

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: Children's and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 7 November 2024

SUBJECT: Bury Complex Safeguarding Assurance GM Report

REPORT FROM: Councillor Lucy Smith, Cabinet member for Children and Education Services

CONTACT OFFICER: Linda Evans, Director of Social care and Early Help, Children's Services

Bury's Childrens Services Updated Assurance Statement in Response to Part 4 Greater Manchester Mayoral Independent Review of CSE - September 2024

1. Introduction

The ongoing independent review into Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), commissioned by the Mayor of Greater Manchester in 2017, published its final report (part three) in January 2024. In the original review terms of reference, there is a focus on assurance of current practice which was agreed by the Wider Leadership Team.

On 26 May 2023 each of the ten Greater Manchester local authorities were requested to produce an assurance statement about the partnership arrangements in place in their area to respond to the issue of CSE and how the partnership undertakes assurance through local safeguarding governance arrangements. Bury's Childrens Services submitted an initial assurance statement in September 2023. This is an update version. It reports against the same headings as the original assurance statement submitted in September 2023.

The approach focussed on three key areas:

1. The 'front-line' and how we work.
2. Strategic Management Oversight
3. Independent & Peer Assurance

Bury continues to be on a transformational journey of improvement, triggered by an inadequate ILACS inspection judgement by Ofsted in December 2021. The senior leadership team is in place and are driving practice and service development and improvement in every area of Children's Social Care delivery, including Complex Safeguarding, through improved scrutiny, governance, operational delivery and impact for children and young people.

As part of our improvement journey, Ofsted undertake monitoring visits of specific areas of service delivery. In August 2023, the focused area was on the area of Complex Safeguarding. Ofsted were assured in our delivery of service to children subject to exploitation and other complex factors.

The statement below is extracted from the Ofsted monitoring visit letter published in September 2023:

“...since the last inspection, the local authority has continued to make steady progress on its improvement journey. Senior leaders have strengthened arrangements for children who are at risk from exploitation, which have become more strategically aligned to the regional model of practice...and governance arrangements have been enhanced...”

“There are effective strategic and operational relationships in Bury, which underpin the work to identify and protect vulnerable children. Children benefit from well-trained and effective practitioners, who offer support to children and their families based on strong professional relationships and strength-based practice. There is also a strong commitment to developing contextual safety within different communities... Exploitation of vulnerable children is clearly recognised at the front door. Initial concerns are triaged effectively through the MASH. Referrals are prioritised in a timely way and there is a proportionate response to identified concerns.”

Bury's practice model is Family Safeguarding. We were the first local authority in Greater Manchester to launch the pioneering model. Central to the foundations of the approach is the intrinsic value and worth of families. As a model of practice, it aims to keep more children safely in their families in line with the vision of the Children Act 1989. To achieve this, all Family Safeguarding authorities recognize the need to change their attitude to families, to create a culture based on seeing every family as deserving of help and support, and not people deliberately setting out to harm their children or leave their children at risk of significant harm.

Family Safeguarding is consistent with and links to the work and practice of our Complex Safeguarding team, which adopts a multi-disciplinary approach to working with families, with Social Workers and Family Support Practitioners working alongside Adult Specialist Workers to provide help and support in relation to issues associated with parental domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental ill-health. Family Safeguarding is built on core foundations of good practice with shared values across the partnership workforce including, supporting the development of stable relationships, having a shared model across agencies, a focus on strengths and balance with need and promoting purposeful interactions and interventions.

2. The 'front-line' & how we work.

Bury's multi-agency Complex Safeguarding Team sits under a Head of Service responsible for the MASH, Initial Response Teams and EDT and is co-located at Bury Police Station. Co-location is supporting effective joint working relationships. The team comprises of Police Officers, Social

Workers, Specialist Safeguarding Nurse, Parenting Worker, and has access to a Trusted Relationship Psychologist. The Trusted Relationship Psychologist supports practitioners understanding of trauma informed approached with young people who have and are experiencing trauma. In addition, we have

strong links with the Virtual School who and have a lead for children with a Social Worker. Since the last assurance statement, we have strengthened our Early Help offer to ensure young people and their families get help and support at the earliest opportunity and a prevention offer via the Youth Prevention Team.

The shared location of the Complex Safeguarding team real-time information sharing and collaborative decision-making, leading to timely and coordinated interventions and supports professionals to learn from each other's expertise and perspectives, resulting in more informed and comprehensive support for vulnerable individuals. The inclusion of a trusted psychologist acknowledges the importance of addressing mental health aspects in complex safeguarding children, which often play a critical role in understanding the full picture of a person's vulnerability.

The Complex Safeguarding Team is skilled and stable, we are currently over established, and this post is covered by agency staff. This stability is supporting team cohesion, culture and the quality of practice particularly in relation to developing and maintaining meaningful and trusting relationships with young people and their families. This is positive when considered against the backdrop of national concerns in relation to social work recruitment.

There are well developed relationships within the team that support effective working together and healthy challenge. The team is also connected into wider services including Education, Adult Social Care, Sexual Health Provision, Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC), Youth Justice, Youth Prevention Service, Early Help Locality Teams, Family Resource Services, Early Break (young person's drug and alcohol service), Housing, British Transport Police and CAMHS. The voluntary sector in Bury also supports the work of the Complex Safeguarding Service, with the lead for the Voluntary Council sitting on the Complex Safeguarding Subgroup and supporting the voluntary sector awareness and community resources available within the community.

The Complex Safeguarding Team also works closely with the Police and Partners in relation to Organised Crime Groups via Programme Challenger to tackle organised crime groups supported by the National Crime Agency, Force CSE Major Investigation and Modern Slavery Units. We are further linked to Regional and National Teams targeting Trafficking and online exploitation. Since the first assurance statement in September 2023 there have been several criminal investigations with positive outcomes in relation to child criminal and sexual exploitation and a proactive use of child abduction warning notices issued to potential exploiters. In July 2024, HMICFRS undertook a Child Protection Inspection of GMP Bury Division and initial

feedback prior to publication of the report is that the Complex Safeguarding Team and their Safeguarding Practices were a strength which is a significant positive in terms of ongoing independent assurance.

Training, Learning and Awareness Raising

Bury actively engages in Greater Manchester working and initiatives including Biannual Weeks of Action; and benefits from support provided via the Greater Manchester Complex Safeguarding Hub. Alongside the Programme of learning events offered by GM Complex Safeguarding Hub, Bury Complex Safeguarding Team holds a week of activities for children and young people to educate and develop their understanding of exploitation. The events are held in educational settings from primary through to local colleges and used community resources and projects to strengthen the message and promote diversion from anti-social behaviour and youth crime.

Training was offered across the Partnership and an event at Bury College targeted over 500 staff members. Health colleagues working in the local Accident and Emergency and the Urgent Treatment Centre were offered Exploitation awareness training, including indicators within the specific setting and how to report and act on their concerns.

Training is also delivered quarterly across the Safeguarding Partnership for the multi-agency workforce, including taxi drivers, school/college staff, residential providers, and foster carers. The training is delivered by CST Managers, Police, and the Health Lead. In addition, training available through the Greater Manchester Complex Safeguarding Hub is distributed to support wider learning opportunities.

Funding was used to support outside providers to offer additional sessions and this year Bury welcomed CELLS (Choices, Educations, Learning, Lifelong Skills) and "Out of the Shadows" who work to challenge and change the way exploitation of children is viewed, discussed, and understood in the UK. Our Youth Service resourced "Prison Me No Way" to promote positive choices and raise the confidence of children and young people to make positive choices that avoid crime, promote safety, and realise their full potential.

Bury piloted work with the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service which invited a group of young people to an immersive awareness session on child criminal exploitation at their Training Centre. The day involved multiple agencies coming together to create 8 different experiences in a realistic imitation setting to create greater awareness of the risks and signs of CCE. The pilot was an enormous success, and the programme will now be widened across Greater Manchester as a resource.

The Complex Safeguarding Team supported a Bury Safeguarding Partnership in thematic Serious Case Review Learning Day in July and repeated in September 2023 whereby a child exploitation victim was discussed in the context of learning from the Serious Case Review process. This supported wider learning across the partnership and encouraged questioning and reflective discussions in relation to 'what could we do differently' and 'what was the learning to take forward' to support service improvements. This was attended by over 200 professionals from the

extended partnership, third sector and community leaders, engaging in awareness raising and promotion of the risks that exist in our communities and digital communities.

How We Work

Our practice in Bury is guided by our Greater Manchester Policy framework. These procedures have been built on by producing a locally designed practice framework of Operating Principles, learning from regional and national research. This has expanded the role of the Complex Safeguarding team, enabling a broader scope of contextual risk and vulnerabilities for young people, and better recognising the inter-connectivity of these risks. The remit of the team is now as below and broadly aligned with the rest of Greater Manchester, giving greater assurance of reaching the right children at the right time:

- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Threat to Life
- Forced Marriage and Honour Based Violence Policy
- Serious Organised Crime and Criminal Exploitation
- Safeguarding Children and Young People who may be affected by Gang Activity and serious youth violence
- Modern Slavery and Trafficking
- Missing from Home

A Complex Safeguarding Panel is in place to further review all referrals made to the Complex Safeguarding Team. This is attended by social care, police, health, substance misuse service and youth justice. This allows multi-agency discussion with the allocated social worker and their team manager to support sharing intelligence, decision-making and information sharing which is right and proportional to the child and their family's needs at the time.

Daily Governance Meetings are well attended by social work professionals, and partners including MASH, Early Help, Initial Response Team, Safeguarding Nurses, Complex Safeguarding Practitioners and Police Officers to ensure all new children that have come to the attention of the Police are discussed. Information is shared, gaps are identified to ascertain further information and actions are agreed. This includes all children reported missing in the last 24 hours, children in custody and reports of new crimes or current investigations where contextual safeguarding is identified as a potential concern. This process is critical and ensures timely assessment and consideration in relation to risk, support and services required.

The Complex Safeguarding team have WISE (Working to Increase Safety in Exploitation) assessment approach for children exploited or at risk of exploitation. This tool supports practitioners understanding to increase safety and stability in children's lives, including disruption activity.

Assessments are completed following four weeks of intervention and are quality assured by the Team Manager and reviewed quarterly or following a significant event. All allocations and closures are reviewed and authorised by the Team Manager. At point of assessment completion, a joint supervision with the CST Team Manager is held with the allocated Social Worker and the CST Social Worker to discuss and agree the plan of intervention. A further joint supervision takes place prior to closure to ensure that the ending is agreed and to outline plans for step down.

A Strategic Assurance Lead continues to develop and support robust performance reporting, structures, and dashboards to enable front line officers to identify gaps in practice standards, address them within teams and better understand the needs of the children and young people we work with. This also affords the early identification of vulnerability in service delivery to enable early challenge managerially.

Risk Management Meetings are held fortnightly within Complex Safeguarding Team to consider all children and young people open. These multi-disciplinary meetings ensure that the blended approach to working is embedded, and that drift and delay can be challenged. To further support the multi-agency relationships within Bury Complex Safeguarding Team, group supervisions are also held to ensure that space for critical reflections on impact of service involvement for the child and promotion of child-centred practice whilst drawing on a trauma informed, strengths-based approach. This is in addition to the reflective supervisions which are held between the individual CST Social Workers and CST Team Manager.

A Child Exploitation and Missing (CEaM) Panel takes place monthly. This multi-agency panel considers young people who are vulnerable to exploitation and missing from home. The purpose to ensure processes and pathways are followed, safety plans and trigger plans are up to date and there is a plan for the child for harm to be reduced. Furthermore, the panel identifies where any wider care planning is required, i.e. mapping contextual factors and associates.

Tangible practice improvements since the last assurance statement:

- The W.I.S.E. assessment has been embedded, further enhancing our ability to analyse and assess risk and aligning Bury with other GM Complex teams.
- The Missing from Home Service is well established within CST and has two permanent workers to better capture professional curiosity, risk and needs and connections to forms of exploitation. The return home interviews help establish the support needed to prevent repeat episodes and the identification of any child exploitation concerns, which can then be further considered at the Daily Governance Meetings or Risk Management Meetings. All return interviews are reviewed by the CST Team Manager to ensure that risks and safety planning has been addressed and that these translate to the plans in place for the child/young person. Children who are not known to Children's Social Care will be referred to MASH where the interview identifies potential support needs for the young person and their family.

- We have developed a Complex Safeguarding Problem Profile for Bury that provides a comprehensive overview of thematic threat, risk, and vulnerability areas within the wider complex safeguarding arena by identifying these key areas. The Profile is a valuable resource for informed decision-making allowing professionals and agencies to focus their efforts more effectively and efficiently.
- We have developed a Safety Plan on our recording system to ensure that this is available for all staff to ensure it is understood and supports out of hours planning for children.
- Joint supervision has been embedded (at the point of completion of the WISE assessment) to ensure congruence between Complex Safeguarding and statutory allocated social work team planning.
- Since most of the children open to the team are subject to Child in Need planning, similarly to other Local Authorities in GM, we have implemented 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 received at point of closure for every young person and carer, indicating impact and outcomes and understanding where services can improve further. (examples of this at the end of this report)
- We have expanded the remit of the service 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.
- We have also introduced a link worker for schools, developing better consultation with the education sector, helping to identify exploitation or the risk of exploitation earlier.

3. Strategic Management Oversight

Effective safeguarding requires professionals to work collaboratively both internally and externally, across the partnership and the region. Bury Senior Managers and Managers are represented at the Greater Manchester Steering Group, Greater Manchester Complex Safeguarding Operational Group Meeting, and senior colleagues with the remit of Complex Safeguarding are represented at the Bury Children's Strategic Partnership. The Executive Officer in the Partnership with overall Strategic Lead for Complex Safeguarding is our local GMP Chief Superintendent.

The Complex Safeguarding Subgroup is the key strategic meeting considering and strategically driving the support available for children at risk of or experiencing exploitation. The Subgroup is a formal sub-group of the Bury Safeguarding Children Partnership, which in turn is responsible to the Bury Safeguarding Executive. In addition, the Children's Improvement Board, the Community Safety partnership, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the CYP Strategic Partnership also retain oversight and influence through the Bury Children's Safeguarding Partnership.

The Complex Safeguarding Strategy 2023 - 2025 and Strategic Delivery Plan represented a milestone achievement for the Bury strategic partnership and provides a comprehensive framework and roadmap for proactive and targeted interventions emphasising prevention and early intervention. This strategy reflects collaborative between partner agencies, independent and expert input and provides a single overarching framework that sets out a consistent approach to tackling the exploitation of children and young people in Bury. The strategic objectives are to:

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

In July 2025, an impact assessment will be undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the delivery plan in meeting these priorities.

The Complex Safeguarding Sub-Group reflects a broad-based commitment to effective multi-agency working. Representatives from partner agencies have embraced their roles with renewed enthusiasm, recognising the importance of their contributions in delivering against the Strategy and the actions contained within the associated Delivery Plan. This collaborative approach has created a platform for open dialogue, enabling a holistic understanding of complex safeguarding themes and cases. The Subgroup has continued to strengthen, with its revised meeting structure alternates between a strategic overview with entire partnership cohort in attendance and a tactical delivery group which focusses on the tactical delivery by the team against the thematic priority areas.

Managers and senior leaders in Bury have oversight of the experience of children at risk of exploitation and the quality of practice. Bury has a comprehensive and effective Quality Assurance Framework that is regularly reviewed, and impact is analysed to ensure the quality of safeguarding responses is consistent with our Practice Standards and best practice advice and guidance. Findings of quality assurance activity are used to support practice development and improvement.

Quality Assurance and auditing supports managers and senior leaders to gain a better understanding of the quality of practice and service delivery for young people at risk of exploitation. In pursuit of continuous improvement and the assurance of high-quality safeguarding practices, the CS Sub-Group is undertaking additional peer-reviewed dip samples of current Complex Safeguarding cases. These dip samples serve as an essential

mechanism for local quality assurance of safeguarding cases. By subjecting a representative selection of cases to rigorous peer review, the local authority ensures that its supervision and case management is consistent, effective, and aligned with best practices.

Bury provides data to the Complex Safeguarding Performance Framework for Greater Manchester on a quarterly basis to contribute to the picture across the whole of Greater Manchester, understanding cross border and regional themes. This supports identification and further actions in relation to the CST Development Plan and the social work team actively support the Challenger Team with Police operations when required to do so.

Alongside the data returns to GM quarterly performance analysis is reported to the Bury Complex Safeguarding Sub-Group, which considers the number and characteristics of the cohort of young people being worked with by the service, emerging patterns in reasons for involvement and the geography of child exploitation and missing from home episodes across the borough.

Performance Overview

The total number of children worked with by the service over the past year is 133, with the number being worked with at any point in time ranging between 30 and 50. Just over half of referrals received by the service over the past 6 months progressed to involvement and 24% had previously been open to the service, in line with the Greater Manchester average.

The children and young people supported split roughly equally between boys and girls, with girls likely to be younger than boys and a particularly large proportion of the boys being aged 16 or 17 years old. The predominant reason for involvement also splits on gender lines, with the boys almost exclusively supported for reasons of criminal exploitation, while girls are predominantly being supported for sexual exploitation. There has been growth in the number of girls supported for mixed reasons of CSE and CCE, reflecting growing fluidity between categorisations.

Looking at the group of children open to the service across the year makes the connection between living in more deprived areas of Bury the likely vulnerability to child exploitation clear – over 60% of all those open or closed to the service in the past year lived in areas in the most deprived 3 deciles in the country.

In terms of the ethnic make-up of the children supported, children of mixed ethnic backgrounds are slightly over-represented, while those of Asian heritage are under-represented. The prevalence of those of White-British heritage is in line with that within the secondary school population.

Most of those children and young people being worked with by the CST Team are also open as to Children's Social Care as Children in Need, or are currently under assessment by children's social care. A small, but significant number are Children in Care, or subject to Child Protection Plans, with these young people again likely to be open for longer, have a predominant reason of CSE and to be girls.

We know from our internal monitoring that children open to the complex safeguarding service have regular contact with their allocated worker; and that those workers receive regular supervision from their Team Manager.

4. Independent, or peer assurance

Bury welcomes external and political scrutiny to further enhance and strengthen practice and service delivery. We are governed by an executive and scrutiny framework. We are resourced sufficiently well and backed politically to make a difference to children's lives and reduce the risks of harm caused by exploitation. Bury has a well-established Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) which has Contextual Safeguarding (including exploitation) as a continuing strategic priority and focus for the partnership.

Greater Manchester Local Authorities engage with the Greater Manchester peer review/self-assessment cycle, which provides external scrutiny and review of processes and practice and auditing of multi-agency case work. This challenge also supports the Bury team to learn from regional and national research and development to help deliver a high-quality service for children and young people. Bury was last subject to a Peer Review in February 2022 and are expecting one to take place this year however the schedule has been delayed and there is no date in place yet.

Bury is subject of an improvement plan following an Inadequate Ofsted inspection in December 2021 and we are expecting a full ILACS inspection in the next six months. An inadequate Ofsted judgement in ILACS brings a lot of ongoing external scrutiny from Ofsted via monitoring visits (five have taken place in the past 3 years, with a further one due in the autumn of 2024), in addition to support from the Department for Education, including six-monthly formal reviews, with reports to the minister.

In August 2023, Bury had an Ofsted monitoring visit, the focused area was on the area of Complex Safeguarding. Ofsted were assured in our delivery of services to children and young people experiencing or at risk of exploitation and other complex factors. The introduction section of this assurance statement provides relevant extracts from the letter Ofsted published in September 2023.

5. Conclusion

Partners in Bury remain strongly committed to delivering a robust response to tackling child exploitation. The multi-agency, co-located specialist workforce is experienced and skilled and continues to seek to improve outcomes for children at risk of or experiencing exploitation. Bury has travelled a considerable distance since the last GM Peer Review of the Services and the review of local safeguarding arrangements undertaken

in 2022. This journey was recognised in the Ofsted monitoring visit in the late summer of 2023 and has continued in the year since. The good practice identified at that time has now been further embedded together with further developments and enhancements: the completion of missing from home return interviews within the team, the regular cycle of meetings and information sharing, the development of the problem profile and a stronger culture of performance management.

Jeanette Richards
Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services
Bury Council
16th September 2024