



# WST Exploitation Thematic Review

June 2023

## Purpose and Aims

This review was initiated and commissioned by Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together Partnership (WST) and is the second thematic review of exploitation that has been commissioned in recent years, and therefore evidence of a sustained commitment to continually improve knowledge of, and responses to, exploitation in all its forms.

In 2019, City of Wolverhampton Council commissioned a Whole Systems Review of Exploitation. This review prompted several strategic and operational changes being made to improve how the system prevents, identifies and responds to all Child Exploitation typologies.

It has been identified that this review process serves as an important opportunity to explore the impact and efficacy of the improved strategic and operational responses made in direct response to the previously commissioned review.

The purpose of this Thematic Review is to provide further critical insights into the multiplicity of factors that underpin exploitation whilst simultaneously providing assurance of the efficacy, consistency and robustness of current systems and processes.

## **Phase 1**

This phase of the review sought to understand the impact of the local system, to respond to exploitation and the key characteristics and opportunities to effectively prevent and respond to knife crime.

This was achieved by conducting interviews with strategic and operational leaders and other key professionals to understand and analyse local and systemic responses.

## **Phase 2**

The second part of the review process involved an analysis of two case studies provided.

The purpose of this activity was to aid the understanding of how effectively the recommendations arising from the Whole System Review conducted in October 2019, have been implemented to effect positive system change and understand how those changes have led to improved outcomes for children.

## Conclusions

It is not the aim, intention or purpose of this review process to look for or apportion blame for failings or missed opportunities. In fact, this review has been carried out in such a way to take a systemic view of exploitation. That said, a fundamental part of any review process is to ensure that each organisation responsible for safeguarding and protecting children consider if the review raises the possibility that there were instances when opportunities were missed, and practice could be improved.

One conclusion and area of optimism highlighted during the review process is that there is a positive learning culture in Wolverhampton. Professionals that formed part of this review process had all clearly been deeply impacted by their work to safeguard and protect exploited children. They showed a commitment and a real desire to learn lessons, and approached the review with candour, openness, and honesty. The willingness to continually evolve and improve the lives and outcomes of children should be applauded.

There is clear evidence that learning and systemic improvements are already well underway, and so it should be concluded that the recommendations made in this review will be considered and steps taken to further aid and strengthen practice.

# Recommendations and Themes

## Intelligence and Information Sharing

- WST and LA to ensure the problem profile is used to inform strategic needs.
- WST, SWP and WMP to seek opportunities for further collaborative work with the VRP.
- WMP to further consider and address the impact that current structures have on preventing the identification and response to cases where there is an intersect of exploitation typologies.

## Screening Tools

- WST to consider the revision of the current iteration of the exploitation screening tool to ensure it is revised in line with the findings of this review.
- WST to work with police, health and third sector partners to better understand and address the barriers that are resulting in low levels of screening tools being completed.
- WMP to consider working with partners to develop a pathway which sees the completion of the exploitation screening tool every time a child presents in police custody.

# Recommendations and Themes

## Training and Professional Development

- WST should ensure the development of a suite of resources which raise awareness of the increasing use of digital platforms to facilitate the exploitation of children, in response to the local problem profile which identified the exploitation of younger children over digital platforms.
- WST should consider the implementation of an additional strategic priority which encompasses the strengthening of the current partnership training offer to equip practitioners from all sectors with knowledge and skills need to recognise, assess, and respond to cumulative harm and trauma.

## Risk Assessment and Response

- WST and Children's Social Care should consider the development of MACE paperwork to support the equitable and consistent application of "context weighting" to ensure that all contexts are considered as part of risk assessment.
- WST and strategic partners should work in effective collaboration to ensure that the exploitation and SEND agendas are aligned.
- WST should consider revising the current categorisations of Child Exploitation to ensure that exploited children are consistently viewed as victims of Modern Slavery

# Recommendations and Themes

## Risk Assessment and Response continued

- WST and strategic partners should hold a strategic conversation to determine what action is required to ensure practitioners are consistently aware of the re intersect between victimisation and offending
- WST and Children's Social Care should continually use their quality assurance frameworks to seek additional assurances that Child Protection arrangements are sufficiently being used to responding to cases of exploitation where there is significant risk of harm.
- WST should consider the development of a Transition from Child to Adult Services Pathway
- WST should utilise local intelligence and profiling to provide further insights into the role of females in co-offending peer groups and in the perpetration of exploitation and exploitation - related harms.
- WST should seek assurance that commissioning partners understand the need to ensure that parents and carers of children who are at risk of exploitation are able to access specialist support, help and advice from relevant professionals

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