

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE**

### **SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING AND YOUTH RELATIONSHIPS**

#### **1.0 Executive Summary**

- 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 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?
  - 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?

## 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 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
- 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 multi 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.