

Adolescent Risk Pathway

Report of the Chief Officer Children's Services

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

1. **Background to the Report**

- 1.1 This report outlines plans to develop and implement a multi -agency adolescent risk pathway in order to provide a safety planning response to young people where they are exposed to risk emerging in their contacts outside the family network.
- 1.2 There is a long established statutory response to children who experience familial risk, such as child protection conferences as outlined in Working Together to Safeguard Children. However, this response does not readily fit for young people at risk of harm outside of the home and we are in the process of work to consider an operational response to young people where they do not meet the criteria for a child protection plan but need a risk management plan that co-ordinates professional network activity and supports the family and young person to remain safe.
- 1.3 Therefore, a strategic response is required to provide an overarching framework for this work that supports prevention, protection and pursuit where required. As a multi-agency partnership it is important that we understand the inter-relationship of a multiplicity of risks affecting young people, such as substance misuse, gang involvement, child sexual exploitation, frequent missing episodes, drug related activity (including County Lines dangerous drug networks), self-harm, victims of or perpetration of violence.

2. **Key Drivers**

What follows are some of the key concerns that have led to consideration of this initiative.

- 2.1 The emergence of 'County Lines' (dangerous drugs networks) coming down to Devon out of larger cities such as London and Manchester.
- 2.2 Increasing concerns about gang related behaviour/activity within the county. This has come to the notice of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) as they have identified an increase in the number of requests to consider investigating risk related to networks/groups of young people who are a risk to themselves or others. The Community Safety Officers have been raising concerns in respect of key locations in the county where groups of young people are an increasing cause for concern, which they want to prevent escalating.
- 2.3 The vulnerability of young people, including those who are known to statutory services, such as looked after children, to becoming victims of exploitation and drug related concerns, when they go missing, is very high.

Connected to these locally emerging concerns, the OFSTED joint targeted area inspection framework (JTAI) is currently refocusing on children who are at risk of exploitation (both sexual and criminal through association or involvement with gangs) and children who are missing from home, care and education. It is important that Devon has an agreed approach to ensure a consistent response, across the partnership, to young people to support prevention, protection and pursuit of perpetrators of harm.

- 2.4 There is also risk of radicalisation which can include a range of vulnerable young people.
- 2.5 Responses to young people who have significant mental health issues, where they self-harm or at risk of suicide need to be formulated.
- 2.6 There may be other emerging risk factors affecting adolescents where multi agency safety planning and risk management is required.

3. Key issues of concern

- 3.1 Adolescents can experience multiple risk factors where they are a risk to themselves or others. The factors contributing to this risk may either be linked to their experience of parenting or to risk from factors outside their immediate family. They can be exploited in situations that are not directly attributable to the quality of parenting they receive. This can result in multiple risk behaviours requiring safety planning and intervention. An increasing number of local authorities across the country have considered this as key concerns regarding sexual and criminal exploitation have emerged and grown as a cause for concern.
- 3.2 This concern has increased recently in Devon given the impact of County Lines, sometimes referred to Dangerous Drugs Networks. County Lines is the police term given for urban gangs supplying drugs into our local market, principally in Exeter and coastal towns. This can include child criminal exploitation (CCE). Concerns regarding violence, drug dealing and exploitation are risks which require assessment and intervention.
- 3.3 The child protection planning process is not always appropriate for these young people, particularly where their parents/carers are not responsible for the harm experienced. Therefore, consideration is being given to developing a response that supports this group of young people and their parents/carers more effectively. This has led to a wider consideration of our response to adolescent risk in the county across key partner agencies working with children and families and with adult services colleagues. We want to develop a co-ordinated approach at both a strategic and operational level.

4. Key elements of work to be undertaken

- 4.1 This work is at an early phase and will be developed with key partner agencies. We need a clear multi agency co-ordinated approach supported by strong leadership to respond to key risks, particularly in relation to increasing concerns regarding gang related sexual and criminal exploitation
- 4.2 The development of an 'Adolescent Risk Strategy' will provide an umbrella to a range of existing strategies that will need to speak to each other, such as Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), radicalisation and missing strategies. As part of this development, it will be necessary to review all existing relevant strategies and identify where there are gaps. For instance, there is no agreed strategic response in respect of gangs and criminal exploitation and this will need to be developed as part of this work.

This strategy and approach requires an 'end-to-end' approach from prevention to rehabilitation and this necessitates collaboration between statutory and non-statutory partners, local residents, faith and voluntary groups, the district councils as well as public agencies and businesses in the county.

- 4.3 A multi-agency operational response that supports early identification of concerns, safety planning and interventions to build protective factors and reduce risk is required. This will build in support that can be offered at both an early help and statutory level of response. This will be particularly important to protect young people at high risk as well as a preventative response for those young people on the edge of concern to reduce the risk of any escalation of risk.
- 4.4 Practice guidance for practitioners and families to support early identification and responses to adolescents of concern will be developed. This will identify key evidence-based interventions to work with young people and their families to reduce risk and build resilience and protective factors.

5. Governance and timescale considerations

- 5.1 This development will be overseen by the Complex Safeguarding Subgroup of the Devon Children and Family Partnership.
- 5.2 Given the complex nature of this piece of work, it is proposed that the Adolescent Risk Strategy will be prepared for agreement by June and an operational approach will be ready to implement by September 2018.
- 5.3 In the meantime, individual young people who are a cause for concern will be considered individually to ensure that their safety needs are met via existing planning mechanisms (early help, child in need, child protection or care plan for looked after young people). Concerns regarding networks/gangs of young people will be considered via the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) service to ensure risk is assessed and managed.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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