

CHILD EXPLOITATION AND MISSING – PARTNER IMPACT

BLMK ICB is actively involved in the workstreams in relation to contextual Safeguarding & Exploitation and has an identified lead who engages with PREVENT and the CHANEL panel. Preventative work through awareness raising activities or therapeutic outreach, including appropriate literature to target vulnerable young people (e.g. missing young people) and people whose workplaces them in a position to recognise and report worrying behaviours; codes of practice for staff with direct contact with children/young people at risk of child exploitation; procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns specifically mention child exploitation.

Bedfordshire Police have utilised home office funding and the education and diversion team now offer free police based educational resources to all schools and other educational establishments across the county via Pol-Ed (An educational program developed and managed by West Yorkshire Police). The Pol-Ed resources are available to be delivered directly by schools and cover key areas such as:

- Relationships – Consent, Domestic Abuse, Sexual offenses, Grooming, Bullying
- Keeping Safe – Emergency Services, Child Criminal Exploitation, Anti-social behaviour, Gangs, Addiction
- Understanding the law – Responsible citizens, Stop and Search, Public order, Hate Crime.

Cambridgeshire Community Services (CCS) participated in the recent multi-agency thematic review of child exploitation. An action plan which is supporting the multi-agency response to child exploitation is overseen and supported across CCS as active participants.

CCS have emphasised the challenges for contextual safeguarding management, including CP-IS (child protection information system). These are acknowledged by all partners and will be a significant part of local agreement to support children and families.

Youth Partnership Nurse is seconded by CCS into this role in Luton and supports wider system working and meetings such as Multi-Agency Gang Panel (MAGPAN).

The Pan Beds Child exploitation risk assessment tool has been promoted to practitioners; making them aware it is now available on the Bavex website instead of the VERU website. This link has been added to our clinical system via safeguarding quick links. Additionally, the multi-agency submission forms for highlighting known intelligence related to contextual safeguarding risks are emphasised to staff in training and supervision. Again, its availability on the Bavex website has been highlighted.

The children and adult safeguarding teams work closely to ensure practitioners are supported and referrals are made to Prevent when necessary. Channel panel attendance also continues. To support practitioners the Prevent SOP was updated in 2023.

CCS FGM pathway and policy was updated in 2023 to align with legislation. This included the implementation of the use of FGM-IS into CCS policy and procedures.

What to improve:

It has been identified CCS needs to be represented at Child Exploitation and Missing (CEM) meetings. This will begin in May 2024.

ELFT: Supervision has been a focus across Luton where all adult facing services have had joint safeguarding supervision every quarter with the named professional for adults and children to encourage a more “think family” approach. CAMHS teams have quarterly safeguarding supervision with the named professional for safeguarding children. The top themes for practitioners seeking ad hoc advice across Luton were domestic abuse, child to parent violence, concerns around parenting capacity (either due to mental health concerns or physical health concerns), child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation which aligns with the safeguarding partnership priorities.

Link to change held their first ever two-day **Youth Empowerment Event**, which allowed them to witness the incredible power of young voices and the spark of creativity. From music production to arts and crafts to sharing input on current issues, the children and young people were able to use their voices to participate freely without judgement. As part of March’s **National Exploitation Awareness Day**, the group created a helping hands canvas which served as a platform for team members to express their commitments to safeguarding young people from exploitation.

Luton Council’s Children, Families and Education Services identify strong relationships with Bedfordshire Police in information sharing and joint working, along with support from agencies such as Link to Change. Their Contextual Safeguarding lead ensures consistent guidance on best practice and support to service delivery who shares weekly updates with Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Chairs.

The Missing Protocol and return home interviews support prompt engagement with children, young people and families to provide support and high rates of completion of return home interview. Where children and young people are reported missing, there is a collaborative response in terms of understanding the risk for that child and safety planning. A range of services are available to support children/parents, from statutory services to referrals to funded and voluntary programmes available in the community.

Single Point of Contact (SPOC) meetings take place monthly which look at the most frequent and highest risk missing children and young people in Luton. Service providers think collaboratively as to how we can best support each child and their family to reduce the risk and disrupt future missing episodes. A monthly contextual safeguarding meeting takes place

where a range of practitioners look at hot spots in the community that could benefit from additional support. This could include solutions such as increased lighting, cameras, visits from the TREE project, increased community police presence etc.

Police support with a range of disruption techniques such as CAWNS, property closure notices etc. The Contextual Safeguarding group will also look at intelligence and reports of cuckooing in specific addresses and areas, or anti-social behaviour and put in place disruption plans to make these areas safer. Ensuring that National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals are made for those children and young people believed to be a victim of exploitation which offers an extra level of protection. Where children, young people and their families are at risk of violence/repercussions, safety plans are out in place. This includes markers on properties (to ensure priority response if emergency call made), briefing to CCTV team, briefed to community policing and increased patrols. Personal alarms are made available for young people, provided by community safety and have been provided in particular to young people at risk of CSE.

The **LBC Youth Partnership Service** works with some of the most marginalised children in Luton who are also the group most likely to record poor education and health outcomes. Many of the children subject to interventions with the Service have previously undiagnosed issues which can affect the way they communicate and interact with others.

For an area with pockets of high deprivation, Luton can be a challenging place to work and it is significant that in terms of statutory performance, the Service has sustained some key improvements across reducing first time entrants into the criminal justice system and reductions in the use of custodial sentencing.

Our greatest challenge in Luton remains the numbers of children being drawn into criminal exploitation that leads to incidents of serious violence where there has been no previous offending. Luton had seen significant reductions in the use of custody for children over the preceding five years, however, 2023 saw a number of secure remands with children charged with serious youth violence.

Whilst not all these children were convicted, which gives weight to the recent HMIP findings around the overcharging of children in these types of incidents, 90% of the children remanded had no previous convictions. The four separate serious violence incidents in September 2023 involved 12 children, all were known to MAGPan. Of those 12, only two had previous recorded offending yet this was at a low level. All 12 had experienced exclusion from mainstream school, all had some form of health or communication issue and all were either open to Children Social Care or had multiple referrals for intervention previously.

There is close partnership working with **Bedfordshire's Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit**, through MAGPan and our existing partnership arrangements, ensuring that risk of exploitation is addressed at an early stage through targeted interventions and support.

Monthly meetings around the context of the town centre infrastructure/economy and how the town centre impacts on young people, gangs, Child Sexual Exploitation etc.

Meetings where vulnerable children and young people are discussed these include the Luton weekly Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE) meeting and MAGPan. In terms of building YPS scope and capacity to meet the challenges within MAGPan, two Criminal Exploitation Reduction Officer (CERO) posts have been created and two workers have been commissioned from two local community organisations who are seconded full time to the Service. In post since May 2023, the CEROs are working on the principle that communities trust the organisations based in their own communities and these two Officers are part of the YPS and sit together with all the other statutory and non-statutory members of the Service. Since the CEROs have been in post, consent to work with children in the MAGPan space has gone from a third to over 80% of children and families giving their consent. This is significant given the Service is holding this high risk in what is a voluntary space for most children open to MAGPan.

For more information please access [Luton Borough Council](#) or [BAVEX](#) or [Bedfordshire VERU](#).