

Multi-Agency Deep Dive Audit into how agencies in the Wakefield District respond to Children Displaying Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) October 2022

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 in cases where children have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB). The audit considered five cases involving children in Wakefield.

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WHAT IS HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR (HSB)

The Ofsted [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#) published in June 2021, spoke to over 900 children and young people from 32 schools and colleges about the prevalence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment they had experienced. The findings revealed the scale of sexual harassment and online sexual abuse that children and young people were experiencing and the frequency of harmful sexual behaviours being so commonplace, some considered it normal and did not report it.

When we refer to HSB, we use the same definition as the Department for Education:

“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 abusive towards another child, young person or adult.”

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AUDIT FINDINGS - AREAS WORKING WELL

- **Recognition:** where initial concerns of HSB were raised, recognition and responses from services was efficient ensuring immediate referrals, screening and decision making as to next steps. Trauma was recognised and informed responses.
- **Assessment and Planning:** Assessments were appropriate (Brook Traffic Light tool) and considered children's needs and parenting capacity in light of the HSB concerns.
- **Voice of the Child:** services recognised the most appropriate practitioner to capture the voice of the child based on the relationship that existed.
- **Interventions** in some cases were appropriate and immediate. Direct work was undertaken with children which demonstrated good awareness from practitioners as to where interventions would be best focussed.
- **Joint Working:** Information sharing and visibility of records was effective and informed the appropriate next steps.
- **Impact and Outcomes:** The impact of the role of the link social worker between education and Children's Social Care greatly enhanced the timeliness of responses and sharing of information between partners in one case.

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AUDIT FINDINGS - AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- **Recognition:** Although trauma as a result of bereavement was identified by services at the outset, recognising maltreatment and emotional harm at an early point in a child's life and providing the right support, may have prevented the children displaying HSB.
- **Assessment and Planning** did not always accurately reflect which services were taking ownership for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the child and these were addressed.
- **Voice of the Child** was lacking in some instances with no evidence the child's wishes and feelings had been sought.
- **Interventions** were not always timely. Where HSB was low on the continuum of behaviours, other interventions could have been considered to help the child to understand their behaviour.
- **Joint Working** could have been strengthened to ensure planning and responses were multi-agency, rather than over reliance on the actions of one service and the family in one case.
- **Impact and Outcomes:** the outcomes of interventions were not always shared with agencies who had an involvement in supporting the child and family.

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WHAT WILL WE DO WITH THESE FINDINGS?

WSCP will consider the key learning points from this audit:

- To establish what the system offer is in respect of children who display and are victim of HSB, across the continuum of behaviours, by establishing a multi-agency working group to review.
- To raise awareness of the Harmful Sexual Behaviour Panel and its function to support practitioners who are dealing with instances of HSB across a continuum.
- Recognising that all services have a part to play where allegations of HSB have been made and ensuring there is clarity and understanding which is evidenced in planning.

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NEXT STEPS

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

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RESOURCES

The WSCP has developed a range of resources and guidance which can support practitioners in understanding Harmful Sexual Behaviour and their responsibilities in respect of safeguarding children who have displayed or are victims of HSB.

- [WSCP Understanding Sexual Behaviour Webpage](#)