

Child Exploitation Multi Agency Audit

June 2020



This audit reviewed the records of six children to consider how effectively organisations within South Gloucestershire identify and respond to child exploitation. The aim of the audit was to assess whether there were good multi agency standards for managing cases and whether organisations have implemented a robust and consistent response in line with statutory and good practice guidance, SGCP policies and procedures.

For the majority of the audit cohort parents/ carers had expressed resistance to professional involvement and this impacted professionals attempts to try and engage all family members and to remain focused on the child's needs.

Themes

Organisations involved were
 YOT, Children's Social Care, Sexual Health Services, Sirona, Preventative Services – Families Plus and YPS, Pathways Learning Centre, Safeguarding Advisor for Education, Police, CAMHS, BNSSG CCG on behalf of GPs, BASE, Educational Psychologist.



Children were aged from 13-17 years



3 girls
3 boys

1 child sexual exploitation



3 had not been reported missing when they should be

4 children criminal exploitation

1 child criminal and sexual exploitation

When children are not in receipt of full time education this increased their vulnerability. This issue was relevant for all children in the audit cohort. Exclusions and part time timetables meant that children had a lot of "free time" when their whereabouts were not known

Escalations were raised by organisations in relation to two children in the audit cohort. In both cases there was the added complexity of cross border issues. Although escalations were made, the multi agency agreed policy was not used and timescales were not adhered to. Escalations were not responded to promptly or within the timescales set out in the policy and this was not further escalated.

One of the children is a child looked after, four of the children are subject of child protection plans, and one child is working with preventative services (YPS)

This audit saw a much more positive picture in terms of the right information regarding risks to children and case status with Social Care being recorded on a child's health records than previous audits

Children's voices were not always heard by social workers, police or health. At times this was due to parents/ carers resistance for professional involvement. For some children, professionals who had a pre-existing relationship with the child were not involved in discussions and plans, when these key professionals could have supported gaining and hearing the child's voice.



What's Working Well?

- Organisations engagement in and information sharing within strategy discussions is strong
- A cross-border complex strategy meeting has been held and reviewed. Well attended & strong information sharing particularly from the police. A police investigation is also being undertaken regarding the cross-border concerns. There are clear plans in place regarding disruption of perpetrators and locations where children are at high risk of exploitation
- Good practice by 2 GPs who have spoken to children alone and ascertained their views even when different from parents .
- For 2 children police recognised them as victims of exploitation when there were concerns regarding criminal behaviour . Police referred to NRM regarding 1 of these children and to Social Care for the other clearly highlighting their concerns.
- A Return Home Interview (RHI) was completed promptly, the child engaged well with the worker and this worker was then allocated from YPS to work with the child regarding issues identified within the RHI.
- Strength in a child's engagement with education was identified and is being used to promote the child's engagement with Children's Social Care.
- Escalation has been attempted by organisations when there has been concerns regarding the response to children at risk of exploitation.

What are we Worried about?

- Key professionals including the correct education provider and BASE not being invited to key meetings including strategy discussions.
- Children's voices are not always heard by Social Care, police or health and this led to some missed opportunities to gain an understanding of children's views and experiences.
- NRM referrals are not always considered when there are potential concerns regarding trafficking (Also noted in December 19 multi-agency exploitation audit.)
- There were concerns regarding children having missed a significant amount of schooling. There were concerns about the slow identification of an appropriate education provision to meet a child's needs and children having experienced single or double permanent exclusions which all increased the children's vulnerability. (Also noted in December 19 multi-agency exploitation audit.)
- There was evidence that the two 17 year olds were not always considered as children first. The assessment of risk was heavily impacted by chronological age.
- Appropriate escalations were made by a number of agencies but these weren't always followed up the escalating organisation to ensure a resolution was reached. These issues were compounded by the complexity of cross border issues.
- For some children prior to them being allocated a social worker they had been discussed at the multi agency exploitation forum due to emerging concerns regarding exploitation but this was not noted on their records which led to some confusion about what information was known and what actions had been agreed.
- Actions and decisions agreed at a strategy discussion were not always completed/ followed up/ reviewed/ shared. There was evidence of delay in actions agreed in strategy discussions being completed included SERAF and NRM referrals being completed.
- Repeated use in some documents of the term "in a sexual relationship with" to refer to a child being sexually exploited
- There was limited contact between an assessment social worker and social worker of a connected child in South Gloucestershire.
- Initial parental perception regarding the concerns and level of risk and need for professional intervention was not always explored or challenged and this led to a lack of professional involvement or assessment of the child's needs for 5 of the children.
- In relation to one child the GP was not aware of or asked to contribute to the ICPC.

Next Steps

When a child is discussed at an Exploitation Forum due to emerging concerns regarding exploitation a note will be added by the consultant social worker to the child's Social Care record.

More detailed audit findings regarding Children's Social Care ART services to be sent to Children's Social Care SLT for their consideration.

When the subject of a strategy discussion is closely associated with another child also at risk of exploitation, that child's social worker needs to be contacted ahead of strategy discussion and invited to contribute (either in advance or through attending the meeting)

Social Care to take steps to ensure all appropriate agencies, including educational placements, are correctly invited to strategy meetings.

A development session will take place with Child Protection Conference Chairs which will consider the example of one of the children within the audit cohort and how to ensure a child's voice is heard and accurately reflected in the notes.

An assessment workshop has been planned for School Health Nurses and one of the children within the audit cohort will be considered to ensure when concerns are identified regarding changes in behaviour that face to face assessment with the child takes place, their views heard, and exploitation considered.

Resolution of professional differences (escalation policy) should be followed (including the timescales set) by all organisations when wanting to escalate concerns regarding the response of a South Gloucestershire organisations response to child exploitation concerns.