

REVIEW SUMMARY

Thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review: Serious Youth Violence and Extra-Familial Harm



Review Background

Over two separate violent incidents, five young people (who were all under 18 at the time and therefore still children) were injured as a result of stab wounds. Following initial rapid reviews of the two cases, Solihull Safeguarding Children Partnership agreed to commission a thematic local Child Safeguarding Practice Review focussed on serious youth violence and extra-familial harm. Four young people harmed in one incident and the perpetrator of violence in the other incident, who were all Solihull residents were the focus of the review.

An independent author was identified to undertake the review, and to ensure the report was informed by the views of young people, the independent reviewer met separately with two from the five young people that are included in this review, six young people accessing support from the Youth Justice Service in Solihull, and a further two young people looked after by Solihull Local Authority. He also obtained chronologies and information from organisations involved with the five young people.

Learning: Positive Practice

It is important to recognise that local case reviews also identify positive practice. In this case the reviewer found:

- There is evidence of good practice already being progressed and further work planned to strengthen and further improve the existing pathways, including an exploitation pathway which covers practice response at all Tiers of need.
- Good practice was evidenced in the role of health and education services in remaining connected to the young people during the COVID-19 pandemic to meet their health and educational needs as appropriate.
- The Exploitation and Missing Team was seen by one young person and their family as the only service that was supportive in making the young people and families feel at ease to engage with them in a positive manner and approach.
- It is positive that the [Strategy](#) has recently been reviewed and there is evidence of a suite of resources including a training offer and pathway for child exploitation.
- The MAACE (Multi-Agency Adult and Children Exploitation) process was reported as having improved significantly since a consistent Chair has been appointed, with messages and actions now being progressed more quickly and better information sharing.
- During the review there was clear evidence across the scoping documents that child protection concerns were identified quickly and referred to appropriate agencies.

Learning (Procedures, Processes and Services):

Solihull's All Age Exploitation Strategy and the Understanding of Gangs

- For each of the young people considered in this review, agencies in Solihull at points had information, intelligence and/or concerns that directly linked each young person to incidents of involvement to be potential/actual victims of exploitation.
- Reports and referrals citing concerns in respect of [extra-familial harm](#) /risks associated to exploitation, often led to [Early Help](#) referrals or when a Social Care Assessment was completed, extra familial harm seemed to be considered as an isolated incident and there were no plans put in place to progress work to support these young people around exploitation risks. This in turn led to most referrals of concern in the Scoping Period not leading to a longer period of ongoing Children's Services involvement, which may have supported co-ordination of multi-agency input via either Child Protection, Child in Need (CIN) planning and support.
- However, it must also be recognised that responding to the harm young people experience outside the family home is often beyond the reach of parents and carers and can undermine the parent/ carer relationship with the child. Parents and carers themselves need to be [supported as safeguarding partners](#) when extra-familial harm is taking place.
- Across the scoping period, there was no formal activity undertaken to understand the links and associations of these young people to a local gang. There is limited awareness of the scale of the problem, or of the local profile of child victims of exploitation in Solihull. [Complex](#) Strategy Meetings and mapping activity to consider associates and identify contexts where intervention and disruption was required, did not occur.
- There is a definitive need for Solihull partners to develop the [contextual safeguarding](#) culture and approach to include enabling the referral, assessment, planning, and intervention into places, spaces, education establishments and peer groups, and to enhance the skills of the workforce to proactively and effectively respond to the needs and risk of young exposed to exploitation.

Learning (Knowledge and Practice):

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Understanding Trauma

- It is well understood that ACEs can have significant impact on adolescent and adult behaviour. ([Link to training and resources](#))
- Each young person had suffered [trauma](#) in their childhood. Common themes from their home environment included: Domestic abuse in the home; child neglect; parental mental and emotional health issues; parental use of alcohol and drugs, including dealing; history of social care involvement, gang affiliation, criminality, county lines, cannabis use, child to parent abuse, and the absence of supportive adult relationships.
- There was evidence for all the young people of involvement in criminality, both as a victims and perpetrators. Each young person had links to cannabis use/distribution which was never a focus for attention or considered a potential Child Criminal Exploitation risk and seemed to have been normalised over time when it should have been a 'trigger' for proactive intervention.
- There was little evidence that any of the early childhood experiences or individual characteristics and life experiences were considered to devise plans, support or appropriate intervention. As a result, future safeguarding issues continued, and the risks escalated to the stage where they became at high risk of exploitation.
- The national picture in respect of rising school exclusion rates is reflected in Solihull. There have been many studies undertaken that connects school exclusions to exploitation, criminality, and gang activity, especially where links to exploitation are already apparent. Research undertaken suggests that keeping young people in full time education should be used as a protective factor for preventing and reducing risks around child exploitation.
- Feedback from mainstream education representatives in the focus groups expressed extreme difficulties for staff in schools to differentiate between persistent disruptive behavioural issues and those that are influenced by ACEs, Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND), or poor mental health. Difficulties accessing the specialist support services leads to delays in understanding the causes of specific patterns of behaviours and the ability to provide the right support.
- The young people lost confidence and trust in professionals, which made further support and building trust extremely difficult.

Learning (Knowledge and Practice):

Intersectionality & Adulthood

- When ethnicity, cultural beliefs, identity, experiences & values of young people have not been considered, practitioners cannot understand the ways that [multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage](#) may compound themselves and create obstacles for young people.
- [Adulthood](#) is noted to occur when a child is at risk or suffering harm outside the home but also in contexts such as domestic abuse, homelessness and other circumstances that create risk for young people where adulthood can lead to a diminished safeguarding response.
- Feedback from the young people and/or their parents /carers involved in this review of their experiences of services in Solihull, highlight these young people being perceived by professionals as 'offenders'.
- Practitioners and the partnership must be able to constructively challenge colleagues and partner agencies to reflect upon how young people are viewed within the context of suffering child exploitation and modern slavery, whilst remaining mindful of potential [adulthood or other forms of bias](#) that could potentially exist.
- The starting point for anyone working with a child and members of their family is, with [cultural humility](#), to pay specific attention to their gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and the lived experience of each individual, including the impact of harm through discrimination and how these may "intersect" to create unique dynamics and effects for each child and member of their family.

Learning (Procedures, Processes and Services): Threshold Level Considerations & Early Help

- Limited risk analysis and inappropriate [threshold application](#) meant that the young people were not subjected to meaningful multi-agency planning and disparate responses were identified across the cohort.
- [Early Help](#) can be a crucial component to prevent children being lured to exploitation, however, whilst there were services that could provide early help, the links to contextual safeguarding was not clear.
- The significance of building relationships with community groups cannot be underestimated, as in most cases these types of provision are developed and rooted with support from within communities as an extension of families.
- [Early Help](#) was routinely offered as continuation of support as children deescalate from statutory social care intervention. However, when the offer of 'early help' was refused, there was no contingency plan or follow up.
- One of the most significant factors in young people's experiences was the lack of a positive, trusting, and supportive adult in their lives, this was despite multiple agency involvement to support them and their families.

Learning (Procedures, Processes and Services): Disruption Activity

- This review did not hear of any coherent [disruption](#) approaches to proactively respond to young people entrenched in exploitation in Solihull. It is vital that people working in frontline roles effectively spot the signs of exploitation of children and work together proactively with other agencies to disrupt offending and safeguard young people as 'victims'.
- The Police have a pivotal role and part to play in disruption and multi-agency discussions involving extra familial harm and exploitation. The effectiveness of the MAACE process in Solihull is highly dependent on information and intelligence and the Police are key to ensuring there is good information sharing and receiving in the context of structures and processes in Solihull.
- Each of the young people considered in this thematic cohort had first response contact with Police over time for a range of concerns. The police need to recognise and connect their contacts as part of the multi-agency response.
- Intervention and disruption planning would have been enhanced by lead practitioners and independent reviewers (such as Child Protection Chairpersons and Independent Reviewing Officers) and line managers ensuring that actions and decisions from the MAACE are integrated within other forums where plans are being reviewed.
- There was a view of not enough focus on operational delivery and positive activities for young people.

Recommendations for the Solihull Safeguarding Children Partnership

A range of recommendations were made. These include the following:

- In relation to Workforce Practice and Knowledge:
 - Working with strategic partnerships across Solihull, consider the need for a strategic approach to practice that includes Adverse Childhood Experiences and a Trauma Informed approach.
 - Review and promote [guidance](#) to upskill the workforce around use of language and approaches to working with young people who are the victims of exploitation.
 - Review and promote [guidance](#) for managers across the partnership on utilising effective supervision, with emphasis on reflective discussions, diversity, and unconscious bias.
 - Within the context of Early Help, agencies to agree be flexible in their pathways to enable the practitioner that is most trusted by the family to remain as the lead practitioner.
- In relation to Strategic Oversight:
 - Develop a greater understanding of the activity of organised crime groups both within Solihull and cross border to identified entrenched and emerging networks and establish robust risk outside the home / extra familial harm pathways.
 - Review and re-launch the 'Thematic Exploitation Communication Strategy'.
 - Review the [Multi-Agency Procedures](#) with particular attention to the contextual safeguarding approaches and to ensure the pathway for receiving referrals, assessing, planning and interventions for places, spaces, and peer groups is clear.

An action plan is in place, which is being progressed by strategic leaders and practitioners across the partnership.

Practitioner Questions and Information

- Do you know where to find the West Midlands Procedures around harm outside the home? – [Harm outside the home including Exploitation, Trafficking and Gangs Procedures](#)
- Do you know how where to find information regarding our local response to exploitation? See our website: [SSCP Child Exploitation](#)
- Have you seen these [Multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm \(researchinpractice.org.uk\)](#)? They are designed to support effective partnership working across different local contexts; providing a common language and framework to better respond to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.
- Do you know where to find the Solihull thresholds of need document? This is vital in enabling you to understand what support may be available for a child and their family - [SSCP Threshold Guidance](#).
- Do you know where to access guidance on reflective supervision? [Reflective supervision \(procedures.org.uk\)](#)
- Do you know how to escalate concerns? See the SSCP website for more information on our [escalation guidance](#).
- Do you feel comfortable sharing children's information with your colleagues? See our website for [Information Sharing guidance](#).

For up-to-date safeguarding advice and guidance:

[SSCP Website](#)

[West Midlands Child Protection Procedures](#)



Solihull
Safeguarding
Children Partnership