TOWARDS A CONTEXTUAL RESPONSE TO PEER-ON-PEER ABUSE

EXTRACT #5

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NOTE TO THE READER

This briefing comes directly from the chapter ‘Local Site Work: Approaches, Findings and Resources’ in the MSU report ‘Towards a Contextual Response to Peer-on-Peer Abuse: Research and Resources from MsUnderstood local site work 2013-2106’. To read the briefing in context, please refer to the report, which is available on both the MSU and Contextual Safeguarding Network websites.

Developing holistic and coordinated strategic approaches

Audits across every MSU site suggested that in order to maximise the effectiveness of the activities outlined in this report (and resources produced) sites required greater coordination in their response to safeguarding adolescents in general and peer-on-peer abuse specifically. Each audit considered, at a minimum, the response within sites to harmful sexual behaviour, domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation, serious youth and gang-related violence and to varying extents identified a need to:

• Increase cross-referencing and coordination across different strategic documents (for HSB, CSE, DV etc.) to ensure a complimentary and consistent response to peer-on-peer abuse
• Ensure that issue-specific operational and strategic multi-agency groups were better coordinated—particularly where the same individuals, families, peer groups, school or public spaces were being discussed at different meetings
• Increase reference to, and recognition of, contextual risk, strength and vulnerability factors within strategic meetings and documentation

While the above applied to all sites—they did so for varying and distinct reasons. For example, in one site there was a clear protocol for responding to HSB but it hadn’t been recognised in the CSE strategy as part of their response to perpetration. In addition, the safeguarding-led language in the HSB protocol was missing from the narrative on perpetration in the CSE document. In another site there was a clear recognition that a child could not consent to CSE and it was not a lifestyle choice but in the gangs and youth violence strategic document the language of lifestyle choices was still present and there was less recognition of grooming and coercion. Likewise, some sites had joined the operational meetings to CSE and missing, whereas others had linked their meetings on CSE and gangs, but few had identified a way to ensure their response to DV in young people’s relationships were integrated into the wider response.

Delivery activity sought to identify different ways to increase coordination across strategic documents and multi-agency meetings:

• In two sites meetings were held with the chairs of multi-agency meetings to identify levers for information sharing across meetings and to avoid duplication. One of these meetings resulted in the chair of the gangs panel attending the CSE meetings. In another site there was a recommendation that the LSCB needed to review the number of panels in operation and formulate a proposal to have greater oversight of the connections between them
• In one site a strategic steering group was established to oversee MSU delivery—in addition to the original operational steering group that had assisted with the audit process. Relevant Assistant Directors and the Head of the Youth Offending Service sat on that group, as well as senior representatives from community safety and the youth service. Over the course of the delivery period this strategic group developed a proposal to form a Safeguarding Adolescents Task and Finish Group. The group will review the relationship between different multi-agency panels in the site and identify a workplan to ensure increased linkage between them in the coming twelve months
• In one site we produced a briefing paper to recommend opportunities for linking strategic documents (Appendix P). This document has been used to inform the commissioning of
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\(^2\) Where identified as relevant by the participating site steering group some audits also considered the response to neighbourhood-based concerns, violence against women and girls more broadly and/or children going missing from school/home/care
new protocols and guidance from the LSCB across all of its documentation. The tender for this document stated that:

‘We would like a single author to bring a consistency of style across the documents, but also to use their subject expertise to ensure that different subject matters are both consistently and appropriately referenced across policies and procedures. For example, a number of our policies and procedures reference young people who are perpetrators, but they are inconsistent in the way young perpetrators are also presented as possible victims. We would like the commissioned provider to pick up and amend any inconsistencies such as this, but also identify and update any areas where appropriate references may be missing entirely’

Such requirements were directly related to the MSU audit and briefing document (Appendix P) developed during the delivery stage.

During the delivery period all MSU sites have been going through a process of trying to:

1. Better coordinate their response to peer-on-peer abuse (across HSB, CSE and gangs/youth violence at a minimum)
2. Develop a holistic approach to safeguarding adolescents

This process extends far beyond the impact that MSU could have in any individual site, but the work we undertook provided levers through which to begin this process.

For other sites considering this process the following steps are critical:

**STEP 1:** MAP strategic documents and multi-agency meetings concerned with HSB, CSE, Serious Youth Violence, Domestic Abuse, Gang-Association and Missing Children

**STEP 2:** IDENTIFY duplication/overlap regarding individuals, families, educational establishments, peer networks, and public spaces

**STEP 3:** IDENTIFY inconsistencies in language, assessment and sector engagement

**STEP 4:** DEVELOP future documents and multi-agency structures which a) address identified inconsistencies and b) avoid duplication of discussion, intervention, assessment or commissioning

In order for site activities to have a sustainable impact this process needs to continue beyond the delivery period. The University of Bedfordshire will continue to track and advise progress in this regard through our [Contextual Safeguarding Practitioners Network](#) (see page 49). For our London sites we hope that this process will be further supported by the creation of a Pan-London Safeguarding Adolescents Steering Group that was established in June 2016 and is being supported by the University of Bedfordshire to develop consistent and shared principles (and any required documents) for safeguarding adolescents across London’s strategic bodies (Terms of Reference in Appendix Q). Across our sites there is evidenced appetite for greater coordination across responses to different forms of violence and abuse experienced by young people – and we will therefore seek to engage national policy bodies, inspectorates and commissioners in a process of creating an environment that enables such a holistic approach in the future.
APPENDIX P: BRIEFING: COORDINATING STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS ASSOCIATED TO PEER-ON-PEER ABUSE

Introduction

Research tells us that a significant minority of young people in the UK will be abused by another young person before they turn 18 (Barnardo’s, 2011; Barter et al., 2009, 2015; Corr, 2013; Firmin, 2015). A third of child sexual exploitation cases nationally are peer-on-peer and surveys of school-aged children have found that up to a third of young women report experiencing sexual violence from a partner before they turn 18, a quarter report physical abuse, and close to half report emotional and online abuse (Barter et al., 2015; Corr, 2013; Pearce and Pitts, 2011).

In this site we are beginning to build a picture of the local peer-on-peer abuse profile, particularly through the work of specialist agencies and the multi-agency panels that discuss child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse and serious youth violence. A number of young people living in this site were referred to our specialist harmful sexual behaviour service in the past year, and peer-on-peer exploitation cases have been identified at our sexual exploitation risk assessment conference. A small number of teenage relationship abuse cases have been referred to our MARAC, and the work of our commissioned young person’s domestic violence advocate is identifying new cases.

Our strategic response to peer-on-peer abuse currently features across a number of safeguarding strategies, policies and procedures including:

- LSCB procedure safeguarding children affected by gang activity (2014)
- LSCB procedure children who exhibit problematic / harmful sexual behaviour (2014)
- LSCS practice guidance child sexual exploitation (2014)
- The Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy (2015-2018)
- LSCB domestic abuse policy DRAFT (2015)
- LSCB child sexual exploitation strategy DRAFT (2015)

This document links these five documents together, highlighting the strategic priorities for responding to peer-on-peer abuse in this site, and identifying inconsistent messages across documents that require strategic clarification.

Strategic Priorities

The following are evident from the documents reviewed:

- Abuse experienced by young people is a strategic priority for this site
- This site’s partnerships are committed to providing services to young people experienced by violence and abuse
- Routes that enable information sharing, assessment and referral are central to identifying and responding to abuse experienced by young people
- Professionals need to be alert to the signs of abuse, and made aware of the issues via training and partnership working

Consistent messages

- All documents recognise that young people may be harmed by other young people and not necessarily adults – hence all recognising peer-on-peer abuse, for example:

  The definition of sexual abuse is the same for sexual abuse by children as for sexual abuse by adults, and includes the use of technology. Abusive/inappropriate behaviour is often characterised by lack of true consent, the presence of a power imbalance and exploitation (LSCB children who exhibit HSB 1.1)
Every child and young person can expect to be supported and protected, whether as children and young people by violence against their parents or carers, or as young people abused by partners, friends or acquaintances (Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy page 5)

A child or young person may also be a victim of domestic violence and abuse through her or his own involvement in a violent relationship (LSCB Domestic Abuse Policy page 4)

- All documents recognise peer-on-peer abuse as a safeguarding and child protection issue, albeit without specifically using the language of ‘peer-on-peer abuse’. For example, child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, serious youth violence and harmful sexual behaviour are all presented as safeguarding issues and so therefore is peer-on-peer abuse by proxy
- The safeguarding procedures for young people affected by gang activity and young people who exhibit harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) recognise the overlap that can occur between victim and perpetrator:

Children who are harmed and children who harm should both be treated as victims, and professionals should bear in mind that a child may be a perpetrator and also a victim of violence (LSCB safeguarding children affected by gangs procedure 4.1)

Agencies should also be alert to the possibility that a child or young person who has harmed another may well also be a victim (LSCB children who exhibit HSB 1.3)

- All procedures recognise formal structures in this site, and that children’s social care have a role in responding to peer-on-peer abuse
- All procedures outline similar warning signs displayed by young people affected by peer-on-peer abuse, and all identify individual, familial and environmental vulnerabilities associated with abusive behaviours and victimisation

**Messages in need of clarification**

- Procedures for harmful sexual behaviour, domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and children affected by gang activity all suggest different referral routes and multi-agency arrangements for raising concerns. While some attempt to cross-reference, for example the gangs procedure refers to the sexual exploitation policy, this is inconsistent. The harmful sexual behaviour and gangs protocols have the clearest references to the referral and case management procedure and are most closely aligned, but it is not clear how a case of gang-associated, sexual exploitation (where by default a young person was displaying harmful sexual behaviour) would be managed using these documents
- The strategic position on young people who abuse their peers is inconsistent in existing documents. While the victim/perpetrator overlap is recognised in the harmful sexual behaviour and gangs protocols, the domestic abuse policy and related strategy do not recognise the roles of these processes in managing young people who abuse partners
- The two inconsistencies outlined above means that while children’s social care are referenced in all documents, their role in responding to cases of peer-on-peer abuse is not clear – this is with reference to those who abuse peers as well as those who are abused by them

**Next Steps**

In order to achieve greater linkage across this site’s strategies and protocols related to peer-on-peer abuse this briefing document recommends the following:
1. All protocols identified opportunities for cross-references to ascertain whether in addition to the presenting issue, say harmful sexual behaviour, another, such as gang-association, requires consideration and the relevant partnership engagement. This could be developed through the production of a referral flow chart highlighting the different routes to multi-agency discussions and where they come together, with reference to children’s social care procedures and the thresholds document.

2. All protocols and strategies to recognise the potential vulnerabilities and victimisation of young people who abuse their peers, and how this may differentiate them from ‘adult perpetrators’.

3. The domestic abuse policy requires a distinct section on 16 and 17 year olds. Trying to condense the response to them in the pre-existing policy is hard to follow and does not link teenage relationship abuse with other peer-on-peer abuse issues – a LSCB procedure similar to that for harmful sexual behaviour or gang-association is required.

4. Any future procedures, protocols or strategies that are produced in this site could be sense-checked to ascertain:
   a. Does it recognise that young people who abuse a partner or peers require a safeguarding response by the virtue of their being a young person?
   b. Are young people who abuse their partners or peers differentiated from adults who abuse children or partners?
   c. Does it appropriately link with other relevant procedures and identify where referral pathways and multi-agency arrangements may need to come together to address complex cases?
   d. Does it provide consistent messages regarding children’s social care involvement in line with the thresholds document and children’s social care procedures, while also being in line with all other procedures of relevance to peer-on-peer abuse?
   e. Does it suggest approaches to intervening with the environmental factors associated to peer-on-peer abuse as well as managing risk experienced by individual young people?
APPENDIX Q: TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR LONDON SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS STEERING GROUP

London Safeguarding Adolescents Steering Group

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Aims

The London Safeguarding Adolescents Steering Group seeks to:

1.1. Develop holistic, consistent and shared principles for safeguarding adolescents across London

1.2. Identify ways in which learning from the MsUnderstood programme specifically, and contextual approaches to safeguarding more generally, can be embedded within Pan-London policy development

2. Objectives

2.1. Support the development of policy regarding the needs and welfare of adolescents

2.2. Provide impetus and strategic leadership to all member organisations in regards to their responsibilities to safeguard adolescents

2.3. Identify and develop opportunities for holistic responses to issues affecting the welfare of adolescents in London – including opportunities to coordinate across issue-specific strategic groups and activities

2.4. Consider whether additional text is required in Pan-London child protection procedures for safeguarding adolescents, and if so oversee their development

2.5. Provide oversight to identified Pan-London research and initiatives designed to improve the safeguarding of adolescents in London – initially via the work plan for the MsUnderstood implementation plan

2.6. Promote that the voices of the individual child and children collectively are heard in the development of policy affecting adolescents

2.7. Disseminate learning on safeguarding adolescents and contextual safeguarding through member organisations and identify opportunities for embedding and sustaining such learning

2.8. Influence and inform the development of policy, practice and legislation relating to the safeguarding of children and the promotion of their welfare

3. Accountability

3.1. The London Safeguarding Adolescents Steering Group is accountable to its member organisations

3.2. The group also provides an additional point of oversight for the implementation of the University of Bedfordshire’s contextual safeguarding programme in London and the MsUnderstood learning and implementation process. Over time it may act as a point of oversight for other Pan-London programmes of work intended to improve the strategic response to safeguarding adolescents and they will be listed here as identified

4. Chairing

4.1. Members will adopt a position on chair on a rotational basis demonstrating collective ownership of the group’s objectives and deliverables
5. Membership

5.1. The London Safeguarding Adolescents Steering Group members will have either a strategic role and/or an advisory role in relation to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children within their organisation and on some occasions represent Pan-London associations and other such bodies. The member committees/associations/organisations will be:

- The London AD Network
- London Safeguarding Children Board
- Metropolitan Police
- London Councils
- Mayor’s Office of Policing and Crime
- NHS England (London)
- Crown Prosecution Service
- London Association of Youth Offending Team Managers
- London Association of Heads of Community Safety
- London Probation Service
- Youth Justice Board (London)
- Transport for London
- London Youth

6. Functioning

6.1. The London Safeguarding Adolescents Steering Group will meet three times per year with interim communication being made over email where necessary

6.2. All disclosable documentation i.e. minutes and steering group papers will be made accessible upon request

6.3. The steering group will work towards an agreed workplan for the first two years informed by the funded resource available at the University of Bedfordshire. As further work is developed this workplan can be developed and reviewed in detail on an annual basis

7. Staffing

7.1. The London Safeguarding Adolescents Steering Group will be supported by a senior research fellow and research assistant from the University of Bedfordshire who are each resourced to support the group one day per week until March 2018

8. Finance

8.1. As outlined above current resourcing is provided by the University of Bedfordshire under funding provided by Trust for London, the Samworth Foundation and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation

8.2. Meeting room space is provided by the London Safeguarding Children Board

8.3. As the workplan for the group is developed all member organisations are invited to make financial contributions to further fund any specific projects and initiatives that they may identify as required
9. **Affiliated networks**

9.1. Relevant professional networks and associations will be invited to provide feedback to the London Safeguarding Adolescents Steering Group on issues of concern and good practice.

9.2. The work of the steering group will also be fed into Pan-London bodies whose work involves the safeguarding of adolescent’s such as the London AD Network, the London Safeguarding Children Board and the Mayor’s Violence Against Women and Girls Board.

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<th>Organisation/Association/Committee</th>
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<td>London AD Network</td>
<td>Anne Turner</td>
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<td>Paul Angeli</td>
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<td>London Safeguarding Children Board</td>
<td>Alison Renouf</td>
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<td>Metropolitan Police</td>
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