



## **Learning Project 4:**

### **Responding to safeguarding concerns in local businesses and neighbourhoods**

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RESEARCHING CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION,  
VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this Learning Project is to understand how areas are seeking to address risks within neighbourhood and community settings and engaging businesses in this process.

## **Evidence base**

This Learning Project was informed by:

- Written responses to the Contextual Safeguarding Network's fourth learning project research questions. Four participants from the following sectors: Social Care, Education, Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), and Community Safety.
- Seven in-depth interviews with network members from social care (Early Help and Prevention; Adolescent and Family Services; CSE and Missing), Community Safety, Licensing, and the Voluntary sector.

## **Background**

During adolescence, young people spend less time at home than they do in earlier childhood and more time socialising in neighbourhood spaces such as local parks or local business outlets such as fast food restaurants or shops. The Contextual Safeguarding framework recognises that the different relationships young people form in their neighbourhood settings can feature violence and abuse and therefore these contexts require consideration in child protection assessment and intervention (Firmin, 2017). Research in recent years has highlighted the shortcomings of the current UK child protection system in identifying and responding to risks faced by adolescents in public spaces (Coleman, 2011; Hanson and Holmes, 2014; Sidebotham et al., 2016; Firmin, 2018). An in-depth analysis of nine cases where young people either raped or murdered their peers, for instance, identified that the risks posed to young people, and enabled by the neighbourhood and local environment, were for the most part only addressed via the management of individuals – such as through relocation, managed moves, and/or restricting contact between young people – rather than reducing risks in those contexts themselves (Firmin, 2018).

Through engagement with the Contextual Safeguarding Network and wider research, professionals have repeatedly reported facing challenges in knowing how to identify, assess and intervene in neighbourhood spaces. A central concern expressed by many participants who informed this learning project is the lack of partnership working and information sharing between key agencies, partly explained by the widespread perception that safeguarding in public spaces was not seen as anyone's responsibility. Partnership building with sectors and individuals who manage extra-familial settings where young people spend their time (such as those responsible for the management of transport services, shopping centres, libraries, or take-away shops) is acknowledged in the Contextual Safeguarding framework as one of the four key domains of a Contextual Safeguarding systemic change (Firmin, 2017). These four domains have been identified as providing the foundations for reforming the way that services describe, and respond to, abuse in adolescence.

The four domains of a Contextual Safeguarding framework are:

1. **Targets:** identifying, assessing and intervening with the *social conditions* of abuse (i.e. targeted the nature of the contexts in which abuse occurred rather than just the individuals affected by it);
2. **Legislative framework:** incorporating extra-familial contexts into child protection frameworks;
3. **Partnerships:** building partnerships with sectors/individuals who are responsible for the nature of extra-familial contexts;
4. **Outcome measurement:** monitoring outcomes of success in relation to contextual, as well as individual, change.

In a Contextual Safeguarding system, therefore, extra-familial settings and relationships can be subject to safeguarding processes. A take-away shop, for example, or a peer group could be referred into a safeguarding system, assessed, discussed by a partnership and subject to an intervention, should young people be at risk of significant harm in this context. The contextual interventions outlined in this briefing share examples of strategic partnerships between and within agencies, local businesses and community groups in response to safeguarding concerns within neighbourhood and community settings.

## **1. Examples of channels for identifying risk and planning interventions in public spaces**

### ***a. Strategic meetings and multi-agency panels***

This learning project identified several examples of strategic meetings and multi-agency panels in which safeguarding concerns in neighbourhoods were shared and interventions developed. These included: Location Panels, Anti-Social Behaviour panels, Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation panels, Youth Offending panels, Vulnerable Adolescent Steering Groups, police panels in schools, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) meetings, local services linking up CSE and missing services, and meetings between the police and gang units.

One Local Safeguarding Children Board set up a Responsible Authorities Meeting following the government's reform of licensing and gambling legislation (Gambling Act 2005). The reform placed statutory responsibility on LSCBs to influence how licensed businesses operate to safeguard children and young people. This Responsible Authorities meeting initially involved key partners with law enforcement responsibility within the local authority such as Licensing, Planning, Police, Training Standards, Environmental Health, and Children and Families. Partners with access to these businesses act as Licensing's 'eyes and ears' and report any safeguarding concerns when performing routine inspections in local businesses. The Responsible Authorities Meeting took place every month but now that relationships have been established, specific concerns are being addressed via a task and finish group approach. Examples of interventions initiated under this framework are outlined further in section 2b of this briefing.

### ***b. Local business associations***

A couple of learning project participants identified local business associations as effective channels for identifying safeguarding concerns. One participant explained their local authority was part of a Pub Watch association bringing together licensed establishments to discuss issues they are facing and identify solutions. Another local authority collaborated with their Business Improvement District to send leaflets raising awareness on CSE to a large range of local businesses. According to a participant involved in this initiative, being part of an association provides a common

structure and a shared sense of purpose and responsibility that are key to facilitating information-sharing and joint responses between a range of partners.

***c. Local community partnerships***

A participant from the Voluntary Sector interviewed for this learning project shared learning from a community-based intervention they are currently coordinating across three local communities. The project aims to improve the three communities' capacity to prevent child sexual abuse by building a 'coalition of local partnerships' between key community representatives (groups such as religious leaders, sports clubs or parents associations), social care, schools, health, the voluntary sector and the police. Representatives from key community groups have been instrumental in identifying local needs and they are now in the process of co-developing a 'collaboration toolkit' with partner agencies outlining community resources and processes for preventing and reporting child abuse.

Community engagement and broad partnership working, this same participant observed, is a new way of working for many practitioners in social care or the third sector. Practitioners from the aforementioned project found it difficult to challenge some of the community representative's views or attitudes on sensitive topics, such as child sexual exploitations or healthy relationships, and were concerned that such challenges would compromise the trusted relationships they had established with them. This participant further spoke about the challenge of responding to a targeted issue (such as CSE) in marginalised areas where there are many intersecting vulnerabilities and needs and limited services.

Another local authority is working in partnership with local communities and businesses, through a Prevent Advisory Group, to raise awareness on the risk of radicalisation faced by vulnerable individuals. They plan to build on this partnership and their Prevent agenda more broadly to address wider concerns of exploitation and vulnerabilities. This local authority's Prevent team, for instance, conducted an audit of all unregistered school settings in their local area in order to engage with them and raise awareness on radicalisation and associated vulnerabilities, such as abusive relationships and peer on peer abuse.

#### **d. Community surveys**

One local authority introduced a section in their annual community survey looking at specific crimes such as CSE, hate crime and online crime with the aim of gaining a better understanding of respondents' knowledge on these specific issues, whether they had experienced them, and if so whether they had reported or would report their concerns. The Community Safety team uses data gathered from the survey to prioritise key strategic issues. A participant from this Community Safety team reported that local communities in their local authority generally fail to see CSE as a critical issue taking place within their local context: *'We spend so much time and energy into making people feel safe and reducing crime that when we went to raise their social consciousness around sexual exploitation it's harder to get the message across'*. This same practitioner believed this could be partly explained by the fact that their local authority was situated in rural areas and had less high-profile cases of CSE than other local authorities situated in larger urban areas with higher numbers of reported CSE or other forms of exploitation.

## **2. Examples of interventions developed for neighbourhood contexts**

#### **a. Awareness raising and training of businesses and community groups**

The intervention most cited by participants for responding to safeguarding concerns in neighbourhood settings was delivering awareness raising and training to a range of community groups including public facilities, local businesses, train station staff, schools, faith groups, sports clubs and estates.

For several participants, engaging with these community groups and businesses was easier than anticipated. They explained that community actors were aware of safeguarding concerns but often didn't feel it was their place to intervene or didn't know how to report concerns and welcomed professional support and guidance. Participants reiterated the importance of helping community actors understand their safeguarding responsibility and providing them with information on key contact points and resources available in their neighbourhood, such as youth services, including youth hubs or outreach provision. According to one participant interviewed about their engagement with local businesses, community outreach should raise awareness *'about what's available on [businesses'] doorstep'* and local authorities

should build a reputation with businesses *'that allows them to be one of the contacts that someone might turn to for solutions.'* Having conversations with businesses can encourage them to review their policies to create safer spaces. A takeaway franchise in one local authority, for instance, decided to turn off the Wi-Fi and music in their premises and increase security outside of school hours to discourage a large number of young people from gathering there in the evenings, following a number of violent incidents involving the police. While the intention was clearly to increase young people's safety, the respondent working for this local authority did underline that these measures did not completely solve the issue as the young people could still meet somewhere else where they may be at a greater risk of harm. This same local authority's Community Safety team, moreover, identified all the businesses in their local area that are selling knives and delivered training to them, encouraging them to manage the sale of knives more safely.

#### **Case study 1: Training staff in fast food outlets**

One local authority's Early Help and Prevention team delivered training with staff from a large chain of fast food outlets. This was in response to an incident where a young woman went missing and indicated in her return home interview that, at the time of going missing, she had spent time in a local outlet. Although the incident happened late on a Friday night (this outlet had long opening hours) and the young girl was wearing her school uniform, staff failed to report to the police.

This local authority's team of Town Centre Coordinators had previously conducted work with this outlet when its facilities were being used by street drinkers. The Early Help and Prevention team built on this pre-existing relationship to approach the two outlets from the same fast food chain in their local area, informing them of the incident and offering training to support staff feel confident on what to do if they had any concerns about a young person in their restaurant, signposting them to local services (one of the outlets, for instance, was just around the corner from one of the local authority's youth hubs) and starting conversations about what the local authority's youth service could offer.

According to the professional who coordinated this intervention, the training was very well received among staff. The key success factor, in this professionals' opinion, was the established partnership with the Town Centre Coordinators team. As this professional observed, *'the challenge for children's services is to understand what other parts of the local authority do...and if you are a senior manager and have connections across, then you can help practitioners make connections with other people to find solutions.'*

Raising awareness and delivering training within neighbourhood settings can present a number of challenges. Several participants remarked that signposting to community resources is difficult in the current context of reduced budgets and limited services, impacting particularly on local police forces or detached youth work. Another participant raised the challenge of ensuring that training delivered to businesses was cascaded down to all staff. They explained they had delivered CSE training to a range of hotel managers with the expectation that hotel managers would in turn train their staff. The majority of hotel managers, however, did not feel confident training their staff on CSE as they felt they lacked skills and expertise and asked the participant for additional training. The participant's team in this case lacked the capacity to delivery multiple trainings to the same hotel.

***b. Use of gambling and licensing regulations to embed safeguarding policies in businesses***

Several participants said they found engaging local businesses challenging. Some businesses appeared unwilling or unable to provide staff time for training and others struggled to recognise the concerns practitioners raised with them on their premises or did not see safeguarding as their responsibility. Gambling and licensing regulations can provide levers for encouraging businesses in updating their policies, particularly when they appear reluctant to do so.

A participant working in a Licensing team explained how the Responsible Authorities Meeting between key law enforcement partners in their LSCB (aforementioned in section 1a of this briefing) enabled them to routinely identify safeguarding concerns in local businesses. Law enforcement partners with access to these businesses

report suspicious activity or concerns when performing routine inspections. This model gives the Licensing team a platform to start conversations with local managers and business owners and provide them with guidance or bespoke training packages. A range of businesses have been successfully approached via this model including taxi companies, hotels, pubs, clubs, shopping malls, shisha venues, off-licenses, and events managers. In situations of high risk or non-compliance, legal action is taken to disrupt activities. This same LSCB extended its partnership model to working with unlicensed businesses such as tattoo and body piercing studios and other small businesses. Whilst the participant interviewed recognised their legal influence over unlicensed businesses was more limited, they were nonetheless successful in working with them to support them manage and respond to risks faced by young people in their premises.

#### **Case study 2: Disrupting suspicious activity in a shisha lounge**

The participant from the Licensing team interviewed as part of this learning project shared an example of an intervention with a local Shisha lounge. A Gazebo equipped with secured doors had been set up in the car parking lot of this Shisha lounge. This Gazebo contained various gaming machines and young people went there to spend time and socialise. Parents raised concerns with the local authority when their children came home smelling of cannabis after spending time there. Some of the young people who were spending time in the Gazebo were known to the local authority's CSE service and others were known to the police. Because the Gazebo was built on a wasteland, the Planning team of the local authority was involved and had it closed down under Permit legislation.

The same participant from the Licensing team further shared examples of cases where businesses have proactively contacted them to report concerns. One of the examples concerned a betting shop, outside which young girls aged 14 and 15 were approaching male customers offering sex in exchange for money. The professional explained that over the years the Licensing team has successfully built relationships with this betting shop and staff are now confident to report concerns knowing that they will not be penalised. The professional stressed the groundwork of raising

awareness within businesses and establishing good relationships was critical in allowing businesses to feel confident reporting their concerns. Many businesses now turn to the Licensing team for solutions, which act as a pathway to involving relevant agencies and works with businesses to provide them with further guidance and support.

***c. Adapting interventions to specific contexts***

Another key lesson from the learning project is the importance of adapting interventions to local contexts. The following case studies outline examples of creative interventions that have been adapted to neighbourhoods and businesses:

**Case study 3: Setting up a 'pop-up youth club'**

One Local authority has set up a 'pop-up youth club' in a public library in response to concerns raised by library staff. The concerns were directed towards a group of young people using library facilities to socialise and obtain access to Wi-Fi. The library staff raised issues of what they perceived to be 'antagonistic' behaviour when the young people were challenged for being too disruptive. Some of the young people spending time in the library were known to social care, and others had been engaged through youth outreach work. In discussions between social work and youth outreach services, the library began to be referred to as a 'hotspot' for anti-social behaviour linked to CSE. The issue thus came to the attention of the CSE lead. Through a management group, the CSE lead was made aware that the local authority's detached youth service and participation team had also been contacted by the Library and Anti-Social Behaviour team to respond to the issue in the library. At this point, the different teams involved were working in silo of each other. The participation team had already met with both library staff and young people to establish expectations and wishes. The young people wanted somewhere safe (and warm) to 'hang out' and the library staff wanted them to behave.

The issue was then raised in the local authority's Vulnerable Adolescent Steering group, where a joint intervention was planned between the three teams involved. In response to the issue, the detached youth work and participation teams delivered

training to the library staff and engaged with young people to find out what young people wanted and co-create solutions with them, and the CSE team conducted a risk assessment to assess the severity of the situation. It was jointly decided to run a series of workshops for young people on a range of topics selected with them, including healthy relationships. The library provided a room for these workshops to take place. In parallel, library staff were trained on adolescent development. One of the library staff members also took part in the group sessions with the young people. What was meant to be a very brief intervention – the original plan was to signpost young people to youth services – turned into an eight-week programme as it became apparent that young people would benefit from more in-depth group work. The intervention proved very popular: a total of 70 young people were engaged, including a core group of about 30 young people with an additional 40 young people involved in a drop-in basis. Group workers were able to pick up on many unhealthy relationship issues in the group, including potential exploitations. A couple of young people with multiple vulnerabilities also made disclosures during the group sessions.

The professional interviewed was clear that this intervention would not have been possible without the three teams coming together and joining their resources and expertise to resolve the issue, after agreeing to a set of common principles and timeframes: *'Without the collective it would have not worked – everyone would have said it was not their responsibility.'* Buy-in from management was also crucial. Setting up a pop-up youth club was extremely time-consuming and resource intensive as it required all the necessary preparation of a standard youth club, such as debriefs prior to each session, providing food and refreshments, complying with health and safety requirements, ensuring female to male staff ratio and having managers on call. In fact, the young people who took part in the programme requested an extension and this was granted for six weeks but this was not possible to be extended further due to one of the three teams facing staffing issues. This underlines another important challenge on how to best end short-term community interventions and help young people transition into other services. In this instance, a transition event was planned between staff at the three teams running the library group and staff at the nearest youth club for the final session. The youth club staff visited the library for two weeks before the event and the library group staff then met

the young people for their last session at the youth club (with celebratory food) and remained on hand at the youth club for a few weeks, until the summer holidays. Approximately 40 young people attended the event and between 20-30 have continued to engage in the youth club, a site they previously thought was not an option to them due to it not being in 'their area'. Other young people have utilised a local football club event held each week at the same time.

#### **Case study 4: Working with businesses to create risk management plans**

One young man aged 14 that was part of a peer group who were being criminally exploited. His parents tried to keep him off the streets by employing him in their takeaway shop during evening shifts, which went against child employment legislation. The manager of the Licensing team consulted with the Child Work Permit team and provided their expert opinion to convince them that working in a safe environment with parental supervision was in the best interests of the young person. The Licensing Manager interviewed in this learning project explained that adapting safeguarding interventions to particular contexts required flexibility as certain regulations could undermine safeguarding.

In another example given, a young man was using a fake ID to get work as a DJ in adult club venues. The Licensing manager met with his social worker and the venue and devised a special risk management plan allowing for the young man to continue working as a DJ with an adult chaperone.

## Thematic summary

Key themes and considerations for successfully engaging local businesses in safeguarding young people, particularly for increasing safety in public places were:

- Identifying opportunities for multi-agency partners to discuss and share information and intelligence relating to safeguarding concerns in neighbourhood settings.
- Identifying opportunities for key partnerships to be formed between local authorities and various law enforcement agencies (e.g. Community Safety, Regeneration, Licensing, Food & Hygiene Inspections, Health & Safety, etc.) to address location-based safeguarding concerns through regular information-sharing and joint interventions.
- Ensuring sufficient resources are allocated to the delivery of awareness raising interventions and training sessions for key businesses and community groups.
- Ensuring that local businesses and key community groups know how to report concerns and providing them with information on key points of contact and resources available in their neighbourhood, such as youth hubs or outreach provision.
- Considering adapting interventions to local contexts and involving businesses, community groups, young people and families in the design of these interventions with a view to embedding local capacity and ownership of safeguarding policies and processes.
- Considering opportunities for utilising local networks and associations as a vehicle for awareness raising, identification of concerns and implementing joint interventions.
- Utilising levers offered by the Gambling Act 2005 to engage unresponsive licensed businesses.

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