusion agenda.
- 6.6 Since implementation there have been a number of examples of impact where children have accepted a community mentor, have engaged with positive activities, have been supported in school and where risk has been assessed to have reduced.

7 Safer Options Team Approach:

- 7.1 The Safer Options Team is grounded in the Public Health approach to serious violence which has been seen to be successful in Glasgow and is now used in London. This approach conceptualises violence as a collective, rather than individual issue and focuses on understanding causality in order to provide preventative strategies that operate at every level from community through to specialist recovery from trauma.
- 7.2 The intelligence that the Safer Options Team receive enables the identification of contextual “hot spots” where heightened risk is associated with a particular area or group and to take action that builds safety and aims to disrupt the risks that are present.
- 7.3 A key element of the approach is to recognise adverse childhood experiences, the links with contextual safeguarding and to strengthen a trauma informed approach which includes helping to build positive activities that engage young people, therapeutic and psychological

services which are effective in supporting this group of young people and their families. The team support and coordinate existing agencies and services, including universal services by identifying a lead professional. Where needed, they will strengthen the service offer to young people and support them to take up services that are focussed on protection, diversion, building aspiration and achieving potential.

8 Operation Topaz

- 8.1 Topaz incorporates a police led proactive team of officers and intelligence staff as well as nominated contact officers. The unit is intelligence led and is designed to assess risk posed to children from identified suspects involved in Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) behaviours using a bespoke risk assessment, designed by the constabulary, with the intent of carrying out suspect disruption to prevent harm to children.
- 8.2 This can take many forms but includes the issuing of child abduction warning notices, arrests for unrelated offences as a means of disruption and investigations into cases of child sexual exploitation where these are not being dealt with by other police units.
- 8.3 A key part of the Topaz process is the involvement of victim contact officers whose role is to undertake long term engagement when required with children who are presenting considerable risk to themselves through identified risk factors, they are also responsible for undertaking evidence gathering via video interviews and statements.
- 8.4 The unit currently is above national average for ongoing engagement and evidential disclosures for CSE as a result of this tactic. Topaz also incorporates a significant proportion of multi-agency working with intelligence being gathered and police led multi-agency meetings where intelligence and taskings are shared with other agencies. This sharing has opened up lines of enquiry and increased intelligence sharing with partner agencies.
- 8.5 Topaz is working with 77 victims or potential victims currently and to date has 151 victims and 129 suspects listed in Bristol. The rapport that engagement officers build is key to Topaz success and can take anything from a few days to many weeks. To date, 52% of children allocated to Topaz have gone onto give either a video interview or statement.