

SCRUTINY REPORT



MEETING:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	15 November 2023
SUBJECT:	Detailed report on Complex Safeguarding and missing response – Annon Experiences
REPORT FROM:	Councillor Lucy Smith, Cabinet member for Children and Young People.
CONTACT OFFICER:	Jeanette Richards, Executive Director of Childrens Services

Bury Complex Safeguarding Team Progress since October 2022.

As part of our improvement journey, the Chief Executive commissioned an independent scrutineer in October 2022. The key areas for development identified by our internal review and by the scrutineer were:

- Staffing and establishment of the team
- Governance
- Practice definitions
- Operating principles and procedures aligned to GM Complex Safeguarding Hub
- Performance Reporting
- Improvement planning

After the review, the staffing structure was revised to better reflect the demand and complexity of the work, with the additional temporary appointment of an interim strategic lead (in position until August 2023) to engage the partnership, develop awareness; and to help identify young people in need of support and targeted intervention from the multi-agency team.

The new team structure moved Bury into closer alignment with other GM Safeguarding Complex Teams, in that a Trusted Psychologist and Parenting Worker are now in place in the team. The team is also now co-located in the police station, sitting alongside the key police teams. In addition, Bury had a mixed system for Missing from Home governance and practice. This has been changed, so that it now sits solely within the Complex Safeguarding Team, ensuring tighter consistency of practice, performance, and accountability.

As part of the improvement work, Bury Safeguarding Arrangements were revised, giving clear lines of accountability and governance. The Safeguarding Executive appointed the local Chief Superintendent as the responsible executive officer for Complex Safeguarding, leading on a revised subgroup and strategy, supported by the Director of Social Care Practice.

Revised Complex Safeguarding Strategy, Delivery Plan and Operating Principles are now agreed across the partnership and a revised subgroup has wider partner membership designed to make a difference in Complex Safeguarding. Our practice definitions are consistent and have been approved by the GM Complex Safeguarding Hub.

Our strategic aims, owned by the executive, the partnership and driven by the subgroup are:

1. To embed clear governance and assurance arrangements.
2. To increase our awareness and understanding of Complex Safeguarding.
3. Joint training and development opportunities, practice tools, guidance, and resources.
4. To provide a co-ordinated multi-agency response to children and young people at risk of exploitation.
5. To provide a co-ordinated multi-agency response to children and young people who go missing.
6. Greater success in detection, disruption, and prosecution; and
7. To work alongside and within communities to tackle exploitation.

Our refreshed Operating Principles focus on forming trusted relationships and identifying and reducing harm through targeted multi-agency intervention. This is best demonstrated through improvements in the multi-agency forums and practice improvements that have been made since July. These include:

- A robust pathway for referral, through the MASH, District Teams and partners.
- Daily Governance meetings to consider the needs and, where necessary, to allocate children: with further discussion of children at
- A weekly screening panel, with all relevant partners in attendance to ensure all intelligence and information is captured; and finally,
- A monthly partnership and risk management meeting, where themes, intelligence and planning for each young person is discussed.

In addition, there have been important practice and assurance changes:

- The W.I.S.E. assessment was implemented in March 2023, further enhancing our ability to analyse and assess risk and aligning Bury with other GM Complex teams.
- The Missing from Home policy and practice has been revised, including implementation of a new Return Home Interview template to better capture professional curiosity, risk and needs.
- Joint supervision has recently been implemented (at the point of completion of the WISE assessment) to ensure congruence between Complex Safeguarding and statutory allocated social work team planning; and
- The Complex Safeguarding Team is part of the main Quality Assurance framework and reports through to the DCS Assurance and Improvement (AIM) meetings.
- As most of the children and young people open to the Complex Safeguarding team are subject to Child in Need planning, similarly to other LAs in GM, there is now a three-monthly review of these children by the Safeguarding Unit, to better replicate the independent oversight received by young people subject to Child Protection planning and those in our care.

- Feedback is now sought at the point of closure for every young person and carer, indicating impact and outcomes and increasing understanding about where services can improve further.
- A comprehensive performance dashboard has been created, giving further insight into our systems and processes, holding practice to account, affording greater understanding of needs and identifying areas to address. This reporting complements the long-established GM Complex Safeguarding Insights reports.
- The remit of the service has been extended to continue to work with young people post 18 years of age and avoid 'cliff edge' endings. Inclusive of this is enabling systems such as NRM to follow the young person into adulthood and Adult social care recording systems.
- Finally, there is now a worker for schools, developing better consultation with the education sector.

Areas of ongoing development

1. Further development is required to ensure that each child's intervention plan captures the multi-agency aspect of reducing harm in contextual safeguarding.
2. Development of a 'Problem Profile' by police colleagues to fully understanding the wider pattern of GM; and intra-Bury Complex Safeguarding risks. Despite this, we are determined locally with our local GMP colleagues to better understand the risks in Bury and GMP colleagues are in the process of developing a more comprehensive problem profile for Bury; this in turn will support multi-agency collaboration and mapping of risk and need.
3. Better links with the wider community. We want to work with the right young people, at the right time. While our performance dashboard demonstrates increased referral to the service from outside of social care, there is more work to do in establishing even better links with our community leaders, promoting awareness within our third sector, and further enhancing our engagement and training with the education sector.

Summary Profile of the Children & Young People Supported by the CST Team

The number of children open to the team continues to be at the high-end of their long-term range of between 35 and 60 children and young people – currently 58 children. Children and young people supported split 58:42 between girls and boys, with girls likely to be a little younger than boys. The predominant reason for involvement also splits on gender lines, with the boys being supported for reasons of criminal exploitation, while girls tend to be supported for reasons of sexual exploitation.

Most of the children and young people have relatively recently opened to the team – more than 50% in the past 3 months, with less than a fifth of the cohort being open for less than 6 months. Most of those open to CST are also open as Children in Need, or currently under assessment by children's social care. A fifth of those open are Children in Care, or subject to Child Protection Plans. Slightly under half of the cohort have no reported Missing from Home (MFH) episodes in the past year, while a quarter have 3 or more such episodes in that period.

Considered geographically, there is a fair spread of children across the borough, with most wards represented amongst the currently open cohort. Radcliffe, Moorside, Elton, Bury East and Redvales have a higher proportion of those open than other areas. Looked at over a longer timeframe, analysis all those children worked with by the service in the past year makes plain the connection between the more deprived areas of Bury and likely vulnerability to child exploitation

– nearly two thirds of all those closed to the service were drawn from areas in the most deprived 3 deciles in the country, with five wards: Besses, Bury East, Moorside, Radcliffe East, Radcliffe West providing over half of all those children open to the service in the past year.

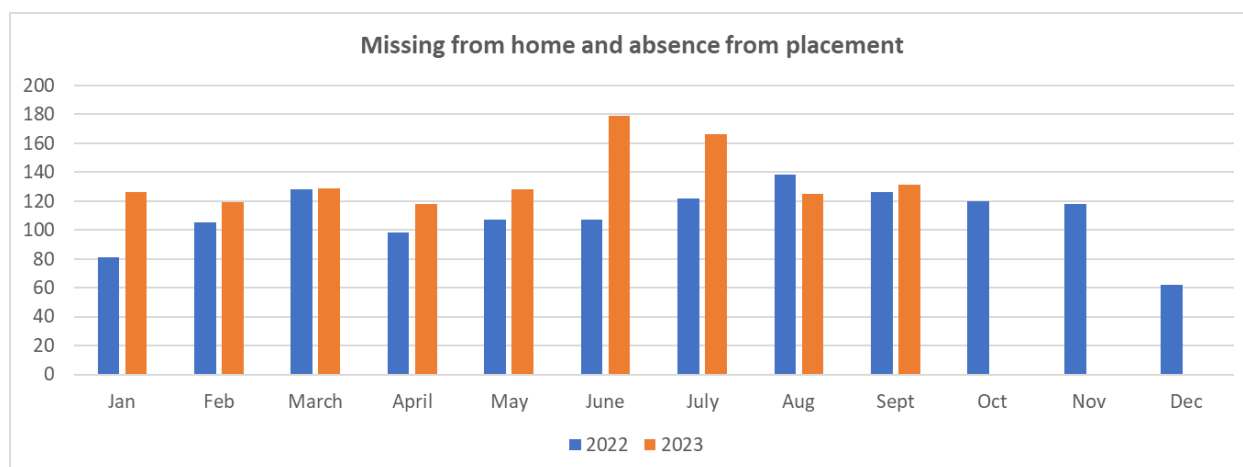
Just under a quarter of those currently open to the service have previously been open to the service. Few children reopen soon after closure (6 of the 58 currently open reopened within 6 months of previous closure), with a longer period of closure more common.

Source of referrals to the service

The coding of the source for the referral shows a widespread involvement from all key partner agencies (police, schools, health, other local authority services, in addition to individual members of the public and their families). It is likely that the coding understates the involvement of other agencies, especially police colleagues, and overstates that of local authority children’s social care because the route of referral is through children’s social care teams (and often occurs as part of the assessment process). But even allowing for this there is good evidence of other agencies being alert to the risk of child exploitation.

Missing From Home Episodes – information to the end of September

Month by month analysis of Missing from Home Episodes (MFH) shows that the general pattern in 2023 is similar to, but slightly higher than 2022, with both years being higher than 2021. The particularly high figure for June in 2023 likely reflects the very warm period of weather in that month.



Children in Care to other local authorities placed in Bury.

Over the 6 months to the end of September there have been 847 MFH episodes. Of these episodes, a substantial proportion (22%) are by children in care to other local authorities (mostly other GM authorities), but living in homes in Bury – mostly either private sector children’s homes or living semi-independently. It is the prevalence of this group amidst the MFH episodes; and parts of the borough, that leads to the geographical concentration of episodes in Radcliffe and Elton, especially Radcliffe West, where there are several key semi-independent providers.

Characteristics and Frequency of Children who go missing.

The characteristics of the cohort of children going missing is slightly weighted towards girls, especially for those with only one or two missing episodes, perhaps reflecting the greater likelihood of missing episodes being reported for girls due to perception of differential vulnerability and risk. For those going missing once or twice, 14 or 15 years of age are the peak

years for MFH episodes, with the peak age increasing for those going missing three or more times to 16 and 17 years old. Again, this reflects the prevalence of children in care amongst those with multiple MFH episodes, both children in care to Bury and to other local authorities – professional care providers having greater clarity around their duty to report children missing when the circumstances arise and continuing to do so up to the age of 18.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, over 60% of MFH episodes were for children with an ongoing social care involvement, over 50% for children in care. Those with multiple MFH episodes were more likely to also be open to the Complex Safeguarding Team for reasons of exploitation. Analysis undertaken in July reviewing social care involvement over a longer timeframe showed that less than 20% of the cohort of children with a missing episode had never been known to children's social care services. Most of those children with MFH episodes have had repeated previous involvement or have current involvement from Children's Social Care services.

Considering other additional needs for the cohort of children with a missing episode, 20% had an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) – partly reflecting the greater prevalence of EHCPs amongst children in care, with 12% having an EHCP with a primary need for Social, Emotional or Mental Health. This fact makes a clear point about the multiple vulnerabilities of the MFH cohort and the fact that MFH episodes, especially multiple MFH episodes reflect other, associated needs and issues amongst the cohort of children and young people.

Return Home Interviews

For Bury children, looking at the last 6 months, 92% were offered a return home interview (RHI) (a further missing episode soon after return often explains why a RHI has not been offered for each episode in the sequence). Three quarters of those offered an RHI accepted the offer and just under 60% of those interviews took place within 72 hours of returning home.

Three Brief Anonymised Case Studies

Child Sexual Exploitation - Operation Tisbury

A number of children were referred to Bury CST following concerns of online child sexual exploitation. The children did not know each other. The investigation has concluded with the offender receiving a life sentence.

[Lewis Edwards: Snapchat sex abuse images police officer jailed - BBC News](#)

The children were referred to Bury CST whereby support was provided alongside the investigating officers. Some of these children had no previous involvement with Bury Children's Services, while others had extensive adverse childhood experiences and involvement with Children's Services. The children were supported by their CST social worker and offered support from the CST Parenting worker. Existing, trusted relationships with professionals were used to ensure that children were not overwhelmed or potentially retraumatised through the involvement of CST.

This highlights that whilst there are indicators of vulnerability to exploitation, any child can be targeted by an offender, and offenders can also be anyone and may not fit the socially constructed perspective of an 'offender'. Direct work tools are used to highlight this with children referred to CST where appropriate, including exploration of gender stereotyping.

Child Criminal Exploitation

Child B was referred to the CST Team following the school becoming aware of information being shared within the community, which alleged that B was dealing drugs. The school raised concerns that B had been criminally exploited into drug distribution. B had not been previously known to Children's Services and was described by the school as a 'model pupil'. The concerns were extra-familial in nature and no further worries were identified by social workers following the referral to Children's Services.

B received support from his CST social worker alongside the other professionals scaffolded around the family. This included the CST Nurse alerting local hospitals due to concerns around possible internal concealment of class A drugs should B attend any A&E. Understanding of child exploitation for B increased through support from their CST social worker. With support from the CST Parenting worker, safety plans were developed using a whole family approach, including older siblings. B began spending more time with other family members, engaging in diversionary activities with support from the CST social worker working with B to explore their interests and then helping obtain a gym pass.

B grew to better understand and identify how the offenders were seeking to criminally exploit them, through the county lines model of child criminal exploitation. Police intelligence forms were completed by the professionals around B and their family, which were fed into the Force Intelligence Bureau to support ongoing operations around the offenders and to support police disruption of their activities.

Missing from home

Child C went missing from home. On their return home a Family Support Worker from CST completed a return interview (this is undertaken, in addition to the initial safe and well check that will be completed by GMP upon their return).

Child C has a history of adverse childhood experiences and is struggling with his education. Child C has shared that he has been collected in a car by someone older, the car is believed to be stolen. The missing from home return interview triggered a social worker assessment of C and his family, and a referral into the CST team due to concerns about child exploitation. Trusted relationships were established to support assessment and interventions. CST Parenting worker worked with mum to increase her understanding of signs of child exploitation and to devise a co-produced safety plan with her and her child, supported by the professional network working with the family.

Support for the family saw Child C return to school, with a focus on diversionary activities and work experience provided after a successful application of Turnaround Funding. Child C and Mum's relationship improved, with greater mutual understanding of their responsibilities. The safety plan empowered Child C to remove himself from difficult situations by using a 'code' word, which invokes more oversight response from professionals and his Mum and reduce offenders' ability to coerce him into exploitative situations. Feedback received from C and their family highlighted the positive relationships developed (Mum shared 'I have got my son back'). Child C is now pursuing his ambitions and considering starting an apprenticeship, with a view to establishing his own business in the future.

Contact Details: -

Jeanette Richards
Executive Director of Childrens Services
j.richards@bury.gov.uk