

TITLE OF REPORT: Contextual Safeguarding and Child Exploitation

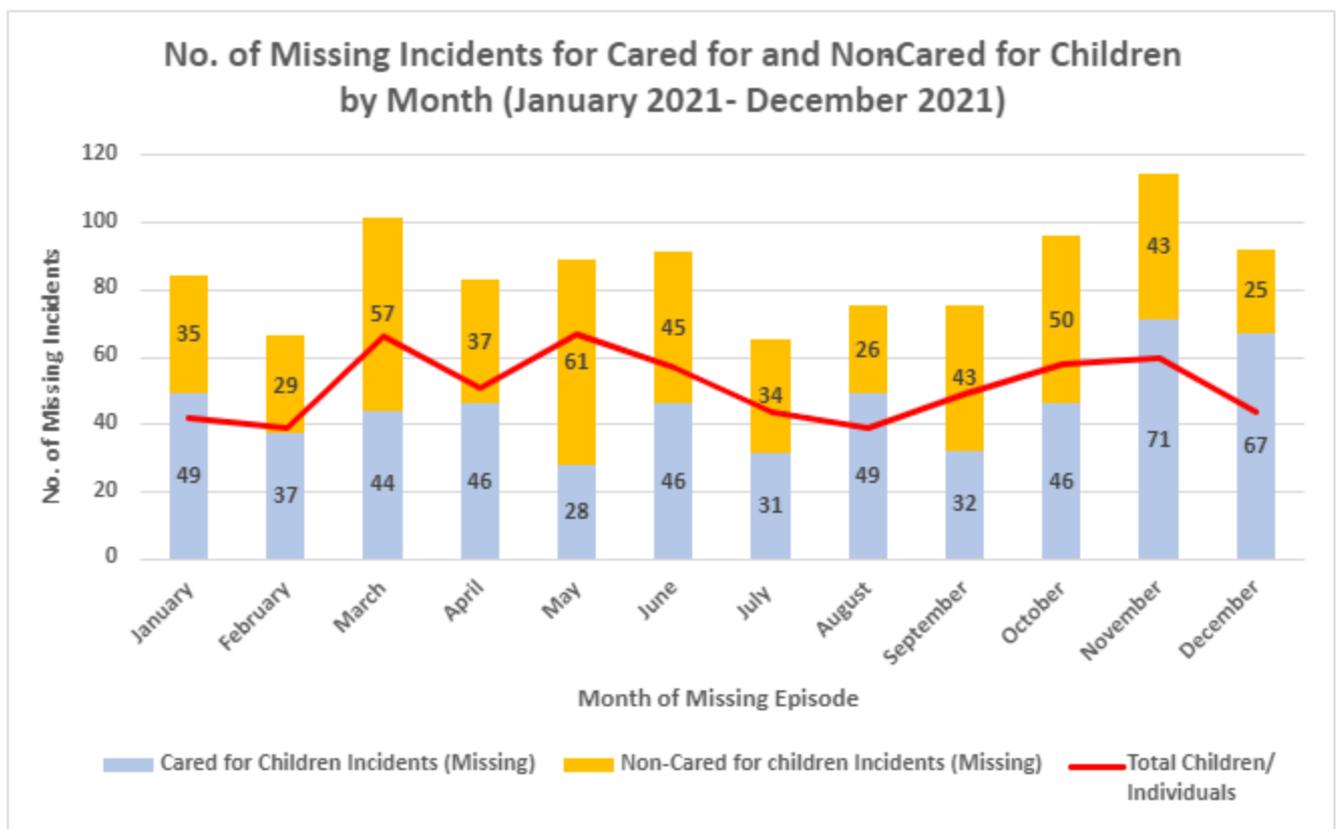
1. Purpose of the Report

2. To seek the views of the Corporate Parenting Board on the departments response to the issues faced by children, young people and families linked to contextual safeguarding and child exploitation.

3. Background

4. Before moving on to look at the current scale of the issues for young people in Gateshead related to contextual safeguarding and exploitation it is helpful to understand what the term contextual safeguarding refers to. 'Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships.
5. Previously the departments response to these areas of risk of harm for our young people had predominantly come from four places. These were the Child Sexual Exploitation post within the children in our care teams, the Return Home Support Worker based within specialist support services, the complex Child in Need (CCIN) Team and the multi-agency Missing, Slavery, Exploited and Trafficked (MSET) monthly operational meeting.
6. As part of the Ofsted focussed visit in September 2021 the inspection team made the following comments about the CINN Team "Leaders have recognised the need to strengthen services and systems to monitor and assess the impact of work with vulnerable adolescents, those missing from home and children at risk of exploitation. Action to appoint dedicated specialist staff is beginning to make a difference, but the alignment of services and systems to monitor and assess the impact of this work is not yet fully embedded to ensure that risks to children are fully understood and addressed quickly."
7. In discussion with the inspection team, they had also asked question about what they perceived, with some validity, the narrow focus of the Child Sexual Exploitation role and this being based within the children in our care teams.
8. Therefore, children's social care practitioners, child protection systems and wider safeguarding partnerships need to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over/within extra-familial contexts, and recognise that assessment of, and intervention with, these spaces are a critical part of safeguarding practices. Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse beyond their front doors'. Taken from the contextual safeguarding network at the University of Bedfordshire.

9. The consensus following the feedback from the focused visit was that we had, within the department the right roles and the correct workforce resource to be able to support young people and their families with the risks posed through contextual safeguarding and exploration but that these resources needed to better align to make the biggest impact.
10. Before considering the proposals around how services could be realigned it is essential that we look at the available data to help the department and members to understand the scale of the issues faced within Gateshead related to contextual safeguarding and exploitation. The following data graphs and charts help us to do this.
11. We know that children who are at risk of exploitation and risks outside of the family home also often go missing from home. The graph below shows the number of missing episodes in Gateshead for children for 2021. This shows that these concerns are not limited to children who are in our care. This was one of our first thoughts when considering the positioning of the Child Sexual Exploitation role within one specific team whose role is only to work with children in our care.



12. Another valuable source of information for the department when considering the risks associated with children missing from home comes from their return home interviews. This is a much-improved offer since Lyndsay Richardson has been appointed into the role of Return Home Support Worker fulltime. This role sits within the specialist support service and is therefore available to and works across all service areas within the department.
13. During every return home interview, the young person is asked about why they went missing to help us identify vulnerabilities and high-risk concerns. From the data gathered, the three radar charts below show the most frequent factors young people sight as to why they have been missing, what has taken place during this missing episode. An overall category is given following the information provided to show all high-risk indicators that are met during each missing episode.

14. Where this intelligence is available it is apparent that substance misuse is prevalent during missing episodes having been identified on 108 occasions (39.42%). Other vulnerabilities identified included physical and emotional presentation (22.63%), Criminal Exploitation (21.53%), Self-Harm (20.44%), Sexual Exploitation (20.44%) and Offending Behaviour (19.34%). This is shown in the table below.

15. Vulnerabilities

Category	Total
Sexual Exploitation	56
Criminal Exploitation	59
Self-Harm	56
Offending Behaviour	53
Misuse Of Substances	108
Trafficking/Modern Slavery	42
Physical & Emotional Presentation	62

16. This data helped strategic managers to understand the various risks and vulnerabilities facing our young people when they are missing from home. This clearly shows that while sexual exploitation is a significant concern there are also concerns across many other areas. Again, this helped us to understand the issues of a narrow focus around child sexual exploitation and that this does not encompass the range of issues faced by young people in Gateshead.

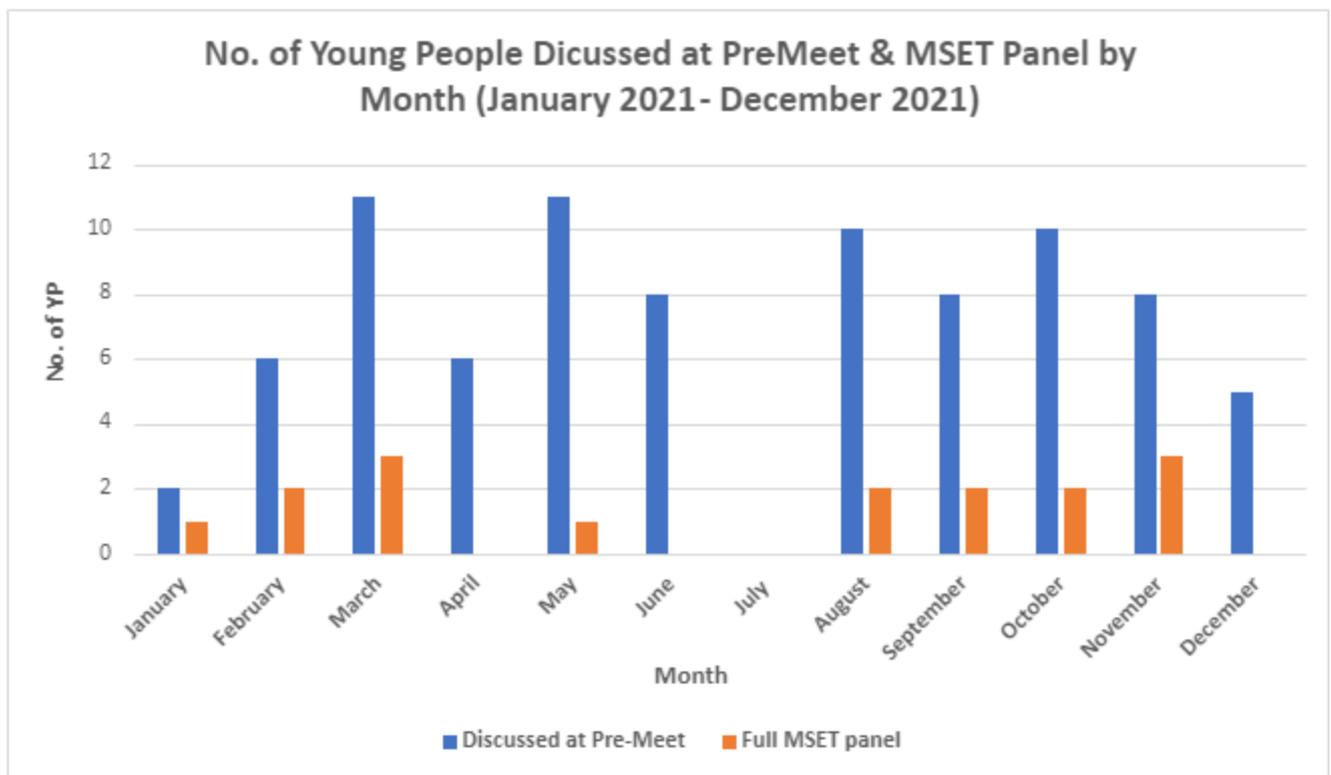
17. The table below considers the prominent reasons disclosed by young people as to why they have gone missing. Nearly 37% of young people interviewed went missing to seek contact with family and/or friends. This is followed by other reasons which account for 14.60%, substance misuse (13.50%) and problems at home (11.31%).

18. Prominent Reasons

Category	Total
Bullying	6
Problems at home	31
Substance Misuse	37
Seeking contact with family / friends	101
Avoiding contact with Family/friends	25
Felt Pressured or coerced	6
Involved in offending	6
Asylum Seeker	0
Other reason	40

19. Many of the young people who are also missing from home are discussed at the multi-agency MSET and pre MSET meetings held monthly. The purpose of MSET is designed to provide an effective response to vulnerable young people who are at an increased risk due to their vulnerability. The purpose of the framework and the meeting is to ensure that a coordinated response is undertaken when considering the vulnerability of individual young people who are deemed to be at medium or high risk of exploitation. The framework is available here [Exploitation_MSET_Framework_-_OCT_19.pdf \(gatesheadsafeguarding.org.uk\)](https://gatesheadsafeguarding.org.uk/Exploitation_MSET_Framework_-_OCT_19.pdf)

20. The MSET process has worked well within Gateshead is chaired by Detective Inspector Lynne College. DCI College is responsible for Safeguarding across the Northumbria Police area and is therefore well placed to support Gateshead with the risks across the area. The MSET meeting is well attended and provides additional scrutiny and advice and guidance to practitioners who are supporting vulnerable young people.
21. Pre MSET is attended by Managers from the Children in our Care Team and the manager of the CCIN Team as well as Gateshead's missing from Care Co-Ordinator from Northumbria police and the Detective Sargant from the Northumbria Police Team. The purpose of this meeting is to review young people submitted for the main MSET meeting and to agree which young people should be presented at this meeting and the young people where it is felt that MSET would not add any further benefit to the work already being done to support them and their family. Below is a graph showing the cases present in both forums during 2021.



22. The graph shows that often cases are discussed with the pre MSET meeting but that these do not proceed to the full meeting. Work is being undertaken to support staff in understanding the purpose of MSET. There is also a concern that part of the reason for these discrepancies is around the workforce's lack of understanding and knowledge related to contextual safeguarding and exploitation. This has also influenced our thinking around how the existing resources we have within the department are aligned to support the greatest number of practitioners and in turn the highest number of young people known to the department.

23. Proposal

24. It is proposed that, the contextual safeguarding team will be allocated case responsibility from the point of initial referral for young people where there is a need for intervention due to the young person experiencing harm beyond their families. This can include issues with peer groups, within the local neighbourhood and schools. Young people at risk of exploitation and extra familial harm. This team will comprise of social workers who will have case responsibility for young people. Advocates will also work with cases allocated offering interventions and support plans. Cases worked in this team will not be long term and it envisaged that involvement will be no longer than 12 months. Social

workers would not work with more than 16 young people at anyone time given the need for intensive support to them and their family.

25. There will also be an offer of support to workers where cases are already open to practitioners, and risks associated with contextual safeguarding and exploitation then become known to the professionals supporting the young person. This offer will include advice and guidance, attendance at strategy meetings/professionals' meetings, sign posting for support services, ideas around direct interventions and work tools and access to the support of some of the family advocates to deliver bespoke interventions. A family advocate has also been recruited into the children in our care service and they would be available to support these young people. This will replace the current role of Child Exploitation Worker with the Children in our Care Team allowing a wider department wide approach to the work and advice available.
26. As part of considering the above model senior officers were able to meet with the research team from the University of Bedford's Contextual Safeguarding Unit (Recently relocated to Durham University) and gain best practice advice and guidance. One of their large-scale studies is looking at the models used in 5 local authority areas. The proposed model better fits the research evidence around how best local authorities rise to the challenges faced related to contextual safeguarding and exploitation.
27. Alongside this service there will continue to be support from the Return Home Co-Ordinator and via both pre MSET and MSET.
28. These proposals do not require any additional staffing resources or finances and are a realignment of current resources.
29. **Recommendations**
30. The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to consider the proposals set out within this report and provide any feedback to the authors. Corporate parenting board are also asked to consider if they require any further reporting in this area or any further information.

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