

Multi-Agency Deep Dive Audit into how agencies in the Wakefield District identify and respond to Children Vulnerable to Exploitation, 2021/22

7 POINT BRIEFING

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SUMMARY

Wakefield Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) carried out a deep dive multi-agency audit to provide the partnership with assurance of the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements where child exploitation is a feature. The audit considered five cases involving children in Wakefield.

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WHAT IS 'CHILDREN VULNERABLE TO EXPLOITATION'?

Child Exploitation refers to the use of a child for someone else's advantage, gratification or profit often resulting in the child being abused physically, sexually, emotionally, and financially. Nationally, Child Exploitation remains a key focus. The [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's It was Hard to Escape Report, March 2020](#) indicated that Safeguarding Children Partnerships need to ensure a bespoke framework is in place to respond to any exploitation within an extra-familial context. WSCP has introduced a [Multi-Agency Child Exploitation \(MACE\) Strategy](#) focusing on three key priorities in relation to: recognition and coordination, protection and support, and disruption.

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AUDIT FINDINGS - AREAS WORKING WELL

- **Recognition:** Vulnerabilities were recognised and understood by all agencies with regular Risk Assessment Meetings (RAM) to coordinate multi-agency responses. Robust multi-agency information sharing was evident in the early stages with proactive action taken to reduce the risk of exploitation, ensuring multi-agency plans were in place
- **Assessment & Planning:** The quality of risk assessments was strong with evidence of mapping to identify victims, locations, and perpetrators of exploitation which contributed to the disruption and reduction of risk for a child.
- **Voice of the Child:** There was evidence of children being listened to and supported in expressing their views.
- **Intervention:** Partners were proactive in sharing intelligence and agencies worked appropriately with parents to assist with disruption. Parents were supported to understand the risk factors.
- **Joint Working:** Joint visits were undertaken with good communication and engagement by agencies with families involved in forming protective factors.
- **Impact & Outcomes:** The multi-agency intervention, joint working and extensive information sharing was effective in reducing harm by focussing work on the child.

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AUDIT FINDINGS - AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- **Recognition:** The identification of exploitation was found to be initially limited in some instances. RAM systems and practice have since developed and strengthened in this respect.
- **Assessment & Planning:** In some cases, the practice would have benefited from earlier identification by agencies of links to neglect and domestic abuse as indicators of vulnerability, possibly prompting earlier escalation.
- **Voice of the Child:** In two cases, children had additional needs and findings highlighted how practice could have been strengthened through agencies considering adaptive approaches in these instances.
- **Intervention:** Two children had experienced multiple disruptions in their carers or placements which impacted on delivery and continuity of interventions. There were delays in some support services with young people being on a waiting list.
- **Joint Working:** A need was identified for services to consider how they can liaise with the CVE team at an earlier stage to aid in identification of risk and to inform next steps.
- **Impact & Outcomes:** In some instances, agencies would benefit from closer consideration of the exploration of trauma and lived experiences to gain a better understanding of current concerns and the impact.

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WHAT WILL WE DO WITH THESE FINDINGS?

WSCP will consider the key learning points from this audit:

- To develop and improve the understanding and aid identification of the different types of child exploitation, including online exploitation.
- Services to have a clear understanding of the roles, duties and responsibilities of partner agencies in the context of child exploitation.
- All services to understand and recognise the co-occurrence of safeguarding factors such as domestic abuse, neglect, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and how this can increase a child's risk to exploitation.

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NEXT STEPS

- All agencies involved in the audit will feedback specific good practice and areas for development identified for their service.
- The findings of the audit have been shared with the WSCP Safeguarding Effectiveness Group and key multi-agency actions have been identified for services to implement.

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RESOURCES

There are a range of national and local resources and guidance which can support professionals in understanding their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children vulnerable to exploitation. Visit our website for more information: www.wakefieldscp.org.uk/professionals/child-exploitation/