



Youth @ Risk Strategy 2019-2022

A multi-agency commitment to work together to prevent all exploitation of children and young people in Bath and North East Somerset

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Foreword

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) has developed this 3 year strategy in response to powerful and often disturbing evidence that some children and young people in B&NES experience exploitation and abuse outside their home environment and that others face high levels of risk. This has significant consequences for their safety and physical and mental health as well as for their ability to thrive and enjoy their lives in the present and longer term. It also has considerable and troubling consequences for their families and the communities in which they live. The issues are complex as grooming and abuse can happen online as well as in the physical world and can be perpetrated by adults or by peers and by individuals or by criminal networks. Whilst the focus is on teenagers, it is recognised that risk factors relating to exploitation can emerge before the age of 10 years and so the needs of younger children must also be addressed.

This is an important and challenging strategy. It is important because of how profoundly these issues affect the lives of children and young people. It is challenging because it requires everyone to take seriously the risks they face and recognise that traditional approaches to safeguarding are not always sufficient. It complements the Children and Young People's Plan and the Early Help Strategy and embodies the determination of all LSCB partners to work together in new ways to make effective strategic and operational responses to the complex, diverse and significant needs of the children and young people affected. Agencies must never give up on these children and young people because their problems and issues seem intractable or because they do not always want to engage with services. The strategy is, in many respects, a call to action and it will only make a difference if the voices and experiences of children, young people and their families are fully reflected in all aspects of the work.

This strategy has been developed by a multi-agency group of partners from the LSCB Exploitation Group and replaces previous policies and protocols. The LSCB has given its full support and commitment to this strategy and commends it to the children's and adult's workforces. All agencies across B&NES now need to work together to realise the vision and ambition it sets out in order to keep children and young people safe from exploitation and to impact positively on their lives and those of their families and communities.

Why do we need a Youth @ Risk Strategy?

A range of strategic initiatives have been implemented over the past few years to better support and protect children and young people in B&NES. Progress has been made but there is a need to address these issues holistically. Children and young people's lives and needs are connected and the issues they face have been historically managed as single issue concerns. This strategy seeks to bring these concerns together and address the issues in the 'round'. B&NES has therefore produced should one overarching strategy at the same time as recognising the importance of addressing particular challenges connected with specific types of 'risk'

behaviours. Account has been taken of the national context and the growing body of research evidence and best practice examples.

There is distressing and powerful evidence that some children and young people are facing unacceptable levels of risk in their lives. They may be at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation, serious violence, of going missing from home, care or school, harmful sexual behaviour and/or county lines (moving and supplying drugs and/or money), trafficking, modern slavery, employment exploitation and/or gang activity. Whilst this may be perpetrated by individuals, the focus of this strategy is mainly on organised exploitation undertaken by groups or networks of adults or sometimes peers.

Whilst the needs of many children are being addressed and there is some excellent practice in B&NES, we also know that for a range of reasons we are not able to support and protect all children and young people effectively. Traditional child protection procedures do not always adequately address risks faced by young people outside of the home. As young people get older their experiences of abuse are often associated with public environments in which they increasingly spend their time. Yet child protection procedures routinely intervene with individual young people and their families rather than the public environments where abuse occurs. As part of the development of this work, B&NES will develop a contextualised safeguarding framework to protect children and young people from these types of abuse.

Through the data analysis already undertaken across B&NES, there is knowledge of the issues that can render young people to be at significant risk. There is still scope to improve analysis of this data to gain a fuller understanding of young people's experiences, to inform planning and delivery. We need to make sure this analysis is comprehensive, rooted in evidence and helps us to protect children and young people effectively across these issues. The strategy aims to tie the issues together and give a focused approach to moving forward. There is recognition of the priorities of these children and young people but there needs to be a consistent, joined up, evidence based response from all relevant agencies to avoid fragmented, crisis driven responses. It is important that statutory and voluntary organisations work effectively together to support these children and young people. This work is already being developed through the creation of the Adolescent Risk Team and the links it has between the statutory and the voluntary sector agencies involved. Pathways through and into services need to be clear to children, young people and their families, and there needs to be clarity and understanding about the types of interventions that will support, protect and build young people's resilience.

Vision

The LSCB vision is for all children and young people and their families and communities to be safe from criminal exploitation

Values

1. Children and young people deserve the very best quality support and protection;
2. We will help children and young people understand that it is their right to feel safe at all times;
3. Staff will never give up on children and young people because they seem reluctant to engage with services or have seemingly intractable problems;
4. Children's and young people's voices should influence and shape all services;
5. Staff recognise that children and young people can be victims and/or perpetrators in exploitation and will view them as children first and offenders second;
6. Staff will always respect the rights, dignity, and worth of everyone, regardless of their abilities, gender, sexuality, religion, or cultural background.

Development of the Strategy

This is the first time that exploitation of children and young people has been looked at 'in the round' within Bath and North East Somerset. There is already some excellent practice in addressing child sexual exploitation and emerging good practice in working with other types of risk, including children who go missing. The strategy draws on the following sources of information:

1. What children and young people have told us about their experience and needs, together with feedback from their parents and carers;
2. Knowledge of need and current operational and strategic practice in B&NES, including what is working well and what is not;
3. Published research evidence from a wide range of outside bodies, including Ofsted, Anna Freud Centre, Research in Practice, University of Bedfordshire, Serious Case Reviews, Children's Commissioner, Department for Education and evidence of lessons learned and best practice in other Authorities.

It will be underpinned by six individual protocols addressing in greater detail the following broad areas of exploitation¹:

1. Child Sexual Exploitation

¹ An explanation of each of these can be found in the Glossary

2. Radicalisation
3. Child Criminal Exploitation, including involvement in county lines, gangs, human trafficking, modern slavery and labour exploitation
4. Serious Youth Violence
5. (Going) Missing from Home, Care or School
6. Harmful Sexual Behaviour

In each of the next 3 years, an exploitation action plan will be produced, describing how agencies will work together to secure and demonstrate improvements in the quality of commissioning and practice to keep children and young people safe and disrupt perpetrators. This will plan actions under the four broad headings of Prevention, Identification, Support and Disruption.

Keeping Children Safe from Exploitation

Building on strong foundations, Bath and North East Somerset will continue its journey to tackle exploitation by employing the following principles and practices. These will be reflected and developed in each of the thematic protocols.

System-wide approach

Addressing exploitation, including disruption, needs to be given the highest priority by all agencies and all staff including senior leaders. We will strengthen partnerships between agencies serving children and adults in the statutory, voluntary and faith sectors and in educational settings, facilitated by a shared understanding of the issues and of what is likely to be effective in addressing them. A 'think family' approach will support consideration of the needs and influence of all members of the family or household. Shared training, clear information sharing and co-ordinated direct work with children, young people and families will all help to embed a system-wide approach.

The protocols will clarify joint responsibilities and accountabilities across partner agencies and partners will commit to implement the strategy, protocols and annual action plan and challenge each other appropriately where necessary.

Information Sharing

Information sharing will not be a barrier to effective partnership working to ensure the safety of children. All agencies will follow the Local Safeguarding Children Board's information sharing protocol and practices in respect of individual children and young people.

Initiatives in mapping links between known perpetrators and young people will be developed further to provide a greater understanding of the nature of risk and how to disrupt perpetrators.

Strategic and operational practice will be informed by good shared intelligence, effective data analysis and agreed outcomes for children and young people.

Disruption

A robust, proactive and determined approach to disrupting and pursuing people who are posing a risk to children will lead perpetrators to regard B&NES as an area where these issues are taken seriously and there are few/no places to hide. Disruption plans need to be understood by all partners and their role within them needs to be identified and clear.

Participation

The voice and active participation of children and young people will be evident in their assessments and plans. We also endeavour to use their feedback to inform development of policy and services. Commissioning will follow principles of co-production to ensure services meet their needs.

The right support at the right time

There will be clear pathways to enable children and young people to access the information and services they need. We will ensure children and young people are listened to and receive prompt and proportionate information, guidance and support from all relevant agencies. At a universal level, there will be guidance for agencies, support for staff and information available for children, young people and families either face to face, for example in classroom or youth work settings or in written/online form. The new Early Intervention Assessment will be used to analyse need and risk and put in place the necessary support at an early stage. For those at high risk of significant harm, those who are known to be in exploitative situations and/or those in the youth justice system, assessment will again focus on need and risk and there will be access to support and interventions that meet assessed need and continues for as long as necessary.

There will be a clear plan when a case is closed that offers the child or young person ongoing support from identified services. In support of this, we will implement an effective and clear step up/step down process that is understood by children, young people, families and all partners;

Transition

Pathways needs to be clear about transitional safeguarding arrangements and also take account of the young people and young adults who are being drawn into exploitative behaviours themselves and now present a risk to others, whilst continuing to be at risk themselves. When they turn 18, young adults continue to face similar risks of exploitation as they did as young people – and they may have fewer places to turn for support. The growing body of evidence that adolescent brain maturation can continue until 25 years of age, and includes heightened risk and searching out of new experiences, suggests they may continue to be vulnerable to exploitation for a number of years beyond the age of 18.

Inclusive

Practice will consistently address the context of children and young people's lives, their individual circumstances and the needs and aspirations of different communities in B&NES.

Evidence-based

There is a growing body of research-based information and models of promising and good practice and we will endeavour to keep abreast of these in the continuing development and delivery of this strategy. In particular, recognition of the impact of the trauma that children and young people have experienced and may continue to experience through exploitation will inform and shape practice.

Contextualised safeguarding

We will develop and use a contextualised safeguarding approach to this work. This term, coined by Carlene Firmin at the University of Bedfordshire, is used for a range of policies and practices to safeguard adolescents from significant harm beyond their home environment. It expands the remit of traditional child protection work to wider contexts, identifying risks and vulnerabilities in a range of social environments where adolescents spend an increasing amount of time, including their school or college environment and public spaces. Assessments may be made of physical spaces such as parks and retail centres and those who use them, identifying sources of significant harm and protective factors and leading to plans to help keep children and young people safe there.

Supporting staff

We will promote training to equip front line practitioners and managers in all sectors to engage well with young people at risk of exploitation and abuse. We also recognise the significant impact this work can have on staff and promote consideration of appropriate levels of support and Supervision.

Outcomes

All work arising from this strategy will be outcomes focused, with a commitment to demonstrate success and incorporate lessons learned into continuing practice. The action plan will identify specific outcomes for each form of exploitation based on the following:

1. Assurance that children and young people are identified, assessed and responded to as early as possible to reduce risk;
2. A measurable risk reduction (through the risk assessment) demonstrating whether the child or young person is safer at the end of the intervention;
3. Outcomes set out in the Children and Young People Plan;

4. Children's, young people's and families' feedback will be collated to test whether they were happy with the way services were delivered and satisfied that they made a positive difference;
5. Specific criminal justice measures will be developed to illustrate the effectiveness of disruption activity.

Governance

Delivery of the Strategy will be overseen by the multi-agency LSCB Exploitation Group which will consider risks to the children of B&NES in a wide context and ensure there is a joined up partnership response and agencies complete the actions agreed and are held to account where needed.

The Exploitation Group and LSCB will work in partnership with the Responsible Authorities Group² and the Youth Offending Service Management Board to ensure that collective efforts are collaborative and effective. The details of these arrangements are set out in the Terms of Reference and will be included in the Youth @ Risk Exploitation Action Plan and the Youth Justice Plan.

Further Information

For information about the LSCB and its work, please go to: www.safeguarding-bathnes.org.uk. Please note that that the LSCB cannot provide advice on individual safeguarding concerns.

To report abuse or discuss a concern, you can contact:

- Your agency safeguarding lead
- Police Safeguarding Unit via 101
- B&NES' children's social care duty team for advice on 01225 396313 or 396312
- Out of hours, call the Emergency Duty Team on 01454 615165
- If there is an immediate risk of significant harm, call the Police on 999

² It is noted that safeguarding governance arrangements are being reviewed and are likely to change from September 2019 onwards; the Exploitation Group will confirm continuing governance of this work thereafter.

Glossary of Terms

Child Criminal Exploitation

This involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them completing a task on behalf of another individual or group of individuals; this is often of a criminal nature. Child criminal exploitation often occurs without the child's immediate recognition, with the child believing that they are in control of the situation. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability (this definition has been adopted by a number of local authorities across the local Authorities)'perpetrators of CCE may themselves be children who are criminally exploited and victims of CCE may also be at risk of becoming perpetrators themselves.' There is currently no official definition of what child criminal exploitation is and also little understanding of the scale of the problem. (Knowsley Council, Merseyside)

Child Sexual Exploitation

This is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology (Home Office, 2017)

County Lines

This term is used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons (Home Office, 2017)

Gangs

A gang is a group of associates, friends or members of a family with a defined leadership and internal organization that identifies with or claims control over territory in a community and engages, either individually or collectively, in illegal, and possibly violent, behaviour. There has been a lot of discussion about whether there are gangs operating in Bath and North East Somerset and many professionals talk about the influence of gangs from outside the Authority, who typically recruit local young people and vulnerable adults into dealing drugs and related criminal activity and sometimes take over their homes for these purposes (so-called 'cuckooing').

Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years old that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult'. (Hackett 2014, Children and Young People with Harmful Sexual Behaviours).

Missing from home school and/or education

A child reported as missing to the Police by their parents/carers because their whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be a victim of crime and/or there is a risk of harm to themselves or someone else. Going missing is a safeguarding issue. Children may be at particular risk of exploitation but could also be running away from or into situations where they could be trafficked, forced into marriage, suffer female genital mutilation, become radicalised or be drawn into other dangerous and/or criminal activity. They may also have difficulties with accommodation or placements or with family relationships or schooling and/or face significant health and safety issues.

Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

These terms are often used interchangeably to refer to the “recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation” (NHS England). The most common forms are forced labour, sex trafficking and forced marriage.

Radicalisation

Radicalisation is defined as the process by which people come to support terrorism and extremism and, in some cases, to then participate in terrorist groups. ‘Extremism is vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas’ (HM Government Prevent Strategy 2011). Keeping children safe from these risks is a safeguarding matter and should be approached in the same way as safeguarding children from other risks. Children should be protected from messages of all violent extremism.

Serious Youth Violence

For the purposes of this work, we will follow the definitions provided in the national Serious Violence Strategy (April 2018) which focused on crimes involving weapons and violence caused through the spread of exploitation linked to county lines.