

Position paper: toward a strategy for safeguarding adolescents in Havering

Introduction

1. This position paper sets out the argument in favour of a new partnership strategy in Havering for working towards safeguarding adolescents. The paper makes the case – referring to national and local factors - that an integrated approach is required to tackle serious emerging issues concerning adolescent risk, including criminal exploitation, county lines, and modern slavery. The proposed strategy would encompass a data-led and systemic approach to prediction, prevention, intervention and disruption to reduce risk so that adolescents in Havering can lead happy, healthy lives.

National context and the drivers for change

2. Nationally, there is recognition for the need for new strategy, policy and guidance for safeguarding adolescents and that the systems for child protection and youth justice do not work effectively enough for adolescents. Safeguarding services have typically been designed around younger children and their families, and not with due consideration to the needs of adolescents who experience risks outside of the family and home contexts. Criminal justice has tended to apply adult enforcement concepts to adolescent situations without a full understanding of the circumstances of adolescent lives.
3. In 2018, the government has published an updated version of Working Together to Safeguard Children, which includes explicit attention to “contextual safeguarding” and to adolescents who are “vulnerable to abuse or exploitation outside their families” (DFE, 2018)ⁱ. The new guidance outlines the demand to address contextual factors:

Assessments of children in such cases should consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child’s life and are a threat to their safety and/or welfare. Children who may be alleged perpetrators should also be assessed to understand the impact of contextual issues on their safety and welfare. Interventions should focus on addressing these wider environmental factors, which are likely to be a threat to the safety and welfare of a number of different children who may or may not be known to local authority children’s social care. Assessments of children in such cases should consider the individual needs and vulnerabilities of each child. (Ibid)
4. The risks arising from situations outside the family interact with a wide range of needs such as social exclusion, poor physical and emotional health, barriers to learning and SEND. The growing sense that the present systems of protection and enforcement are not effective in meeting the diverse needs of and reducing risks to adolescents, is accompanied by an increase in understanding about adolescent development (Hanson and Holmes, 2014).ⁱⁱ
5. Adolescence is a complicated phase of development for both the adolescent and parents/carers and it’s vital that families and professionals alike understand the risks that adolescents are exposed to. The approaches we adopt in work with adolescents must deal with both support and enforcement methods in balance, as different combinations of these elements are required at different times to reduce risk and improve outcomes.
6. Emerging approaches to safeguarding adolescents recognise that traditional systems focus on risks within the family and this can mean that *professionals miss risks external to the family*, underestimate the pull factors for adolescents, and have unrealistic expectations of care givers to be able to provide protection from these risks. Youth justice and policing systems have traditionally applied adult-based principles to adolescents who commit crime and can over-

emphasise enforcement methods that do not take account of the constrained circumstances of adolescents who sometimes believe they have no other choices.

7. These emerging issues ask that critical thinking is applied to frameworks that underpin our work with adolescents. An understanding of adolescent development and the distinctive risks that adolescents face must be consistently applied across policy and practice so that we can:
 - a. Understand the contexts of adolescent lives, so that resources are used in the right places and services are designed and delivered in ways that respond to the risks that exist within peer groups, social networks and other contexts as well as within families;
 - b. Maximise opportunities for integrated working methods that deliver effective prediction, prevention, intervention and disruption;
 - c. Avoid harmful assumptions about adolescent choices: do not minimise the significance of adolescent perspective, recognise the nature of 'constrained choices' and do not perceive risk in adolescent life as adult 'lifestyle' choices;
 - d. Recognise, assess and respond to the challenges involved in reducing adolescent risk and breaking harmful cycles of behaviour (Ibid, adapted).

Having context

8. Havering is committed to improving the life chances of all the children in the borough. However the local partnership – in line with the national response outlined above - has identified risks to adolescents as causes for concern that require collective strategy and action.
9. Havering Safeguarding Children Board's (HSCB) response to safeguarding adolescents is informed by its understanding of issues such as gangs and youth violence with a specific focus on highlighting changes and emerging themes.
10. Significant progress has been made by the HSCB and partners in safeguarding children and adolescents. Good arrangements are in place to respond to: children who are missing from home, school or care (Children Missing); children who are at risk of or who are being sexually exploited (CSE); and children who come to the attention of the criminal justice system, via the Youth Offending Service (YOS). The CSE, Serious Group Violence and Missing panels are well understood by the partnership and functioning well to respond to these issues.
11. These arrangements have been developed in parallel to growing understanding of the emerging issues facing adolescents across the region and nation, established through focused problem profiles, national and local learning and intelligence pictures involving vulnerable adolescents.
12. However, the safeguarding arrangements in Havering do not yet take full account of the nature of emerging risks to the criminal exploitation of children including involvement in county linesⁱⁱⁱ and modern slavery. Current arrangements are not able to assess – through analysis of data – the full picture of risks associated with criminal exploitation of adolescents. Current data on the complex of vulnerability factors including child in need, child protection and looked after children data is not matched with other risk factors such as persistent absence and exclusions from school, among others.
13. In order to understand the risks that adolescents are exposed to outside of the family and home, data analysis must reach a point where there is a commentary on the proportion of children who go missing, who are in care, or at the edge of care, and who are in contact with the criminal justice system who are - or may in the future be - at risk of exploitation. Such a commentary will provide one element in the development of predictive and preventative responses to serious risk and criminal activity.

Proposed purpose and scope

14. The strategy's primary purpose would be to address the risks faced by vulnerable adolescents through effective leadership, multi-agency partnership working, and an integrated prevention and intervention offer in response to emerging risks. The HSCB will ensure the effective coordination of partnership activity and oversee developments in respect of the difference that they are making to the lives of adolescents.
15. The strategy's overall scope would be focussed on safeguarding adolescents from abuse and exploitation. To do this effectively, a range of other vulnerabilities need to be better understood and interventions need to adapt, including stronger prediction and prevention, with partners, peers, families and communities being better involved in the design of how to understand and respond to these issues.
16. The strategy will seek to understand the complexities of adolescent lives and to recognise that the risks of abuse and exploitation can be exacerbated by a range of vulnerabilities with the impact of suffering harm that leads to life-long consequences unless effectively addressed.
17. Practice increasingly suggests that our response should not separate out adolescent risks and vulnerabilities. In this sense, it is proposed that the HSCB develop integrated arrangements that actively consider and effectively respond to complexity. Risk factors proposed for scope include (but are not limited to):
 - a. Child Sexual Exploitation (including Harmful Sexual Behaviours)
 - b. Children missing from home, care and education
 - c. Children and adolescents exposed to risk through gang involvement, county lines, trafficking and serious youth violence.
 - d. Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA)
 - e. Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG)
 - f. Adolescent Neglect
 - g. Self-harm and Suicide
 - h. Substance Misuse
 - i. Radicalisation
 - j. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
18. As adolescents develop, their experiences of abuse are often associated with public spaces in which they spend their time. As such, a critical focus of this strategy will be on how adolescents are better protected and supported by a wider range of individuals and bodies in a wider variety of contexts. Public spaces also include the virtual world and the strategy must maintain attention to how adolescents access technology and use social media.

Values, aims, and principles

19. The strategy will draw on evidence about effective practice from contemporary research and apply it to the future safeguarding system in Havering. The following values, aims, principles and priorities suggest parameters to develop an understanding of the complexities of adolescent vulnerabilities, and to create an effective multi-agency response. It proposes a foundation upon which a Havering contextual safeguarding framework can be developed, and outlines methods to strengthen prediction, prevention, intervention and disruption with vulnerable adolescents.

Values

20. In order to embed a culture of understanding about the nature of safeguarding adolescents, we propose that the new strategy build on the existing Havering vision for children and families, and be based on the following values:
- a. Recognise that adolescents are children first, not adults;
 - b. Understand the development and support needs of adolescents as distinct from those of under 10s or adults;
 - c. Understand the distinct needs of adolescents with SEND;
 - d. Value the range of experiences of the adolescent population of Havering and respond to the needs of adolescents of all genders, ethnicities, sexual identities and beliefs;
 - e. Understand the diverse influences in adolescent lives;
 - f. Maintain a focus on the risks that adolescents are exposed to in contexts outside of the family and the home;
 - g. Consider the positive and negative impact of risks adolescents take in exploring their growing independence;
 - h. Recognise constrained choices that adolescents may feel powerless to avoid;
 - i. Maintain a balance between support and enforcement proportionate to an understanding of adolescent development and circumstances.

Aims

21. In order to build this vision and work relation to these values, the following aims are proposed to achieve a systemic and relationship-based approach to safeguarding adolescents:
- a. Explore the multi-faceted issues of adolescent development and safeguarding, and respond to these issues in a comprehensive way;
 - b. Respond to peer networks, pull factors, and the influence of individuals and groups that cause harm to adolescents and can lead them to make choices that increase the risks that they are exposed to;
 - c. Act to reduce the particular biases gender and races biases reinforced by some traditional approaches to harmful sexual behaviour, child criminal and sexual exploitation and group violence; Add examples here, ethnicity, cultural, gender etc.
 - d. Respond to the needs of adolescents with SEND who may be at higher risk of abuse;
 - e. Respond to the risk factors that can have negative impact on outcomes including substance use, social media, and mental health issues;
 - f. Develop a consistent and flexible practice framework – in the context of an integrated working approach – and a workforce development plan that creates a culture shift in the way that we deliver services that improve outcomes for adolescents;
 - g. Support all professionals – across thresholds and disciplines – to be brave and innovative, to hold and manage risk, and to eliminate all language that blames and stigmatises adolescents.

Principles

22. The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and Research in Practice (RiP) have investigated the evidence on adolescent risk and development. They argue that there is a wealth of knowledge within agencies, adolescents and their families, which must be galvanised and used to improve risk prevention and protection (Hanson and Holmes, 2014). ADCS/RiP propose 7 principles and this present practice guide seeks to follow each of them:
- a. **Work with adolescent development** –*perception, autonomy, aspiration, and skills*
 - b. **Work with adolescents as assets and resources** e.g. *draw on strengths to build confidence and resilience*
 - c. **Promote supportive relationships between adolescents and their family and peers**
 - d. **Prioritise supportive relationships between adolescents and key practitioner(s) through service design**
 - e. **Take a holistic approach both to adolescents and the risks they face** – e.g. *avoid labelling adolescents according to risks they face*
 - f. **Ensure services are accessible and advertised** – *respond to adolescent autonomy, advertise the benefits and provide outreach*
 - g. **Equip and support the workforce**

Proposed strategic priorities

23. Work is already underway to scope a programme that responds to the galvanising challenges set out above. The partnership in Havering understands the need to place this programme in the context of wider strategies and plans that influence the safety and wellbeing of children and adolescents. It is essential that adolescent risk and vulnerability form part of the wider conversation and scrutiny at existing strategic forums, so that all agencies are working together to understand and respond to the emerging issues and the connections between them.
24. A strategic programme must aim at transformation of thinking and practice and demands commitment to ongoing dialogue and coproduction with residents and with groups representing local communities in Havering. Strategic priorities must be informed by both an understanding of local issues and an analysis of the data, which will provide the focus for improving safeguarding arrangements and creating an integrated response to vulnerable adolescents.
25. The following strategic priorities are proposed for the partnership to consider:
- a. **Prediction:** develop analysis of key data sets to support effective prediction, prevention, intervention and disruption that respond to adolescent risk factors;
 - b. **Leadership:** set out the terms of reference for a safeguarding adolescents strategy group – a subgroup of the Havering Safeguarding Children Board - to provide oversight and challenge for the development of the strategy and programme;
 - c. **Prevention:** conduct appreciative enquiry and gap analysis of current policy and practice in work with adolescents across the professional partnership including application of systemic, relationship-based, restorative and strength-based practices to prevent harm and exploitation of adolescents;
 - d. **Intervention:** scope the design of multi-disciplinary offer and integrated working methods that respond to the needs and risks of adolescents as assessed through data analysis;

- e. **Disruption:** build on available disruptive techniques to develop outreach and place-based interventions that reduce adolescent involvement in violence and crime;
- f. **Communication and workforce development:**
 - i. produce and oversee a partnership communication plan to disseminate and promote new ways of working;
 - ii. create a workforce development plan that meets the training needs of professionals across the partnership who are working with adolescents at risk.

Prediction

26. All professionals and volunteers working in the Havering along with adolescents, families, communities, businesses need to know about the problems facing adolescents in the context of risks of abuse and exploitation. This understanding encompasses the signs and symptoms of exploitation and the factors that enhance risk to adolescents. Everyone must know what to do if they are worried about an adolescent. Leaders and managers must understand the intelligence and use this to target prevention, intervention and disruption that make adolescents safer.
27. A strategic approach to prediction will:
- a. Engage the broader community to create public confidence in the actions of agencies and encourage communities to be vocal about exploitation and abuse.
 - b. Engage adolescents, families and communities to understand their perceptions and to gather relevant intelligence. All participate in being part of the solution;
 - c. Give professionals proportionate knowledge of the profile of adolescent vulnerability in Havering. This includes the contextual factors that exacerbate risk and the consequential vulnerabilities arising from exploitation;
 - d. Support professionals, families, businesses to identify adolescent vulnerability, know who to contact, and know what will be done in response;
 - e. Coordinate analytical support across a range of agencies to identify themes, patterns and trends relating to adolescent vulnerability. Stronger intelligence gathering on individuals, peer groups and locational hotspots engages a tactical response from the partnership to make adolescents safer;
 - f. Identify cohorts of adolescents who don't meet thresholds for current interventions under Social Care statutory services or youth justice systems and offer them targeted prevention;
 - g. Support professionals to recognise the impact of diversity and identity on adolescent vulnerabilities and how biases can lead to low identification of some issues (e.g. young males who are sexually exploited);
 - h. Support professionals to recognise the impact of discrimination and disadvantage (including child poverty) and how these can create conditions for enhanced vulnerability;
 - i. Build professional confidence in how and when to share information. Communication at operational and strategic levels is frequent and effective, with intelligence shared beyond LA areas.

Leadership

28. Strong leadership is needed to successfully tackle the range of risks facing adolescents. Political leaders and senior leaders across the partnership of agencies, the local community and business have a collective responsibility to set the culture within which abuse and exploitation are not tolerated. Leadership that creates a culture of professional curiosity, challenge and appropriate escalation of concerns is fundamental. Strong leadership will ensure that this approach is embedded into the professional and community response to child abuse and exploitation.
29. Supporting this priority, vulnerable adolescents will remain a key strategic focus in the HSCB business plan and to the objectives of the HSCB; coordinating what is done by partners and scrutinising the effectiveness of operations.
30. A partnership subgroup of the HSCB is proposed to ensure ongoing connectivity across policy and practice in safeguarding adolescents. The HSCB will ensure that the strategy is driven forward by the subgroup and remains responsive to any work arising from the London Safeguarding Adolescents Steering Group (LSASG). Via the leadership of the subgroup:
 - a. The safety and wellbeing of vulnerable adolescents at risk of exploitation will continue to be prioritised across all relevant organisations and community settings and this is evidenced in strategic planning.
 - b. The culture of organisations will be set by senior leaders who will prioritise active engagement with adolescents to gain and maintain their trust. Adolescents are confident that their concerns are taken seriously, and that help is provided when needed. This culture will help drive a stronger response by peer groups in helping protect their friends and associates.
 - c. Partnership activity in Havering will engage a broader range of organisations and individuals in the protection of vulnerable adolescents in extra-familial settings (i.e. schools, neighbourhoods, public, transport hubs, community centres or in areas where adolescents congregate). Leaders fully commit to engaging their staff in this priority.

Prevention

31. A committed focus on an integrated approach to early intervention will be needed to prevent vulnerability from escalating to more serious forms of harm. In the context of exploitation, this priority relates to the effective identification and mitigation of risk by multi-agency working both before an adolescent reaches adolescence and when they are in the adolescent stage.
32. Strong early help systems, robust responses to domestic violence and the effective identification and tackling of neglect are key, and some of these are already in place across Havering. Equally applicable is the work undertaken directly with children and adolescents, educating and empowering them to support friends, build resilience to exploitation and better understand the risks that they might face, including in online spaces.
 - a. Appreciative enquiry and mapping of existing good practice across universal, community and early intervention settings including the application of strength-based and restorative approaches to work with adolescents.
 - b. Adolescents who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation (i.e. looked after children, missing children) are identified early and supported by their families/carers, professionals, and their community to prevent and build resilience against exploitation.

- c. Professionals engaged in providing universal and targeted services to adolescents, through organisations identify vulnerabilities and harmful attitudes and can empower adolescents to build positive and healthy attitudes towards relationships and friendships, gender identity, and sexuality.
- d. Schools deliver high quality sex and relationships education and where they strive to take a whole-school approach to gender equality, safeguarding, and preventing exploitation.

Intervention

- 33. Recognising positive work with risk and intervention to date, especially around CSE, Missing and serious violence, the strategy should focus on building on current professional practice – such as systemic therapy or restorative practice - that is known to be effective in the protection of children and adolescents.
- 34. This focus does not detract from the need to consider innovative ways to address adolescent risk and vulnerability but covers the ‘basics’ such as: information being shared appropriately, risks being assessed comprehensively, work remaining focussed on the child or adolescent, escalation being engaged as appropriate and case recording being contemporaneous and accurate.
- 35. In terms of innovation, the focus proposed is on finding effective ways of working with vulnerable adolescents beyond the child protection and criminal justice responses, including:
 - a. The co-design with adolescents, families and professionals of an integrated system and multidisciplinary offer that responds to adolescent risk and need;
 - b. Implementation of contextual safeguarding approaches outside of the family and home that improve outcomes for vulnerable adolescents;
 - c. Enduring support to children and adolescents who have been exploited, ensuring that what is offered is appropriate for each individual child or adolescent based on their gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and the nature of the exploitation that they have experienced;
 - d. Adolescents demonstrating harmful sexual behaviours are identified and support put in place to address their behaviours;
 - e. Having develop their collective expertise through joint learning exercises and strong partnership;
 - f. Quality assurance processes by the HSCB and partners that will provide reassurance that both basic and innovative practices remain robust.

Disruption

- 36. A range of disruption techniques are required to build the trust and confidence of victims of crime. Such techniques will move beyond a focus on managing an individual or a group of individuals, to developing place-based interventions through, for example, schools, parks, shopping centres or other spaces where adolescents congregate.
- 37. Through the implementation of such strategies, public confidence will increase; with individuals and communities empowered to report the signs of CSE and other forms of exploitation – knowing that robust and effective action will follow. It also focuses on the targeting and pursuit

of offenders that brings them to justice and interventions with adolescents to reduce and manage any risks that they may pose to others.

38. Effective disruption also requires that the vulnerabilities of adolescents engaged in the criminal justice system are effectively identified. It recognises that some adolescents do not fit neatly into the categories of victim / perpetrator and this needs to be better understood when considering the most effective response to their needs and/or actions.
- a. Professionals identify, assess and mitigate any vulnerabilities that might reduce the chances of adolescents exiting gang culture or involvement in youth crime and violence;
 - b. Robust policing responses to perpetrators are in place: agreeing and monitoring investigation plans to run alongside support plans developed in response to a child criminal and/or sexual exploitation referral;
 - c. All agencies effectively share information and routinely utilising intelligence-led disruption in relation to any local businesses, individuals or groups associated with exploitation;
 - d. Agencies flexibly apply the full range of disruption tactics available through both criminal and civil routes to protect children and adolescents, including powers available in relation to licensing, health and safety, fraud, housing provision and related legislation;
 - e. Where identified, to strongly advocate changes in legislation to better protect and better deter offenders from exploiting adolescents for the purposes of criminal activity
 - f. Robust offender management strategies post-conviction and/or effective intervention strategies that reduce the risk presented by identified abusers.

Communication and Workforce Development

39. All professionals in Havering working with adolescents must be equipped with systemic and relationship-based ways of working that respond to the latest research on adolescent development and will improve the response to children aged between 10-18 who experience risk or harm. The strategy should provide opportunities for quality conversations that help us to build professional relationships and contribute to developing a skilled multi-agency workforce that works together to reduce risks and to keep individuals and families safe. The details of a communication and workforce development plan are to be developed through further stakeholder engagement.

Proposed timeline

40. A provisional timeline is proposed for developing a programme and offer that will respond to the challenges set out above:
- a. Dec 18 – Feb 19: stakeholder engagement and co-design events that develop the local vision for Havering's innovative approaches to prediction, prevention and intervention
 - b. Feb 19 – May 19: a transition period to transform the current offer
 - c. May 19 – Sep 19: engaging the professional partnership to develop our prevention offer
 - d. Sep 19: the launch of a new integrated offer and development programme
 - e. Sep 19 – Aug 20: a parallel study and evaluation of the innovation

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/729914/Working_Together_to_Safeguard_Children-2018.pdf

ⁱⁱ <file:///C:/Users/CMichel/Downloads/evidence-scope-that-difficult-age-summary-and-key-points.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ A definition of County Lines: a group (not necessarily affiliated as a gang) establishes a network often between an urban hub and county location, into which drugs (primarily heroin and crack cocaine) are supplied. A mobile phone line is established in the market, to which orders are placed by introduced customers. The line will commonly (but not exclusively) be controlled by a third party, remote from the market.

The group involved in County Lines exploits young or vulnerable persons, to achieve the storage and/or supply of drugs, movement of cash proceeds and to secure the use of dwellings (commonly referred to as cuckooing). The group or individuals exploited by them regularly travel within and between the urban hub and the county market, to replenish stock and deliver cash. The group is inclined to use intimidation, violence and weapons, including knives, corrosives and firearms. (National crime agency, 2017)

N.B For the purposes of this practice guide, 'County lines' will be referred to as Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) when discussing children who have been groomed into this activity. We are clear that County Lines is a form of exploitation and trafficking that can happen in any local authority area (is not restricted to the either rural or urban locations) and as such, children who have been groomed into this will not be treated as perpetrators of this crime.

DRAFT