



Child Criminal Exploitation in Lancashire

Multi-Agency Thematic Review

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Commissioner of the Report: CSAP

The following table describes the meaning of various abbreviations and acronyms used throughout the report.

<u>Acronym</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
A&E	Accident & Emergency
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
C&F	Child and Family
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CCE	Child Criminal Exploitation
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group
CE	Child Exploitation
CIN	Child in Need
CME	Children Missing Education
CSC	Children Social Care
CST	Child Sexual Exploitation Team
CYJS	Child & Youth Justice Service
GP	General Practitioner
MACE	Multi-Agency Child Exploitation
MACSE	Multi-Agency Child Sexual Exploitation
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
TAF	Team around the Family

Audit of Criminal Child Exploitation cases and Multi-agency working (see Appendix A)

Introduction

This report has been commissioned by the Children's Safeguarding Assurance partnership to review the multi-agency working in cases where Criminal Child Exploitation (CCE) has been identified in Lancashire.

A selection of 12 cases were chosen from across the county, with 4 coming from each of the 3 (old) localities. Each case at the point of being audited was open to the Contextual Exploitation Teams in Lancashire, with the intention being that this cohort would equal 10% of the total cases open to those teams. This report is intended to highlight areas of good practice, outline challenges, establish where appropriate interventions are in place and consider collective responses to CCE (multiagency working) and consider the impact of children's voices in this work.

The cohort

Of the 12 cases that were audited, 11 were male, (including one who was born female but now identifies as male) and 1 female. Age wise, seven of the young people were 17 whilst three were 16. One was fourteen and the youngest was 12. The average age of this cohort was therefore 16. Of the 12 young people, 9 were white British, one was Polish (white European), one was dual heritage White British & Afro-Caribbean and another was a young person who was seeking asylum, from Somali. At the time of audit most of the young people were living with family, two were in Placements made through the local authority and one young person was serving a custodial sentence.

The audits showed that there had been significant police involvement with these young people. One young person had had 115 contacts and 9 arrests, while another had had 106 contacts. For the most heavily involved young people, the police involvement stretched back a long time, with the longest two going back to 2007 and another to 2013. For all the young people, police involvement reflected in the audit related to serious concerns, including drug dealing, possession of weapons, intimidation of witnesses, robbery, criminal damage and threats with the exception of the young person seeking asylum. This is possibly due to his recent arrival in the UK. For this young person and for the 1 female in the cohort, it was missing from home episodes that brought them to the attention of statutory agencies rather than police intelligence. Concerns centred more specifically around exploitation risk, with the young person being reported missing and for the female concerns around county lines and being 'missing from home' being raised.

Findings

- A number of the cases audited showed that there had been significant difficulties in engaging with young people and their families.
- These cases featured a high number of 'critical moments' cited in the "It was hard to escape" report (2020), arrest, A&E attendance and/or permanent exclusion.
- In a lot of cases some form of early intervention had been offered, some of which was declined. For some, earlier intervention (or prevention) may have prevented issues escalating in the way that they did.
- Children's Social Care remain the centre point for multiagency work in these cases
- There were good examples of flexibility and cooperation between agencies
- A system for sharing information (either through technology or formal communication) between agencies (including the police and GPs) may be beneficial.

- In some cases, it was observed that more education may have helped to stabilise the young person's situation.

Engagement

In 8 of the audits it was reported that there had been difficulties in engagement either with the young person or with their parents. Where the young people were seen to be hard to engage this took the form of not taking part in assessments or not making themselves available to the worker. Where this issue was in relation to parents, this was seen in the form of parents 'withdrawing consent' for work that was being undertaken. In one case, a series of multi-agency meetings had been underway and had to be stopped following the parents' withdrawal of consent, while in another the case was closed to CST altogether because consent had been withdrawn.

Issues with engagement did not only affect workers from Children's Social Care, there were also instances where young people had refused to engage with health assessments or with CAMHS . In one case a health worker from Virgin Care was refused access.

There were also instances where issues with engagement were overcome, and here flexibility between professionals was important. In one case, where a young person had refused to engage in direct work with a worker from Children's Social Care, this work was incorporated into the work completed by the CYJS. On another case, where the young person had refused to speak to the social worker, there was still ongoing (if sporadic) engagement with the CYJS worker. This seems to chime with the findings of the 'Hard to Escape' report which did highlight the need for flexibility and that staff from agencies whose role was seen as less punitive (such as social services) sometimes had more success in engaging families.

Earlier engagement

While not necessarily reflecting the current situation for these young people, the audits did cover the role that Early Help (or earlier intervention) could have played in diverting these young people from their current situation.

There are a number of cases seen here where earlier intervention has been offered, including by the CYJS as well as through Children's Social Care and through Health. As already indicated above, these offers of support were not accepted in every case, but in some they were. In some cases a TAF or CAF offered through the school were in place, while in other cases prevention work was provided through the CYJS. One of the audits showed an example of a school nurse offering assessments, although these were not then taken up. There were examples of work having been offered earlier through one of the agencies considered here in 9 out of the 12 cases looked at.

Where it was seen that more Early Help could have been offered, these usually related to an event at an earlier time which required support. For one young person who had suffered the death of his mother, it was felt that support with his bereavement could have helped him. For another the auditor felt that support could have been offered as far back as 2008, when this young person was exposed to parental substance misuse and domestic abuse, and this may have helped to divert him from the pathway to CCE. In all, there were 5 cases where the auditor felt that Early Help or Preventative work could have been offered in the past.

Children's Social Care as the Centrepoint

Unsurprisingly, the audits reflected that Children's Social Care remain the centre point for the management of risks of CCE, however other agencies did play a key role in many cases. This broadly reflects the findings from the 'It was hard to escape' report which concluded that the management of risk should sit with the Local Authority (although local arrangements and flexibility were also encouraged). In most of the files, the majority of the evidence and information relating to these cases was seen on the children's social care file. This was seen in the supervision notes and management oversight, in the attendance at meetings and in strategy discussions and other processes (such as missing from home).

Other agencies though did feature a lot, notably the police and CYJS. All but one of the young people considered had had some involvement with the police, and several also had (or continued to have) engagement with the CYJS. There were instances of workers from CYJS working with young people and attending review meetings, MACSE meetings, strategy discussions and risk assessment meetings. Police were also involved in strategy discussions and other multiagency meetings.

The audits also showed engagement from different health professionals in these cases, this was particularly where there was an issue or event which had then led to the particular professional becoming involved. For example, in a case where there were concerns about potential ADHD for one young person, the GP had become involved. In another case there was liaison between the CE nurses in Lancaster and Blackpool regarding the health needs of a young person.

The audit did seem to reflect that not all agencies were aware of the risks or in one instance were not aware that a CIN plan had been closed down. The auditor did suggest that a system where health could share and have access to information regarding CCE might be helpful. This issue also seemed to be particularly acute regarding GPs, where one audit stated;

"Community records are not routinely accessed by GPs which would have vital information relevant to an individual and as the community records contain vital safeguarding information, a missed opportunity is likely to occur".

It should also be noted that communication between 'Health' agencies cannot be taken as a given, and what we mean by 'Health' actually represents many different services. Therefore a School Nurse would not necessarily know what had been discussed with a GP (as an example) and vice versa.

It is difficult to comment on the role of education in this process because of the lack of information provided.

The key role in the processes of MACE, and MACSE (MARAC too!) were also highlighted in the audit as the means by which information was shared. There were numerous other types of meetings referred to and perhaps a more streamlined approach could be considered? The 'It was hard to escape' report does postulate that these cases could be managed through the Child Protection Process, and there is an argument for that, however, given the level of risk for each of these young people, as well as their differences, possibly there needs to be a degree of flexibility in terms of how each case is managed.

What did come through the audit, was that where workers had the skill *and* persistence to engage (as well as the appropriate job title), work was done with young people.

Education

As indicated above, more than half of the cohort had been permanently excluded from school. While less information has been received from Education, it is noted that at least 3 of these young people are currently NEET (and I suspect that the actual number is much higher). Significantly, the young person who is currently serving a custodial sentence had previously received 33 exclusions over 4 years.

Without the necessary information it is hard to evaluate the role of Education in these cases, however the information provided does highlight several things.

Schools had played a significant role in these young people's lives at some point, with the schools leading on a TAF or CAF in some instances previously. In another, where there were concerns that a young person may have ADHD, CAMHS had been working with the school to provide support.

In other instances (again without more information I am limited in what I can comment on) there was noted to be a lack of education for these young people. Elsewhere the auditor has commented that more education would help a young person, while in another, the auditor felt that education was "the missing piece" in a young person's life.

For the 4 cases where information has been provided from education, this does not shed light on when information about safeguarding came to light, however it does highlight the pivotal role that the Children Missing Education Service could play in these cases. In one case the CME service liaised with the school over the issues that had led to a young person's previous non-attendance. For the other cases, the auditor noted that it would be useful for there to be an agreed process or system by which Education and other agencies could share and be provided with information about concerns.

The 3 critical moments

The report; "It was hard to escape," published in 2020, refers to there being 'critical moments' when services may have an opportunity to engage with young people or their families. How professionals act in these situations is often significant for the young person and the trajectory their lives go in.

In the audits, these critical moments were defined as an arrest, an A&E appointment or a permanent exclusion from school and these are incidents which all feature a lot in the lives of the young people considered here. Of the young people referred to in these audits, 7 had been permanently excluded, 8 had had attendances at A&E and 11 had been in police custody.

For the auditor many of these incidents constituted missed opportunities to intervene and make a difference (there were some good interventions too). For one young person the auditor felt there could have been a follow up by the Liaison and Diversion division following their arrest, for another a number of A&E attendances by the young person's father could have indicated to professionals that there were difficulties at home.

Critical moments could also be a different sort of incident, with one example being where a young person had suffered the bereavement of their mother, at which point support could have been offered. Given the significant number of these incidents in the cases considered here, it may be prudent then incorporate an agreed response to these specific 'moments' between agencies in the policy making around CCE.

The Young Person's Voice.

There is significant evidence to suggest that services which have young people at their centre are likely to be more effective. A 2015 report "Working effectively to address Child Sexual Exploitation" cited this as one of six key principles in service design and practice development. The report goes on to state further that this should mean;

"At an individual practice level, young people are involved in decisions made about them and are enabled to take ownership of the change process".

There was a range of engagement and involvement of young people in the decisions and work looked at here. Where practice was at its strongest, this extended to the 'co-production' of plans or assessments (suggested in the 2015 report cited above) on some occasions. The self-assessments completed by the CYJS service are an example of this, with young people routinely contributing to these. In two of these cases, the self-assessment and the young person's engagement with this was seen as a breakthrough moment in terms of the management of the case as their voices were heard. For two other cases, co-production was seen in other ways. One involved a young person attending a care planning meeting himself, while another young person actually completed some sections of the report themselves.

Generally, all of the audits showed at the very least a recording of some of their interaction with professionals. Usually this was through CYJS and the self-assessments. There were also notes regarding the young person's voice on the Children's Social Care file in most instances. Often the CYJS self-assessment also contained comments from the young person's parent, or in one instance their grandmother.

The Children's Social Care file usually contained the young person's voice in the C&F assessment, but there were instances, where the relationship with the young person was very difficult, and in those cases the young person's voice was seen to be limited on the record. On another case, it was noted that while the young person would not engage with their worker, their voice was represented through observations. For other cases there were seen to be recordings of the child's voice in the recordings of visits or other discussions with young people.

For other agencies, the young person's voice was less consistently present, although this usually reflected the extent to which the agency had been involved with the young person. In most instances the CCG were noted not to have any comments about the young person's voice recorded, (although there were some where this was present when there had been primary care consultations). Other agencies were also seen to have included the child's voice during an assessment, such as by CAMHS.

The extent to which these 'voices' were considered is harder to evidence from the information on the audits, however there were examples where this has happened. One young person has stated that he has wished to move, and an alternative placement has been sought (but not yet identified). For another young person, their comments about exploitation following a police interview led to action being taken. As already stated, there are also examples where young people have made it clear that they will not engage with social workers but will engage with other agencies such as CYJS. In this it can be seen that their voices have been heard.

Conclusion

As can be seen, there are some strengths as well as some areas for improvement and learning identified in this audit. A lot of the findings mirror the report 'It was hard to escape' which I have referred to earlier. There are some strong examples of flexibility and co-working and there are also some skilled professionals managing to engage with this cohort who are often 'hard to engage'.

The voices of young people appear to be recorded, some work is co-produced with them, and there is some evidence of this 'voice' being acted upon.

The structures in place such as MACSE and MACE promote interagency working, although the extent of engagement from different agencies does vary. CSC, CYJS and Police all feature highly in the audits as agencies engaged with these young people. Other agencies appear to be engaged when this is required, often with notable contributions. The extent to which Education has been or remain involved has been harder to assess because of the lack of information available to the auditor, yet this is a significant factor in recognising vulnerability at an earlier stage.

I note that the auditor has commented on the differences between agencies in terms of their ability to share information and agree that if there were a way for information from Education and the Police (and GPs?) to be shared, then this would be helpful. There may also be scope for training for different professionals to promote engagement, and this has been suggested by the auditor. Motivational Interviewing is a key part of the Family Safeguarding Model that is being implemented in parts of CSC, as an approach geared towards promoting engagement from families it may be useful here both in terms of the strategies it utilizes as well as an overall approach. There should also be some consideration of the role of the CME team in this process given how many young people seem to be struggling with school attendance (although admittedly, this may be less relevant for this cohort given their age).

The audit has also shown that in a significant number of these cases, some form of earlier intervention or help had been offered, sometimes by CSC but oftentimes by another agency such as CYJS. Some of the cases had been open to CAF or TAF too. In a high proportion of these cases this support had been declined, again bringing focus on the need for persistence and skill in engaging with young people and their families.

Recommendations

- Partners to adopt a Trauma informed model of working and training opportunities for staff via VRN
- To share this audit with the Children, Young People and Families Partnership board and for them to consider the findings from an Early Help perspective and feedback to Operational group
- Integrating the role of Education into the process with a strategic level response to emerging risks within CCE
- Develop a way of sharing/recording information between different agencies at the point of the 3 Critical moments prior to escalation

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13.1.22

Appendix A: CSAP Multi-Agency Case File Audit Tool

CSAP Multi-Agency Case File Audit Tool – Child Criminal Exploitation

For each young person please answer the following questions using agency records. Where possible, please consider contacting the involved practitioner to ascertain their perspective on the case and to allow you to evaluate whether the written records accurately reflect the case.

Please consider good practice, especially if this could be transferable and highlight any learning opportunities within the case.

Please stipulate any localised practice and/or any action taken which you know does not conform to your agencies expected policies and procedures.

Basic Details

Name of professional completing audit:	
Name of agency:	
Young Persons unique ID Number / NHS Number	
Young Person Name:	
Young Person's Date of Birth:	
School Name: <i>Please indicate if young person is Electively Home Educated / Missing Education or currently not in Education/Training/Employment</i>	
District:	
Contextual Safeguarding Team:	Deter / Central Engage / East (Pennine) Awaken / North (Fylde, Wyre & The Bay)
Date of referral to Exploitation Team:	
Origin of the referral / referring agency:	

Please indicate if any of the following apply to this young person

Looked After Child	Y / N / Don't know
Special Educational Need	Y / N / Don't know
EHC Plan <i>If yes, please specify reason for EHCP</i>	Y / N / Don't know Specify reason for EHC Plan

History of exposure of existing risk factors (tick all which apply)

Risk Factors	Young Person	Parent/Carer
Mental Health Substance misuse (drug / alcohol) Wider family criminality Domestic Abuse Neglect CSE Human Trafficking Experience of loss Adverse Childhood Experiences		

Is there evidence within your agencies records of any of the 3 Critical Moments as referenced by the National review 'It was hard to escape'

	Young Person	Parent/Carer
Permanent Exclusion		
A & E Attendance		
Custody		

1	How is this young person currently known to your service?
2	Summarise your agencies previous involvement with this young person?
3	What interventions are being undertaken or additional support is provided by your service to support this young person generally and in terms of CCE risks?
4	Is there evidence of an Early Help offer having been provided to this young person? If so, what did this offer entail?

5	<p>To what extent does the case demonstrate effective multi-agency working?</p>
6	<p>Is there evidence of caseload supervision / case management within the records?</p>
7	<p>Is there evidence that the young person's voice was considered within assessments and interventions? <i>Please also consider the families voice if appropriate</i></p>
8	<p>To what extent is the young person's environment (school / community / home) explored within your services records and assessments?</p>
9	<p>Were there any challenges in terms of engagement with this young person and / or family? <i>Consider what methods of engagement have worked / not worked</i></p>
10	<p>What outcomes have been achieved as a result of your services involvement with this young person?</p>
11	<p>Have you identified any missed opportunities?</p>

12	<p>Have you identified any areas for learning? <i>From a single and/or multi-agency perspective</i> <i>Do you have any specific agency recommendations to propose?</i></p>

OVERALL JUDGEMENT OF THE CASE				
Please consider single agency quality of work undertaken for this young person in relation to Child Criminal Exploitation				
1 = Outstanding	2 = Good	3 = Requires Improvement	4 = Inadequate	5 = Not applicable
				<i>To be used by agencies who have little / no involvement with the young person and do not feel able to comment on their own single agency involvement</i>
Narrative to justify overall score given				
Brief analysis of strengths and development areas identified in the work undertaken for this child with regards to Child Criminal Exploitation				
Name of person completing the audit				
Job Title				
Agency				
Next Steps: - Please confirm that the findings from this audit will be shared with the case worker and that development areas and corrective action where necessary will be implemented by your agency		<i>Signed and dated</i>		
Please return completed audits to the CSAP mailbox:- CSAP@lancashire.gov.uk				