

## Learning Lessons Review Briefing

### Child Criminal Exploitation/ Contextual Safeguarding

#### What is Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)?

Criminal Exploitation is abuse where children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes. Coercions may take the form of debt bondage, physical or sexual violence, grooming, and other forms of intimidation. Individuals may not know they are being exploited but the presence of power imbalance and disadvantage weighted against the individual, highlights the risk.



#### What is County Lines?

County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in transporting illegal drugs from one area to another, using dedicated mobile phones. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons.

#### What is Contextual Safeguarding/Harm Away from Home

Contextual Safeguarding seeks to identify and respond to harm and abuse posed to young people outside their home, either from adults or other young people.

Contextual Safeguarding, which has been developed by Dr. Carlene Firmin at the University of Bedfordshire's [Contextual Safeguarding Network](#), recognises that as young people grow and develop they are influenced by a whole range of environments and people outside of their family. For example in school or college, in the local community, in their peer groups or online. Contextual Safeguarding looks at how we can best understand these risks, engage with children and young people and help to keep them safe.

#### The Background of the Review

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP) undertook a learning lessons review (LLR) following an incident in June 2021, the incident did not meet the criteria for a Child Safeguarding Practice Review.

The LLR was undertaken to explore lessons to be learnt to help understand how agencies can learn and adapt from this incident. Whilst it was determined the incident was significant it did not fit the usual parameters of a traditional review, traditional approaches have focussed on the risk of violence and abuse from inside the home. It was recognised there was a real opportunity to look at this incident through the lens of both safeguarding and community safety and to address the time that children and young people spend outside the home to understand the impact that organised crime, county lines and criminal exploitation is having on young people in Darlington and how agencies can work together to address and manage the risks going forward.

The focus of the review was not specifically on the incident but as a consequence of it, to understand how agencies could work differently as current services were not aligned to situations such as this case presented and a requirement to look outside the traditional core group of safeguarding practitioners.

## **The Review and Findings**

A number of meetings were held in order to clarify facts and understand current processes and decision making in practice. Through those meetings the following areas of learning were identified:

- Risks were not viewed as safeguarding issues they were viewed as criminal and for youth justice services to address
- Professionals viewed child protection in a traditional manner and did not recognise harm outside the home
- Information was not always shared and or in a timely manner
- Evidence that agencies had not worked together effectively
- Poor use of language - concerns viewed as a 'lifestyle choice'
- Lack of understanding of the complexities of working with young people who may be vulnerable to grooming and exploitation outside the family home
- No use of a contextualised approach such as mapping
- Didn't always engage parents/carers
- Lack of professional curiosity
- Children continue to be seen as criminals and it should also be acknowledged they may also be; victims and have additional vulnerabilities and/or alleged perpetrators and in both instances should be assessed to understand the impact of contextual issues on their safety and welfare

## **What are we going to do as a result of this review?**

Whilst it is recognised it will take some time to fully embed and understand the nature of criminal exploitation and harm outside the home, this is what the Partnership has agreed to do following this review:

- Look outside the traditional core group of practitioners to strengthen partnership working
- Consider the role community safety and enforcement services have in identifying young people who may be at risk and include them in future planning to support with risk management
- Local Authority and Police to take the lead when concerns are presented
- Implement new pathways to support and monitor young people at risk of harm outside the family home
- Implement twice weekly Community Safety Check In meetings to respond to current issues or concerns providing an opportunity to share information
- Involve parents/carers at the earliest opportunity if willing to engage
- If parents not willing to engage adapt a different approach to intervention
- Interventions will focus on addressing wider environmental factors
- Improve awareness to obtain a better understanding of how young people get involved in exploitation in the first instance by developing briefings and practice guidance
- Continue to raise awareness across all partner agencies with the development of training and video podcasts

## **Further practice/awareness developments since the review was undertaken in 2021:**

- Child Exploitation and Multi-Agency Missing Operational meetings have combined to become Missing and Exploited Group (MEG) to bring together the need to look at missing episodes in context. They are held fortnightly and are more action/outcome focussed.
- Daily multi-agency Missing meetings take place within the Front Door Service which includes consideration of any new Child Exploitation Matrix, meaning a swifter response.
- Review of Child Exploitation Matrix is now considered by the Missing and Exploited Team, based within the Front Door Service
- Launch of Early Intervention Exploitation Panel which is held monthly. Information gathered from Community Safety Check In meetings is analysed and where appropriate a referral is made to the Panel. This Panel will focus on 'places' and the potential forming of groups of children whether there may be a concern for them being drawn into criminal exploitation or exploited in other ways.
- Harm away from home/contextualised safeguarding online conference held in February 2022, [YouTube video](#) is available online to view.

## What are the signs to look out for?

There are a wide range of potential risks where the prime cause of harm is outside the family home. Below are some examples of those areas to look out for:

- Peer on peer abuse
- Criminal/Sexual Exploitation and online abuse
- Missing episodes from home and education
- Misusing drugs or alcohol
- Gang involvement
- Radicalisation
- Trafficking and modern slavery
- Poor mental health
- Signs of neglect/abuse/injuries

## What does good look like?

The nature of criminal exploitation means it can often be difficult to identify and young people may be too scared to speak about their experiences through fear of repercussions.

What can you do?

- Know the signs to look out for
- Listen and speak open and honestly about the risks of exploitation
- Listen actively to what young people are telling you about their experiences, they are more likely to be open if they feel listened to
- Understand and stay up to date with what exploitation looks like in Darlington area, understanding context and language may allow for early identification, take time to listen and understand common words and phrases used
- Share information with other professionals working with the young person in a timely manner
- Discuss any concerns with your manager or other practitioners
- Keep up to date with the latest training and practice guidance
- Don't assume the young person is not a victim

There is a dedicated missing and exploited team based in the front door of children's services, should you need any advice or wish to discuss your concerns, give them a call on 01325 406252.

## Want to learn more?

### Useful links and information:

A comprehensive range of information, policy, procedure, practice guidance and training opportunities are available to support you and can be accessed via the [DSP website](#):

There are many other resources out there to support you, some of which include:

[contextual safeguarding network website](#)

[NSPCC website](#)

