

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
27 JUNE 2022**

MISSING AND EXPLOITED OPERATIONAL CHANGE

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To update on operational changes, improvements and developments in relation to the Missing and Exploited Service

Main Report

Brief Context

2. The Children's Front Door remodelled in March 2020. This major change brought about a different way of working and an opportunity to make sure the right service is provided swiftly to our children and their families, this is achieved through discussion facilitated by a dedicated phone line manned by social workers, replacing the emailing of written referrals. This approach allows for a much more relational approach with our internal and external partners, and importantly with our children and their families, it also allows for the social worker and caller to gain a deeper understanding of the concerns for the child and means they work together in a far more meaningful way than can be achieved from written information.
3. This remodelling at the Front Door transformed the Children's Access Point (CAP) into the Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT), CIAT is now at the forefront of an ever-growing Front Door Service. The growth of this service has been both rapid and successful, led by the needs of children and families. One area in particular has seen much improvement and change, this being children who go missing and who are at risk of exploitation.

The Missing and Exploited Team

4. Prior to the launch of CIAT a part-time Missing From Home Worker and a full time Child Sexual Exploitation Worker were part of CAP. These workers are commissioned from Barnardo's and play a pivotal role in offering children and young people an independent service. A review around the impact these workers were having on tackling this important area of safeguarding found that whilst the two workers were successful in terms of the work carried out with the children and young people, the workers often worked in isolation from one another and did not always work across services as well as they could, it was determined the service could be improved further.
5. In October 2020 the Missing and Exploitation Team was formed. The team is made up of one Team Manager; one Advanced Practitioner; one Missing From Home Worker; one Exploitation Worker and the SWITCH Team, the SWITCH team is made up of three full time

equivalent Children's Substance Misuse Workers. The team sits within the Front Door Service and so forms part of a much larger multi-agency group. The original part-time Missing From Home Worker post was increased to a full time post, and the Child Sexual Exploitation Worker became known as a Child Exploitation Worker, reflecting the shift in how exploitation is viewed and the need to work with children with a broader focus of exploitation and not just one that is focussed around child sexual exploitation.

6. Since the end of 2020 a further review has taken place, this review focussed on the impact of operational processes, exploring how these processes support the improvement of practice, there was also a sharp focus on outcomes. The findings from this review were that the various meetings and forums were informative but facilitating the duplication of discussions being held about the same children, the same professionals tended to be in attendance at both meetings and the plans and discussions were not as outcome focussed as they could be. The meetings tended to be reviews of what information had been gathered since the previous meeting rather than impactful arenas where actions are set with timescales and where activities such as disruption and better outcomes were brought about.

Operational processes currently in place

7. At present there is a weekly meeting held known as the Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker Meeting, a Multi-Agency Missing Meeting held every two weeks and the Child Exploitation Operational Group which is held monthly.
8. The Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker Meeting is multi-agency in nature and considers Police referrals and referrals where a Child Exploitation Matrix has been completed by any professionals who might have worries about a child being exploited. Any matrix that concludes a child is at moderate or significant risk will be discussed at the meeting and from that meeting if the outcome is that the child is deemed to be at high risk then the child is adopted onto the Child Exploitation Group, this is the arena where children at the greatest risk of exploitation are discussed.
9. The most recent review of these operational processes found that children discussed at the Child Exploitation Meeting are not always considered in a contextual way and due to this the missing episodes they experience are not reviewed in detail, the Multi-Agency Missing Meeting considers these missing episodes in a separate forum to the Child Exploitation Group, therefore an opportunity is missed to consider missing episodes along with risks around exploitation and as research and our growing knowledge of children and young people who go missing in Darlington tells us, children who go missing are at the greatest risk of exploitation.

Plan for Change

10. The Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker Meeting will remain as the pathway to explore and consider referrals using the Child Exploitation Matrix Tool where children are deemed to be at risk of moderate to significant risk of harm. Where a Child Exploitation Matrix Tool concludes as Low risk, or when the Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker Meeting determines the level of risk as moderate then a contact enquiry will be carried out by a social worker in CIAT, this will ensure the appropriate referral is made. If the child is already open to services then the Team Manager in the Missing and Exploited Team will be

notified and contact will be made with the lead professional to discuss a plan for the child, ensuring the element of exploitation remains a feature of all work and assessment.

11. A Community Safety Check In Meeting is now being held each Tuesday and Thursday morning. This meeting was borne out of a Learning Review in respect of a young person who was exploited. The meeting is dynamic and responsive to whatever issues arise through discussion, the session is an opportunity to share any information that informs on what is happening in the community, it takes a preventative approach to tackling the issue of exploitation in whatever form. It provides an opportunity to share information about specific children and young people where there are particular concerns, including the locations (hotspots) they may be frequenting, it also allows for identification and an understanding of who else the children and young people might be associating with. When specific children or 'hotspots' are identified then invites for professionals involved with that child, or who work in the community where they live or frequent are sent out and they attend the next meeting. Actions are agreed in order to take a preventative approach and reduce any potential for harm to occur where deemed necessary. If serious concerns are identified then Children's Social Care and Police take the lead on this without delay. This meeting is very much viewed as a starting point in terms of tackling this issue from a preventative approach.
12. An Early Intervention Exploitation Panel will be held monthly, this will be multi-agency in nature and will focus on specific children identified within the Community Safety Check In Meetings, or when a Child Exploitation Matrix Tool has identified the risk of exploitation as Low or Moderate. The Panel will be chaired by the Service Manager responsible for Early Intervention and the Young Peoples Engagement and Justice Service.
13. The Child Exploitation Group will become the Missing and Exploitation Group. This will ensure duplication of discussion does not take place, children who go missing will be discussed, as well as those deemed to be at significant risk of harm from exploitation. This will replace the need for the Multi-Agency Missing Meeting. The meeting will be chaired by the Service Manager responsible for the Children's Front Door, it will be outcome focussed and make sure a contextual approach to children's lives is taken.
14. A preventative approach to tackling the issue of children who go missing, and children at risk of exploitation was not always evident or in place in terms of an operational response. The remodelling of the Front Door and the forming of the Missing and Exploitation Team, together with the joining up of services both with internal and external partners is now supported by a dynamic and wide reaching approach and recognises and responds to the evolving nature of this area of safeguarding.
15. The revised processes mean all children and young people from the very early stages where a preventative approach is so important, to the needs of children and young people at the most significant risk of harm will receive the right level of support and help whether this is complex safety planning and sophisticated disruption tactics, or involvement at an early intervention level. It is expected the child and their parents, carers and family members will have the opportunity to work in a restorative way from the outset and that this approach is one that will ensure any involvement from Children's Services and internal and external partners will bring about a positive impact on children and their families.

16. Of interest, on 2 February 2022 an event took place that reached over 150 internal and external partners/professionals. The event was very successful and the feedback was excellent, the conference focussed on the issue of contextualised safeguarding, or what Darlington regards as the issue of ‘Harm Away From Home’. This event has helped launch how best we can tackle issues that relate to ‘Harm Away From Home’ in partnership with children and young people, their families and by working with any professional best placed to help reduce the risk of harm. The link to access some of the presentations and discussion at this event is <https://intranet.darlington.gov.uk/services-search/children-families-and-learning/workforce-development/training-course-materials/harm-away-from-home/>

Recommendation

17. It is recommended that Scrutiny members note the contents of the report.

Alison Poulter
Head of Service – Children’s Front Door and Early Intervention

Background Papers

Section 17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder.
Health and Wellbeing	This report has no direct implications to the Health and Well Being of residents of Darlington.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address.
Diversity	There are no issues relating to diversity which this report needs to address.
Wards Affected	The impact of the report on any individual Ward is considered to be minimal.
Groups Affected	The impact of the report on any individual Group is considered to be minimal.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
Council Plan	The changes set out in this report contribute to the Council Plan in a number of ways but in particular will assist in working with communities to maximise their potential.
Efficiency	This report does not identify specific efficiency savings.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The changes set out in this report will strengthen and improve the way in which children who are Looked After, and who are Care Leavers and who might go missing, or be at risk of exploitation are responded to.