

Report of the Cabinet Member
Children's Services and Schools

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 5 December 2019:

1. By Councillor Hannaford on:

Last year nationally more than 60 young people were sexually abused or exploited after going missing from unregulated homes. Recent information requests also indicate that missing episodes have doubled in the past three years in England and Wales.

The charity Missing People said the government must "urgently" address the lack of quality placements. The Department for Education said councils had a duty to make sure accommodation for these children was suitable. Children over the age of 16, often in care or formerly so, are increasingly being placed in unregulated homes in England and Wales. Known as semi-independent or supported accommodation, they offer support but not care to residents.

Other indicators are that vulnerable teenagers in unregulated homes can face 'organised abuse' while living in such accommodation. The figures that can be compared from 85 councils suggest missing episodes have increased from 4,656 times in 2015/6 to 10,074 in 2018/9. In the same period, councils found that 63 young people were sexually abused or exploited while missing from unregulated homes. Around one in six missing episodes in 2019 featured children already recognised as being at risk from child sexual exploitation. It's also estimated that police forces spent at least £50m last year in looking for children in care who have gone missing from their accommodation.

Can the Cabinet Member please inform council on what the situation in Devon is regarding these matters and what work is being done collectively to counter these trends? Specifically do we even know how many unregulated homes that we have in the Devon?

2. By Councillor Hannaford on:

Nationally the number of children carrying weapons in schools has risen steeply. Incidents are now being recorded in Devon's schools.

Do we know how many children have been caught carrying weapons in Devon's schools in recent years?

What is being done collectively across the wider educational community in Devon to deal with this serious issue?

Scotland halted the rise in youth knife crime by giving young people more help and support with education, youth work, training, mental health, employment and housing.

Can this joined up multi-agency approach be used in Devon?

Does he agree that every secondary school should hold knife crime workshops to teach young people about the dangers of carrying weapons?

As part of a robust education campaign that it would be important young people should hear from relatives of knife-crime victims?

That pupils should be proactively taught about the dangers of social media on these issues, and given advice on how to tackle peer pressure in and around schools?

That there should be a dedicated police officer for every secondary school in Devon to help raise awareness over issues such as county lines , gangs , exploitation , drug dealing etc , and be a direct point of contact for school staff , pupils and families on this and other issues?

3. To update on:

The 30 year anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Response

1. Care children sexually abused or exploited while missing from homes

Types of provision

Children who are looked after can be placed in a variety of settings. Where a young person, under 16 has significant needs that cannot be met within a family-based type of placement, they will be placed in a children's home. Children's homes are regulated and inspected by Ofsted. For more details see Introduction to Children's Homes.

When a child is over 16 there are more options available. 'Supported accommodation' or 'supported lodgings' are used where young people no longer wish to be in a foster placement, or their needs are such they would not be met in a family-based placement. Many young people aged 16 and over want to move towards independence. Supported accommodation provides young people aged 16 + with a safe, healthy and nurturing environment with some individual care.

There are also types of supported accommodation where there may be a small number of young people living together but in their own individual small units with on-site staff and support. Many Local Authorities including Devon County Council, provide these placements.

These 16+ placements are not regulated by Ofsted.

Quality Assurance of 16+ Placements

External Provision for 16 + is commissioned and overseen by the Children's Commissioning Service.

The commissioning service has worked proactively and extensively with providers since 2018, both to identify the placements and to improve their quality. A Quality Assurance Framework was developed to support this requirement, and providers all received a quality assurance assessment, prior to being awarded a place on the framework. Arrangements for placements outside of this framework will receive a quality assessment and the expectations of providers are aligned to those set out within the overall Quality Assurance Framework.

Unregulated placements are not illegal or inappropriate providing that they are used correctly. They should only be for young people who are aged 16 years and over and should only be used for the purposes of support, not intensive care for those children where a residential place would be more appropriate.

Sufficiency of both residential and 16 plus placements is a national and local challenge.

The Childrens Commissioning Service is working to increase provision within both sectors launching a new contract this year for providers of 16+ provision. For sufficiency of residential beds, they have a 'market development plan' which over the last 3 years has increased the number of beds within Devon from 67 to 103. This work is ongoing as although this is a good outcome, these beds are not owned by DCC and can be used by any Local Authority in the country. There is a proposed 'Block Contract' to secure the use of 10 beds with providers which if agreed, is expected to be in place for the summer of 2020. Additionally, the 'Fixing the System Project' is looking specifically at young people who are placed at distance and working with providers to return these young people to Devon (where it is appropriate to do so).

The specific number of these types of provision operating within the Local Authority boundary is more complex, as the provisions do not require planning permission nor are they required to inform the local authority. At the time of writing there are 103 of these types of provisions. The vast majority are on our Framework with only 11 known to be not part of this agreement. The 'placements team' who find placements for DCC children use the placements on the framework. If, in an exceptional circumstance, a provision is not on the framework, perhaps due to being new, or no other placement being available, additional visits are completed by the Social Work Team and commissioning undertake a quality assurance visit.

Numbers of Children in Supported Accommodation and episodes of being missing.

There were 81 young people placed in supported accommodation during 2018/19 of whom 33 were placed out of the County. The improvements both in the quality and the scrutiny on these placements has evidenced a significant reduction in the number of missing episodes. The number of missing episodes for those children in 16 + provision reduced by 60% from 534 in 17/18 to 213 in 18/19. All children who go missing within Devon County Council who are looked after are offered a Return Home Interview.* This allows the young person to talk about the reasons they went missing and any concerns. If a child from another Local Authority goes missing from a placement within the County the REACH team will track the Return Home interview and escalate through the child's Local Authority if it is not done. They oversaw 218 children from other Local Authorities in the last financial year.

Young people who have experienced trauma and looked after or receive a service from Childrens Social Work may also be at risk of exploitation. In 2018/19 the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse including those in placements was initiated. Devon is taking part in this and have returned that no DCC children were abused. To ascertain if any children were exploited is far more challenging to specifically pinpoint. Missing is a key indicator of children at risk of being exploited. (see recent scrutiny masterclass). Any child considered at risk of exploitation is assessed and a plan put in place. Exploitation can be challenging to spot and needs constant vigilance within all services and in communities.

In the last year training has been provided for staff on exploitation with a dedicated SharePoint resource site. The Safer Devon Partnership in conjunction with the Devon Children and Families Partnership published the Exploitation Toolkit for professionals and members of the public see Preventing Exploitation Toolkit. Taxi drivers, train staff and hoteliers have also been trained and this is ongoing with regular communications and events.

This ensures that the risks of exploitation are recognised. There are currently 60 young people who have these assessments at various stages of risk. Work with the youth intervention officers within the Police and the Community Safety Partnerships has supported the identification of young people who may be at risk of exploitation. The partnerships have done targeted work in areas where there are high numbers of residential

homes and supported living placements. This included Newton Abbott and Exeter. Where a need is identified such as recently with a provision providing support to young women, Space (Youth Service) have swiftly put in place a project providing individual support and are looking at wider learning which will feed back into the Exploitation Sub Group.

A training day for providers of supported accommodation and residential units on exploitation and missing had been set for 21st January. This is being facilitated by Children's Services, Commissioning and the Police to support good practice in identifying exploitation and understanding the reasons young people go missing.

** Children who are not Looked After Children are also offered Return Home Interviews, either by their allocated worker (if they are already open to children's social care) or by the REACH team (if they are not).*

2. Knife Crime in Devon schools

1. Nationally the number of children carrying weapons in schools has risen steeply. Incidents are now being recorded in Devon's schools. Do we know how many children have been caught carrying weapons in Devon's schools in recent years?

Devon is a very safe place to live and it is important that we don't overstate risk and thereby inadvertently risk normalising what is rare behaviour.

Fewer than five children have been permanently excluded from school for possession of an offensive weapon during the academic year 2018/19. The legal definition of an offensive weapon is any article made or adapted for use for causing injury to the person or intended by the person having it with him for such use by him, or by some other person. However, the weapons have sometimes been found in a school bag rather than a child being physically in possession of the weapon.

2. What is being done collectively across the wider educational community in Devon to deal with this serious issue?

Knife crime is a shared responsibility, led by the Safer Devon Partnership (SDP). Community Safety Partnerships in each area lead the delivery of work to tackle all forms of anti-social behaviour including knife crime. Anti-social behaviour groups in the community safety partnerships work with the youth intervention officers from the police.

In 2018, the Devon Children and Families Partnership (DCFP) and SDP began to develop a framework for multi-agency coordination of the risks to young people from outside their family (extra-familial/contextual risks), in recognition of the emerging county-wide and national indicators of concern.

This new adolescent safety framework has just been launched. The key changes in practice include:

- a single and holistic approach to assessment of individual children, peer groups, neighbourhood, location or person/people of concern that guides the assessor to the correct pathway/action through the identification of vulnerabilities, behaviours, environment, relevant concerns, indicators as well as protective factors.
- a model of working at the individual level through Safer Me and Safer Me Plus meetings designed to ensure a strong focus on contextual risks, maximise the participation of the young person and focus on the primacy of collaboration with them to cultivate safety.

- peer Group, Neighbourhood (Location) and School Context conferences which provide a mechanism to coordinate intervention where the context within which young people operate provides the greatest influence over safety/ risk. These are not forums for individual case planning.
- a single coordination hub through the MASH, which ensures timely individual safeguarding, provides threshold stability, maps and analyses received information and ensures connectivity between key forums and the sharing of information for safeguarding, operational and strategic purposes across the county.
- The model for the ASF is recognised best practice and is supported by an evidence base in what is an emerging area of practice nationally.

3. As part of a robust education campaign that it would be important young people should hear from relatives of knife-crime victims?

The Turning Corners project was created in response to increased gang related issues within South Devon and Torbay and was established to identify, divert and safeguard young people who are at risk of Criminal Exploitation. The Turning Corners Project is funded until April 2021 and works with young people who are at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation outside of the home or at risk of, or currently engaging in violence/disorder outside of the home. Interventions also take the form of further referrals.

4. Scotland halted the rise in youth knife crime by giving young people more help and support with education, youth work, training, mental health, employment and housing. Can this joined up multi-agency approach be used in Devon?

Scotland adopted a Public Health approach in response to what was a very serious and entrenched problem with violence.

The Devon Adolescent Safety Framework, and the Turning Corners project share many of the features incorporated in the Scottish model.

3. United Nations Rights of the Child

I would also like to update the Council on the 30 year anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This agreement is signed by the Government, along with 196 other countries that lists 42 promises (also called Articles) made to children and young people to ensure that they are all treated equally and fairly. These promises cover all aspects of a child's life and set out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights to which children are entitled.

The agreement also explains how adults and Governments must work together to make sure all children can enjoy all their rights, meaning that every child has a right to a childhood, every child should survive and develop, never suffer discrimination, have decisions made in their best interests and have a right to participate and be heard.

As Cabinet Member, I recognise the importance of the UNCRC and would like to re-affirm the Council's ongoing commitments to promoting and respecting the rights of children and young people.

I also welcome the proposed activities of the Council's Participation Team who will co-design and co-ordinate a child rights project over the next year, which will discuss and

promote children's rights, culminating in an art project or digital that will be displayed upon completion. The work will seek to reach and engage children and young people across Devon, including those who have identified additional needs or vulnerabilities, and will work with partner agencies in its delivery.

James McInnes

Cabinet Member

Children's Services and Schools