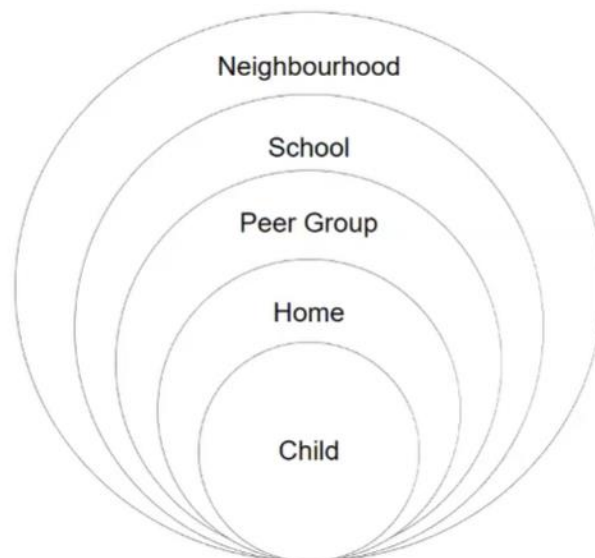# Children and Young People Select Committee

Scrutiny Review of Contextual Safeguarding and Youth Relationships

January 2023

Children and Young People Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
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Contents

	Page

Select Committee – Membership

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Councillor Barbara Inman (Vice Chair)
Councillor Dan Fagan
Councillor Clare Gamble
Councillor Ray Godwin
Councillor Lauriane Povey
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Foreword

TBA

Councillor Carol Clark
Chair

Councillor Barbara Inman
Vice Chair

Original Brief

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

As children move from early childhood into adolescence, they spend increasing amounts of time socialising outside the home or 'online'. The majority make this transition safely and have safe and protective schools, community settings and friendship groups. However, some children and young people can come across individuals / groups who are willing to exploit them due to their age and other vulnerabilities.

A child may not recognise they are being exploited; they may think they have a free and open choice as they are subjected to a combination of 'push, pull and control' factors that they themselves are not aware of. Push factors are things that can push a child away from their home and towards the perpetrator (including adverse childhood experiences such as neglect and family conflict). Pull factors are grooming techniques used to lure the child and gain their child's attention and admiration or desire for acceptance by those with more power over them such as money and status, and control factors include threats of some kind including violence.

We recognise that children who are being exploited need a particular type of response from children's services, one that is holistic and child-focused to address those push/pull factors and protect them from harm. This is coupled with action alongside community safety and police to target perpetrators and disrupt their activities.

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families.

Contextual safeguarding recognises the impact that extra-familial settings can have on the ability of parents and carers to be protective and the weight of peer influence on the decisions that young people make. Contextual safeguarding:

• Extends the notion of 'capacity to safeguard' to sectors that operate beyond families
• Provides a framework in which referrals can be made for contextual interventions that, when delivered effectively, can complement work with individuals and families

The review will examine our response and approach to the issues of contextual safeguarding, child exploitation and the issue of youth violence.

There are increasing concerns about threats to young people from organised crime groups, and in the context of national trends about youth violence as well as the continuing focus on child sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation. Young people being sexually exploited remains a national and local issue. Exploitation by organised criminal activity is a more recent threat. In addition, there are concerns over youth violence including the carrying of knives.
The review mirrors a national focus on the increasing threat to young people from factors outside the home.

The Council are developing an approach with Hartlepool Borough Council and Cleveland Police to respond in the form of a MACE (Multi agency child exploitation) hub.

This review will examine the issues and factors which are leading to a focus in this area, evaluate our response and help to steer the work of the MACE hub.

Within this context, the review will also examine **violent and coercive behaviour in youth relationships.**

As most young people have smartphones and can be in constant contact with a person they are in a relationship with, there is an increase of young people engaged in toxic and controlling relationships which they believe is normal behaviour. These intense early relationships in young adulthood can lead to unhealthy adult relationships and domestic abuse.

A key outcome would be to educate young people on healthy relationships (including consensual sexual relationships) and support national campaign empowering girls to stop abuse.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

- What adverse childhood experience (ACE) make children vulnerable to unhealthy relationships and exploitative situations?
- What ACE create attachment/ personality disorders affecting relationships in later life? How can these issues be addressed?
- Review current approaches; are they coherent? Do they respond to the Child/YP's needs?
- What is the legal and policy framework for contextual safeguarding approaches?
- How are young people at risk identified? What is the profile for children at risk?
- In what contexts might children and young people experience harm? What are the risks?
- What key partners are involved in a contextual safeguarding system?
- To what extent do children's services and key agencies/ partners have a reach into the places where extra-familial harm occurs?
- What partnerships are in place with sectors/ individuals responsible for the nature of extra-familial contexts?
- How effectively are partners sharing information and how well do partner agencies work together?
- How do we prevent, assess and intervene with the social conditions of abuse?
- What approaches have been proven to have a positive impact?
- Is context acknowledged explicitly in all work with children and families? How are we embedding contextual safeguarding with the children's social care system?
- Are extra-familial contexts incorporated into child protection frameworks?
- What education is provided to students in relation to wellbeing, healthy relationships and safeguarding?
- Do children know where to go for help and support?
- Are there any gaps in relationship work in schools and other settings?
- How are the outcomes of success measured in relation to contextual as well as individual change?

Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

Cabinet, key partners.

Expected duration of review and key milestones:

Eight months:

Scope and Project Plan agreed – 8 June 2022
Evidence gathering – July – November 2022
Draft Recommendations – 7 December 2022
Final Report – 17 January 2023
Submission to Cabinet – 23 February 2023

What information do we need?

Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):

https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/contextual-safeguarding/ Publications
The legal and policy framework for Contextual Safeguarding approaches
Hackney Council – Whole systems application – Contextual Safeguarding Implementation Toolkit

New information:

Wide range of case studies
Different approaches to tacking the problem adopted elsewhere

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)	**What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?**
Contextual Safeguarding Team Children's Social Care	What is Contextual Safeguarding Background Presentation – What is Contextual Safeguarding? Causes of vulnerability
Education and Wellbeing Service	Work in Schools
Hartlepool and Stockton Safeguarding Children Partnership	Multi-agency approach Role of HSSCP Partnership working
Cleveland Police and other key partners, including Safer Stockton Partnership and Youth Justice	Wider strategic approach to tackle issues within Cleveland and surrounding areas

Executive Summary

This report presents the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review of the Contextual Safeguarding and Youth Relationships.

The overall aim of the review was to assess the Council's response and approach to the issues of contextual safeguarding. This review examined the factors leading to a focus in this area and understand the work of the multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) hub. Within this context, the review has also examined violent and coercive behaviour in youth relationships.

The Committee examined the following key lines of enquiry:

- What adverse childhood experienced (ACE) make children vulnerable to unhealthy relationships and exploitative situations?
- What ACE create attachment/ personality disorders affecting relationships in later life? How can these issues be addressed?
- Review current approaches; are they coherent? Do they respond to the Child/YP's needs?
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- Are extra-familial contexts incorporated into child protection frameworks?
- What education is provided to students in relation to wellbeing, healthy relationships and safeguarding?
- Do children know where to go for help and support?
- Are there any gaps in relationship work in schools and other settings?
- How are the outcomes of success measured in relation to contextual as well as individual change?

Key findings and conclusions

- As children move from early childhood into adolescence, they spend increasing amounts of time socialising outside the home or 'online'. The majority make this transition safely, however, some children and young people can come across individuals / groups who exploit them due to their age and other vulnerabilities
- Where extra-familial risk is present, factors outside the family overwhelm a parent's capacity to protect a young person, not factors within it
- Child protection systems have been traditionally designed to respond to risks occurring in families or the home environment with the child/ family referred into the system not the peers, school or neighbourhood creating harm
- Contextual safeguarding extends the notion of 'capacity to safeguard' to sectors that operate beyond families and provides a framework in which referrals can be made for contextual

- interventions that, when delivered effectively, can complement work with individuals and families
- A contextual safeguarding system looks beyond a parent's capacity to safeguard and recognises that safeguarding is "everyone's responsibility", creating safe spaces and safeguarding activities that recognise and work with the significance of peer relationships
- All schools must have regard to the statutory guidance from the Department for Education on Relationship Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education. The focus in primary school is on teaching the fundamental building blocks and characteristics of positive relationships, with particular reference to friendships, family relationships, and relationships with other peers and adults. The aim of RSE at secondary is to give young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, not just intimate relationships
- Free for all schools, the Healthy Schools Programme (delivered in partnership with Public Health and Help and Support) is quality assured, linked to the Ofsted inspection framework and aligned to Statutory Relationships, Sex and Health Education. Schools who register with the local programme have access to a wide range of support
- The Virtual School and Vulnerable Learners Team work closely together to support children and schools in the area of Social, Emotional and Mental Health. The Virtual School have an offer around Attachment Aware and Trauma Informed Practice to support individual Children in our Care (CIOC) and schools and the Vulnerable Learners Team offer a wide range of interventions to schools
- The School Support Team offer advice and a wide range of support on emerging issues or concerns as well as support with transition from primary to secondary
- The Council are developing an approach with Hartlepool Borough Council and Cleveland Police to respond to the risk of child exploitation through a MACE (Multi agency child exploitation) hub. The MACE hub provides a daily source of information, scrutiny and problem analysis, improving spaces and places to reduce the risk of harm. Partnership working helps to build a complete picture of the child's environment and provide evidence for arrests. A 2021/22 PEEL inspection of the north-east regional response to serious and organised crime highlighted the effectiveness of the MACE Team
- The Community Safety Strategy was renewed in 2022 to take into account other strategies including those impacting on children and young people
- The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Court Act 2022, introduced a duty to consult with educational settings, prisons and youth custody authorities, for the first time. Responsible Authorities must also work together and adopt a public health approach to 'stop problems upstream'. The new emphasis on young people highlights the need to address issues at primary and secondary stages and through wider partnership working
- Although overall crime rates have fallen in Stockton-on-Tees, there has been an increase in violent crime and is recognised that a partnership approach is essential to tackle this
- The nature of offending is changing including new challenges such as County Lines. Although there have been success stories and progress made, it is recognised that this is the beginning of a partnership journey and greater understanding of the complex issues and tactics adopted is needed
- The current child protection system, legislation and practice does not adequately address the extra-familial harm and risks facing many young people
- There is no statutory definition for Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). The Children's Society believe a statutory definition of CCE is needed because children who are coerced into criminal activity are often treated as criminals by statutory agencies rather than as victims
- It is important to understand the influence of not only the material benefits of grooming but what the items represent to the child and how they can satisfy unmet needs by making a child feel accepted, important and rewarded
- Children may not recognise that they are being exploited or may be too afraid to admit that the exploitation is taking place
- It is imperative that judgements which position children as being responsible for putting themselves at risk and making poor decisions are challenged

Conclusion

As children move into adolescence, their sphere of influence widens from their primary care givers along with family and trusted friends to a wider network of peers, neighbourhoods and other influences; access to internet and mobile technology has cut across traditional barriers and extended the boundaries further. This has led to an acceptance of a greater need to understand who may be influencing young people and the degree of that influence. Contextual safeguarding seeks to address extra familial harm rather than purely focus on the individual child or their family. Tackling extra familial risk requires a holistic approach involving a wide range of partners and the community and our recommendations seek to raise awareness of the issue and strengthen our muti agency response.

Recommendations

1. That a strategic partnership approach to Contextualised Safeguarding is agreed and monitored through existing established multi-agency partnerships such as Safer Stockton Partnership, YOT Board, HSSCP and the Children and Young People's Board.

2. That a consistent definition of child criminal exploitation and contextual safeguarding is developed and adopted by all Stockton-on-Tees partners.

3. That clear outcome measures are defined to measure success of interventions and approaches.

4. That support is provided for schools, in partnership with Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSSCP), to promote understanding of contextualised safeguarding and relationships through the development and delivery of a programme of awareness raising and training supplemented with advice and guidance and clear routes into support.

5. That a training and support programme is delivered to Children's Services staff to enhance understanding of contextualised safeguarding and to help recognise and support young people who are being exploited or at risk of exploitation.

6. That a programme of awareness raising is developed for key partners and elected Members.

7. That a community guardian programme is introduced within schools and communities across Stockton-on-Tees to provide wider community support.

8. That multi-agency capacity to support MACE approach is strengthened through the strengthening of existing arrangements to meet need.

9. That assessment, planning and direct work with young people within Social Care and Help and Support is strengthened to meet the needs of children and young people who are being exploited or at risk through an option appraisal of how improvement in practice, better outcomes and a reduction in young people being exploited can be achieved.

1.0   Introduction

1.1   This report presents the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review of the Contextual Safeguarding and Youth Relationships.

1.2   The overall aim of the review was to assess the Council's response and approach to the issues of contextual safeguarding. This review examined the factors leading to a focus in this area and understand the work of the multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) hub. Within this context, the review has also examined violent and coercive behaviour in youth relationships.

1.3   As children move from early childhood into adolescence, they spend increasing amounts of time socialising outside the home or 'online'. The majority make this transition safely and have safe and protective schools, community settings and friendship groups. However, some children and young people can come across individuals / groups who exploit them due to their age and other vulnerabilities.

1.4   A child may not recognise they are being exploited; they may think they have a free and open choice as they are subjected to a combination of 'push, pull and control' factors that they themselves are not aware of. Children who are being exploited need a particular type of response from children's services, one that is holistic and child-focused to address those push/pull factors and protect them from harm. This is coupled with action alongside community safety and police to target perpetrators and disrupt their activities.

1.5   Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. Contextual safeguarding recognises the impact that extra-familial settings can have on the ability of parents and carers to be protective and the weight of peer influence on the decisions that young people make. Contextual safeguarding:

- Extends the notion of 'capacity to safeguard' to sectors that operate beyond families
- Provides a framework in which referrals can be made for contextual interventions that, when delivered effectively, can complement work with individuals and families

1.6   There are also increasing concerns about threats to young people from organised crime groups, and in the context of national trends about youth violence as well as the continuing focus on child sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation. Young people being sexually exploited remains a national and local issue. Exploitation by organised criminal activity is a more recent threat. In addition, there are concerns over youth violence including the carrying of knives. The review mirrors a national focus on the increasing threat to young people from factors outside the home.

1.7   As most young people have smartphones and can be in constant contact with a person they are in a relationship with, there is an increase of young people engaged in toxic and controlling relationships which they believe is normal behaviour. These intense early relationships in young adulthood can lead to unhealthy adult relationships and domestic abuse.

1.8   The Committee examined the following key lines of enquiry:

- What adverse childhood experienced (ACE) make children vulnerable to unhealthy relationships and exploitative situations?
- What ACE create attachment/ personality disorders affecting relationships in later life? How can these issues be addressed?
- Review current approaches; are they coherent? Do they respond to the Child/Young Person's needs?
- What is the legal and policy framework for contextual safeguarding approaches?
- How are young people at risk identified? What is the profile for children at risk?

- In what contexts might children and young people experience harm? What are the risks?
- What key partners are involved in a contextual safeguarding system?
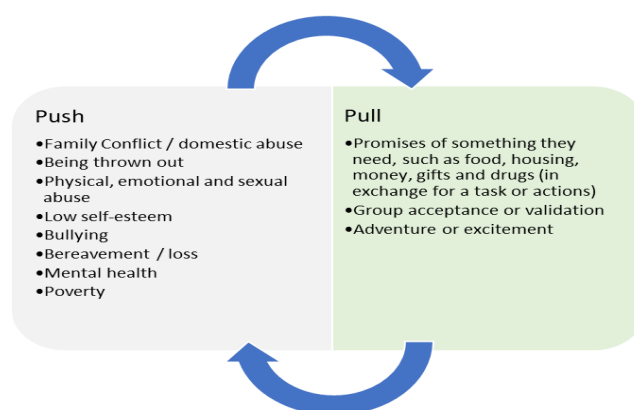- To what extent do children's services and key agencies/ partners have a reach into the places where extra-familial harm occurs?
- What partnerships are in place with sectors/ individuals responsible for the nature of extra-familial contexts?
- How effectively are partners sharing information and how well do partner agencies work together?
- How do we prevent, assess and intervene with the social conditions of abuse?
- What approaches have been proven to have a positive impact?
- Is context acknowledged explicitly in all work with children and families? How are we embedding contextual safeguarding with the children's social care system?
- Are extra-familial contexts incorporated into child protection frameworks?
- What education is provided to students in relation to wellbeing, healthy relationships and safeguarding?
- Do children know where to go for help and support?
- Are there any gaps in relationship work in schools and other settings?
- How are the outcomes of success measured in relation to contextual as well as individual change?

2.0   Evidence

What makes a child vulnerable? The dynamics of adolescence

'Risk' and motivation for 'thrills'	Short term gains
Emotional regulation	Increasing desire for autonomy

Dynamics of adolescence
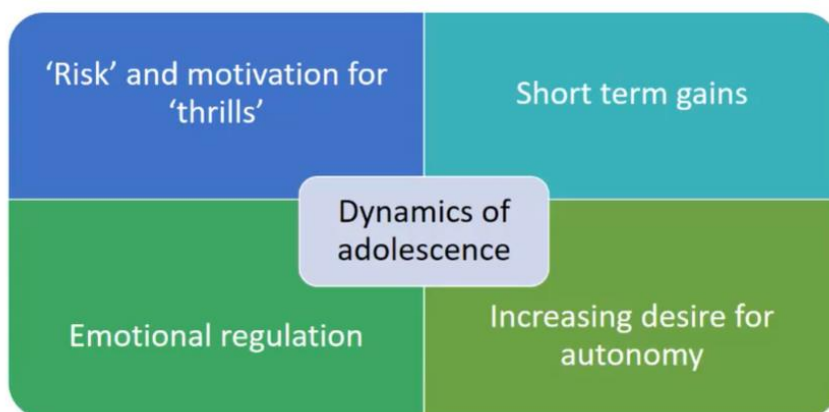
(Coleman, 2011, Hanson and Holmes, 2014; Blakemore, 2018)

Push
- Family Conflict / domestic abuse
- Being thrown out
- Physical, emotional and sexual abuse
- Low self-esteem
- Bullying
- Bereavement / loss
- Mental health
- Poverty

Pull
- Promises of something they need, such as food, housing, money, gifts and drugs (in exchange for a task or actions)
- Group acceptance or validation
- Adventure or excitement

2.1　People that exploit young people, play on the dynamics of adolescence. Practitioners have in the past blamed the adolescent for a failure to consider consequences and take risks rather than seeing them as being exploited. To safeguard young people, practitioners need to understand and accept these dynamics and be better at engaging with them.

2.2　Extra- familial forms of harm are highly contextual:

(Barter, 2009; Firmin, 2017; Firmin, Wroe and Lloyd, 2019; Hudeck, 2018)
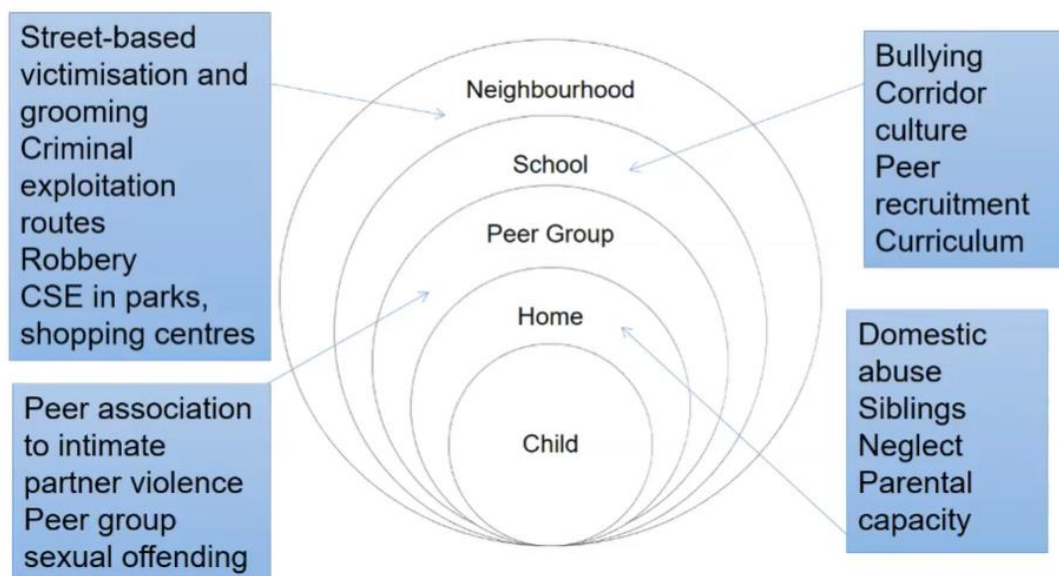
2.3　A child will not be exploited just because they experience adversity, there must be a person who wants to exploit that young person and a situation or context that they can access that young person. Where extra-familial risk is present, factors outside the family overwhelm a parent's capacity to protect a young person, not factors within it.

2.4　Child protection systems have been traditionally designed to respond to risks occurring in families or the home environment with the child/ family referred into the system not the peers, school or neighbourhood creating harm. Those working within a range of sectors have been trained to identify extra familial harm but then they have been tasked with referring into a system focusing on the individual and not the context that the harm is taking place. The system has deprioritised extra familial harm to adolescents because it does not know how to respond to its contextual dynamics.

2.5　The contextual safeguarding frameworks offer some resolution to these challenges over four domains:

2.6 A contextual safeguarding system looks beyond a parent's capacity to safeguard and recognises that safeguarding is "everyone's responsibility", creating safe spaces and safeguarding activities that recognise and work with the significance of peer relationships.

Work in schools

DfE Statutory Guidance: Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education

2.7 All schools must have regard to the statutory guidance from the Department for Education issued under Section 80A of the Education Act 2002 and section 403 of the Education Act 1996. Mandated for all schools from September 2020, there is no parental right to withdraw a child from relationship education at primary or secondary school, only from sex education, with schools advised to keep a record of the process and dialogue.

What does the statutory guidance say?

2.8 Primary "The focus in primary school should be on teaching the fundamental building blocks and characteristics of positive relationships, with particular reference to friendships, family relationships, and relationships with other peers and adults"

2.9 Relationships Education – Primary

- Families and people who care for me
- Caring friendships
- Respectful relationships
- Online relationships
- Being safe

2.10 Secondary "The aim of RSE is to give young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, not just intimate relationships"

2.11 Relationships and sex education – secondary

- Families
- Respectful relationships, including friendships
- Online and media
- Being safe
- Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health

Healthy Schools Programme

2.12 Free for all schools, the Healthy Schools Programme was created in partnership with Public Health and Help and Support with feedback from pilot schools helping to shape final design of the programme.

2.13 The Healthy Schools Toolkit has four overarching themes:

- Social and Emotional Wellbeing
- Resilience
- Nutrition
- Physical Activity

2.14   The programme is quality assured, linked to the Ofsted inspection framework and aligned to Statutory Relationships, Sex and Health Education. Schools who register with the local programme have access to:

- Support, training and development through established Personal Development Networks to understand and embed Healthy School Principles in their setting. The Networks are facilitated by the Education Improvement Service and draw on the expertise of a wide range of partner organisations
- A quality assured Stockton on Tees Healthy Schools toolkit which aligns the programme with Ofsted criteria
- Supporting good practice documents for each of the four key themes of the programme
- A strong network of partner organisations to support implementation of actions identified through a self-evaluation process
- Option to participate in the health-related behaviour survey which targets Years 5, 8 and 10 with questions aligned to the Healthy School themes (Schools Health Education Unit, Exeter University SHEU survey)

2.15   Schools also have access to:

- Termly School Safeguarding Forum
- iTHRIVE Framework
- Mental Health Support Teams in Schools
- Senior Mental Health Leads in schools
- Getting Help offer- collaborative approach

Schools offer from SEND and Inclusion Service

2.16   The Virtual School and Vulnerable Learners Team work closely together to support children and schools in the area of Social, Emotional and Mental Health. The Virtual School have an offer around Attachment Aware and Trauma Informed Practice to support individual Children in our Care (CIOC) and schools and the Vulnerable Learners Team offer a wide range of interventions to schools.

2.17   The **School Support Team** are committed to:

A partnership with families
- ➢ A way of working with families which is focused on the child
- ➢ A commitment to co-production

        ➢ Seeking, listening and acting on feedback

A Focus on local high-quality support

        ➢ Working with local communities, organisations and agencies to keep children local, in non-specialist provision and placements. We believe this is the best way to meet the needs of children

A joined-up system

        ➢ A supporting non-oppositional system, where families have access to advice, guidance and support, and agencies talk to each other, share information and work to a consistent and shared set of standards and objectives

A drive for impact

        ➢ A focus on identifying and responding to needs
        ➢ Measuring how well we are meeting needs and achieving outcomes
        ➢ Achieving real, long term and sustainable change, and avoiding short term assessment transfer or step up and step down
        ➢ A focus on underlying issues and the support needed to address them not responding to risk or presenting issues

A commitment to reflect, review and refine

        ➢ A continuous process of review and reflection to continuously improve, across the system and across all agencies

A drive for value for money

        ➢ An ongoing emphasis on reviewing how we are delivering, what are investing in, how successful we are being in achieving outcomes and managing out budgets to achieve more with less

2.18   The **School Support Adviser** provides:

- A Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for key school staff offering advice and support on emerging issues or concerns
- Regular contact and visits with senior leaders within schools to discuss the Vulnerable Child Database
- Half Termly solution circles within every cluster area to discuss children with low level levels of need and challenges
- Conducts all missing from home return interviews for children reported missing

2.19   Future work will include:

- Introducing and promoting the use of the School Support Worker role
- Introducing safeguarding supervision for key school staff who are Lead Professionals
- Strengthening links with key school staff when children and young people have in-year transfers
- Bringing services to schools – learn with lunch, link in with PD days

2.20   The **School Support Worker** has increased from 2 FTE to 6 FTE posts and is:

- Delivering low level interventions to children who need extra support
- Allocating work from solution circles to address concerns or challenges
- Planning and delivering the summer transition programme

2.21   Future work will include:

- Arranging face to face meetings and introducing the School Support Worker role
- Introducing group work sessions, within school, for pupils displaying risk taking behaviours
- Supporting children and young people with in-year transfers
- Supporting SSA to bring services to schools – learn with lunch, link in on PD days

2.22   The **School Support Enhanced Transition Pilot Programme** provides support:

- To vulnerable young people moving from year 6 primary to year 7 secondary school
- To build confidence, manage emotions, deal with change and make new friends
- To provide parents/carers a workshop on "How best to support your child around transition"
- Using a whole school approach including School Support Team, 0-19 Health Team, Bright Minds Big Futures, Alliance, Kooth and Mind
- One whole day of planned activity including 1:1 'Talk it Out' time
- To enable Year 7 school staff to get to know the cohort
- To provide follow up sessions
- To identify vulnerable young people who might need additional support in Year 7

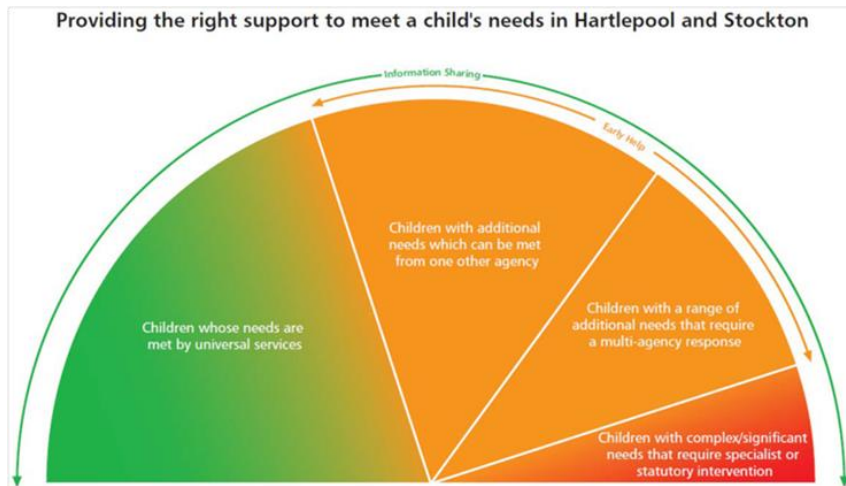2.23   Benefits of a Whole School Approach have included:

- Accountability and sense of responsibility
- Increased knowledge around good and bad choices
- Increased attendance and punctuality
- Reduces anxiety around starting a new school
- Improves positive self-image
- Promotes inclusiveness, empathy and relationship building
- Develops Problem solving skills
- Builds cohesive communities
- Reduced risk of exclusions

MACE – Multi Agency Child Exploitation

2.24   The Council are developing an approach with Hartlepool Borough Council and Cleveland Police to respond to the risk of child exploitation through a MACE (Multi agency child exploitation) hub. The MACE hub provides a daily source of information, scrutiny and problem analysis, improving spaces and places to reduce the risk of harm. Partnership working helps to build a complete picture of the child's environment and provide evidence for arrests.

2.25   The hub focuses on approaches to protect children and young people from extra familial harm and support parents/carers whose children are vulnerable to or experiencing extra familial harm at all levels of the continuum:
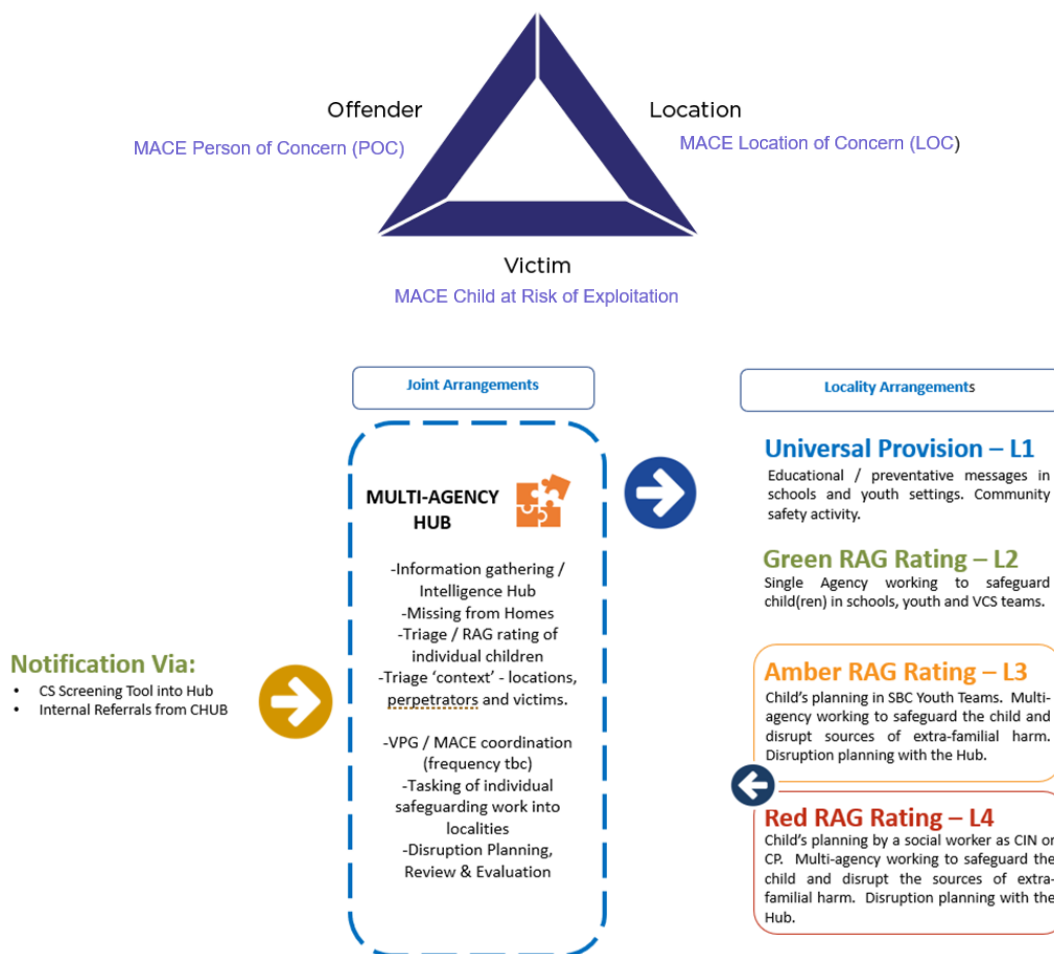
- Sexual Exploitation
- Criminal Exploitation & County Lines
- Going Missing from Home or Care
- Trafficking
- Modern Slavery
- Radicalisation

Providing the right support to meet a child's needs in Hartlepool and Stockton

Information Sharing

Early Help

Children with additional needs which can be met from one other agency

Children with a range of additional needs that require a multi-agency response

Children whose needs are met by universal services

Children with complex/significant needs that require specialist or statutory intervention

2.26   The MACE Hub model is interactive and responds to risks identified on a daily basis, rather than the previous, meeting based model. Information is received from a number of sources and is initially triaged to identify the level of risk to individual children, locations presenting with contextual risk, perpetrators and any group networks. A response is then developed.

2.27   Since the Hub has opened, it has been possible to develop a better understanding of the contextual risks that exploited children were experiencing and the identification of 'those at risk' has improved.

MACE Hub triage – problem analysis

Offender
MACE Person of Concern (POC)

Location
MACE Location of Concern (LOC)

Victim
MACE Child at Risk of Exploitation

Joint Arrangements

Locality Arrangements

MULTI-AGENCY HUB

-Information gathering / Intelligence Hub
-Missing from Homes
-Triage / RAG rating of individual children
-Triage 'context' - locations, perpetrators and victims.

-VPG / MACE coordination (frequency tbc)
-Tasking of individual safeguarding work into localities
-Disruption Planning, Review & Evaluation

Notification Via:
- CS Screening Tool into Hub
- Internal Referrals from CHUB

Universal Provision – L1
Educational / preventative messages in schools and youth settings. Community safety activity.

Green RAG Rating – L2
Single Agency working to safeguard child(ren) in schools, youth and VCS teams.

Amber RAG Rating – L3
Child's planning in SBC Youth Teams. Multi-agency working to safeguard the child and disrupt sources of extra-familial harm. Disruption planning with the Hub.

Red RAG Rating – L4
Child's planning by a social worker as CIN or CP. Multi-agency working to safeguard the child and disrupt the sources of extra-familial harm. Disruption planning with the Hub.

MACE Risk Level	MACE Risk Level Definition
LEVEL 4 – HIGH CONCERN	There is credible information/strong intelligence or evidence that this person/location **IS** a source harming a child/children through exploitation or grooming. **Risk Management Arrangements needed to support contextual response through disruption planning.**
LEVEL 3 – SOME CONCERN	There is credible information/intelligence to indicate that this person/location **MAY BE** a source harming a child/children through exploitation or grooming and requires further intelligence development & monitoring. **Preventative opportunities to be identified and tasking to support further development of information needed.**
LEVEL 2 – LOW CONCERN	This person or location is mentioned in a child's context, whilst this person/location may not support safety, there is insufficient evidence/intelligence to identify exploitation or grooming risk to children.
LEVEL 1 – NO CONCERN	There is no apparent risk identified to suggest this person/location is a source of child exploitation or grooming. Information supports that this association with the child is positive or neutral in the child's context.

2.28   Co-ordinated through the Joint Action Group (JAG), disruption activities might include licensing visits, premises closures, securing empty properties, street patrols, Thirteen visits etc.

2.29   Stockton-on-Tees is making strong progress compared to many other areas. A 2021/22 PEEL (police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy) inspection of the north-east regional response to serious and organised crime highlighted the effectiveness of the MACE Team as follows:

"The force has piloted a new multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) team in its North division. Personnel we spoke to in the team reported a 25 percent increase over a 6-month period in the number of children being identified as at risk of exploitation. They told us that this arrangement works well because personnel from partner organisations and police work in the same office. This has helped the flow of information between organisations. We were informed of an example where the MACE team had worked with an LRO to safeguard several young females being exploited by an OCG."

Community Safety Partnership

2.30   A statutory requirement under Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Community Safety Partnerships have a duty to work in close partnership to address key local issues and to ensure services are empowered to tackle the causes of public concerns. The Partnership has a duty to undertake strategic needs assessment, consult with local residents and develop a strategic plan setting out priorities for all responsible partners operating in Stockton on Tees.

2.31   The Community Safety Strategy was renewed in 2022 to take into account changes in priorities as a result of the pandemic as well as other existing strategies including those impacting on children and young people.

2.32   There are six key priorities, some of which are required in law whilst others reflect local priorities:

- Managing the impact of organised crime
- Reducing serious violence
- Supporting the vulnerable
- Reducing crime linked to substance misuse
- Reducing the offending rates of prolific offenders
- Reducing ASB and improving feelings of safety

Serious Violence Duty

2.33   The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Court Act 2022, extended the definition of serious violence to include domestic abuse, sexual offences, violence against property and threats of violence. It also introduced a duty to:

- work together to prevent and reduce serious violence, including youth related violence
- prepare and implement a strategy for preventing and reducing serious violence
- consult with educational settings, prisons and youth custody authorities, for the first time

2.34   Responsible Authorities must also work together and adopt a public health approach to 'stop problems upstream'. The new emphasis on young people highlights the need to address issues at primary and secondary stages and through wider partnership working.
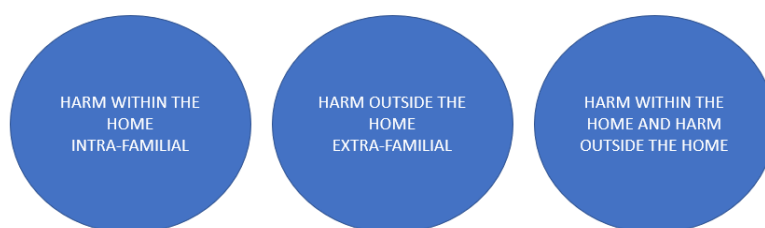
Operational Delivery

2.35   Strategic groups are focusing on empowering and removing barriers for operational delivery. A clear structure of overlapping groups addresses the key areas of concern feeding into the Safer Stockton Partnership. It is essential that the work to develop shared roles and closer joint working continues.
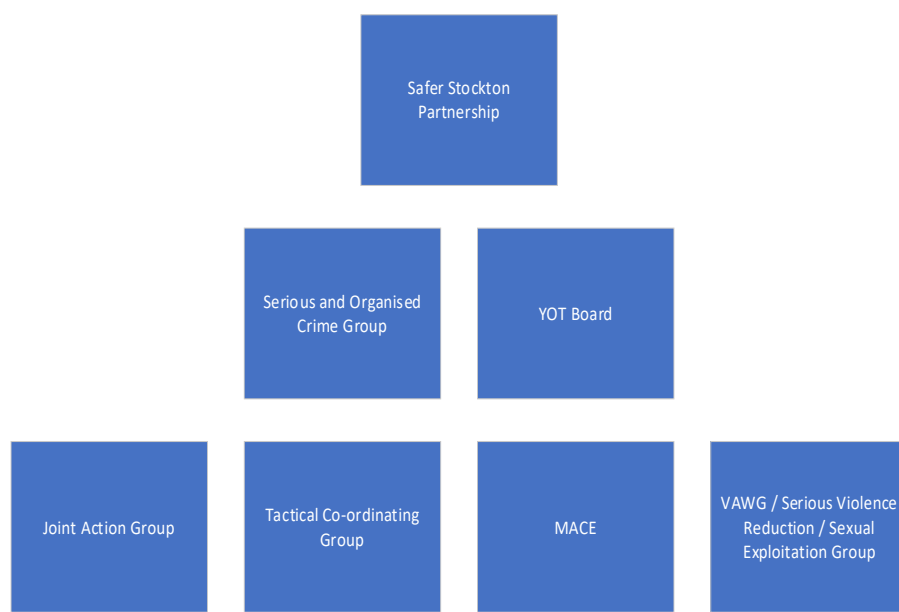
2.36   Although overall crime rates have fallen in Stockton-on-Tees, there has been an increase in violent crime and it is recognised that a partnership approach is essential to tackle this. The nature of offending is changing including new challenges such as County Lines. Although there have been success stories and progress made, it is recognised that this is the beginning of a partnership journey and greater understanding of the complex issues and tactics adopted is needed.

Social work perspective

HARM WITHIN THE
HOME
INTRA-FAMILIAL

HARM OUTSIDE THE
HOME
EXTRA-FAMILIAL

HARM WITHIN THE
HOME AND HARM
OUTSIDE THE HOME

2.37   It is recognised that the current child protection system, legislation and practice does not adequately address the extra-familial harm and risk facing many young people.

2.37   Social workers are trying to work within a range of safeguarding issues that adolescents face, particularly those related to:
   •   Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)
   •   County Lines
   •   Modern Slavery and trafficking
   •   Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Definitions

2.38   There is no statutory definition for Child Criminal Exploitation. The NSPCC states: "Criminal exploitation is child abuse where children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes". The Children's Society believes that a statutory definition of CCE is needed because across each form that CCE takes, the current reality is that children who are coerced into criminal activity are often treated as criminals by statutory agencies rather than as victims of exploitation. This is in part because safeguarding partners have different understandings of what constitutes criminal exploitation.

Grooming

2.39   When a child is being groomed, the child may be provided with money, or items, and they may be 'working' to gain materials to support both themselves and their families. However, if only the material benefits are considered, there is danger of oversimplifying the relationship between the exploiter and the exploited.

2.40   It is important to consider what those items represent and the feelings invoked to fully understand the exploitation taking place. This understanding is essential to answering the question of what needs to change around the child. For example:

Child is introduced to someone and becomes part of their group (*acceptance, belonging, family)*

Child is asked to take a package (drugs) to an address (*importance, responsibility, purpose)*

Child is given money for this task and is praised (*reward, recognition, trust)*

2.41   As relationships become established, expectations, or requirements for the child will emerge that influence and enforce behaviours. For example, the child may be threatened or harmed or their family may be threatened or harmed; the child may be instructed as to what to say to their parent(s), adults and professionals; some children who are actively being exploited, when the exploitation is raised in discussion will say "Do you really think I'd be groomed?", "Do you really think that I would be doing that?" or "I know what exploitation is and that is not happening to me".

2.42   Exploitation presents a distinct challenge when seeking a child's wishes and feelings as they may have been groomed to believe that they wish to make a particular choice, they may have

weighed up the harms and rationalised the abuse because ultimately their desire for acceptance, belonging or reward is being met or partly met. Children may not recognise that they are being exploited or may be too afraid to admit that the exploitation is taking place. Exploitation may exist despite a child's account stating otherwise.

Evidencing Harm

2.43   There is a legacy in which extra-familial harm is conceptualised as the consequence of 'poor decisions' rather than decisions made in a set of poor situations. Value judgements that can detrimentally affect the ability to see harm and vulnerability need to be challenged to avoid the conclusion that the child is responsible for putting themselves at risk.

Safeguarding children who are suffering exploitation is difficult

2.44   A good starting point is to establish the anticipated goals and to determine what safety would look like for a particular child, family or group. It is important to identify who is causing the harm and whether any actions can be taken to prevent this. It might not be as simple as reducing contact if they are peers.

2.45   The mechanism of exploitation needs also to be understood; if the need being exploited is one of belonging, or care or of purpose, then what is required to change around the child for these needs to be met? If a child has been excluded from school or if family relationships are strained, the vulnerability to being exploited is heightened as the structures that could offer safety are not there.

2.46   It is important to balance work undertaken with a child around thinking and behaviour alongside recognition that difficulties cannot be overcome by the child alone. A child cannot think their way out of debt bondage or coercive control. For some children, it may not be possible to enact sufficient safeguards around them in the community and they may require care or restrictive placements.

2.47   These children are suffering abuse and require care as part of a plan to protect them. If a child does become looked after, the intervention required to repair relationships needs to be outlined, to rebuild trust and belonging in the community. Without a plan or intervention to support transition, the child may return to the same environment and again suffer harm because the change required extends beyond them.

Key findings

- As children move from early childhood into adolescence, they spend increasing amounts of time socialising outside the home or 'online'. The majority make this transition safely, however, some children and young people can come across individuals / groups who exploit them due to their age and other vulnerabilities
- Where extra-familial risk is present, factors outside the family overwhelm a parent's capacity to protect a young person, not factors within it
- Child protection systems have been traditionally designed to respond to risks occurring in families or the home environment with the child/ family referred into the system not the peers, school or neighbourhood creating harm
- Contextual safeguarding extends the notion of 'capacity to safeguard' to sectors that operate beyond families and provides a framework in which referrals can be made for contextual interventions that, when delivered effectively, can complement work with individuals and families
- A contextual safeguarding system looks beyond a parent's capacity to safeguard and recognises that safeguarding is "everyone's responsibility", creating safe spaces and safeguarding activities that recognise and work with the significance of peer relationships

- All schools must have regard to the statutory guidance from the Department for Education on Relationship Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education. The focus in primary school is on teaching the fundamental building blocks and characteristics of positive relationships, with particular reference to friendships, family relationships, and relationships with other peers and adults. The aim of RSE at secondary is to give young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, not just intimate relationships
- Free for all schools, the Healthy Schools Programme (delivered in partnership with Public Health and Help and Support) is quality assured, linked to the Ofsted inspection framework and aligned to Statutory Relationships, Sex and Health Education. Schools who register with the local programme have access to a wide range of support
- The Virtual School and Vulnerable Learners Team work closely together to support children and schools in the area of Social, Emotional and Mental Health. The Virtual School have an offer around Attachment Aware and Trauma Informed Practice to support individual Children in our Care (CIOC) and schools and the Vulnerable Learners Team offer a wide range of interventions to schools
- The School Support Team offer advice and a wide range of support on emerging issues or concerns as well as support with transition from primary to secondary
- The Council are developing an approach with Hartlepool Borough Council and Cleveland Police to respond to the risk of child exploitation through a MACE (Multi agency child exploitation) hub. The MACE hub provides a daily source of information, scrutiny and problem analysis, improving spaces and places to reduce the risk of harm. Partnership working helps to build a complete picture of the child's environment and provide evidence for arrests. A 2021/22 PEEL inspection of the north-east regional response to serious and organised crime highlighted the effectiveness of the MACE Team
- The Community Safety Strategy was renewed in 2022 to take into account other strategies including those impacting on children and young people
- The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Court Act 2022, introduced a duty to consult with educational settings, prisons and youth custody authorities, for the first time. Responsible Authorities must also work together and adopt a public health approach to 'stop problems upstream'. The new emphasis on young people highlights the need to address issues at primary and secondary stages and through wider partnership working
- Although overall crime rates have fallen in Stockton-on-Tees, there has been an increase in violent crime and is recognised that a partnership approach is essential to tackle this
- The nature of offending is changing including new challenges such as County Lines. Although there have been success stories and progress made, it is recognised that this is the beginning of a partnership journey and greater understanding of the complex issues and tactics adopted is needed
- The current child protection system, legislation and practice does not adequately address the extra-familial harm and risks facing many young people
- There is no statutory definition for Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). The Children's Society believe a statutory definition of CCE is needed because children who are coerced into criminal activity are often treated as criminals by statutory agencies rather than as victims
- It is important to understand the influence of not only the material benefits of grooming but what the items represent to the child and how they can satisfy unmet needs by making a child feel accepted, important and rewarded
- Children may not recognise that they are being exploited or may be too afraid to admit that the exploitation is taking place
- It is imperative that judgements which position children as being responsible for putting themselves at risk and making poor decisions are challenged

Conclusion

As children move into adolescence, their sphere of influence widens from their primary care givers along with family and trusted friends to a wider network of peers, neighbourhoods and other influences; access to internet and mobile technology has cut across traditional barriers and extended the boundaries further. This has led to an acceptance of a greater need to understand who may be influencing young people and the degree of that influence. Contextual safeguarding seeks to address extra familial harm rather than purely focus on the individual child or their family. Tackling extra familial risk requires a holistic approach involving a wide range of partners and the community and our recommendations seek to raise awareness of the issue and strengthen our muti agency response.

Recommendations

1. That a strategic partnership approach to Contextualised Safeguarding is agreed and monitored through existing established multi-agency partnerships such as Safer Stockton Partnership, YOT Board, HSSCP and the Children and Young People's Board.

2. That a consistent definition of child criminal exploitation and contextual safeguarding is developed and adopted by all Stockton-on-Tees partners.

3. That clear outcome measures are defined to measure success of interventions and approaches.

4. That support is provided for schools, in partnership with Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSSCP), to promote understanding of contextualised safeguarding and relationships through the development and delivery of a programme of awareness raising and training supplemented with advice and guidance and clear routes into support.

5. That a training and support programme is delivered to Children's Services staff to enhance understanding of contextualised safeguarding and to help recognise and support young people who are being exploited or at risk of exploitation.

6. That a programme of awareness raising is developed for key partners and elected Members.

7. That a community guardian programme is introduced within schools and communities across Stockton-on-Tees to provide wider community support.

8. That multi-agency capacity to support MACE approach is strengthened through the strengthening of existing arrangements to meet need.

9. That assessment, planning and direct work with young people within Social Care and Help and Support is strengthened to meet the needs of children and young people who are being exploited or at risk through an option appraisal of how improvement in practice, better outcomes and a reduction in young people being exploited can be achieved.

Glossary

ACE   Adverse Childhood Experiences
CCE   Child Criminal Exploitation
CIOC   Children in our Care
FTE   Full Time Equivalent
HSSCP   Hartlepool and Stockton Safeguarding Children's Partnership
JAG   Joint Action Group
LRO   Local Reporting Officer
MACE   Multi Agency Child Exploitation
NSPCC   National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to children
OGC   Organised Crime Group
PD   Professional Development
PEEL   Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy
RSE   Relationship and Sex Education
SHEU   Schools Health Education Unit
SPOC   Single Point of Contact
SSA   School Support Adviser
YOT   Youth Offending Team