Vulnerable Adolescents

Strategy 2017-19

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Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Understanding the context in which children and young people live their lives is an essential feature of effective multi-agency intervention. For the City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Board (CHSCB), this issue remains central to our overall approach in making children and young people safer. **Context is key.**

1.2 Driving the strategic focus on 'context' across all partners, the CHSCB's developed position for the last three years has been that children or young people being abused, or at risk of abuse, should be seen heard and helped.

- **Seen;** *in the context of their lives at home, friendship circles, health, education and public spaces (including social media).*

- **Heard***; by professionals taking time to hear what children and young people are saying and put themselves in their shoes and think about what their life might truly be like.*

- **Helped;** *by professionals remaining curious and by implementing effective and imaginative solutions that help children and young people and make them safer.*

1.3 This strategy builds on the significant progress made by the CHSCB and partners in safeguarding children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) and those missing from home, care and education. It has been developed in parallel to our improved understanding of the issues facing young people; established through focused problem profiles, national and local learning and intelligence pictures involving vulnerable adolescents.

1.4 This strategy draws on evidence about effective practice from contemporary research. It is a focussed document that sets the parameters for developing our understanding of the complexities of young people's vulnerabilities and finding more effective multi-agency responses to these issues. The strategy maintains an unswerving focus on making sure that professionals are getting the basics right whilst striving to develop best practice. It provides the strategic foundation upon which a local contextual safeguarding framework will be developed in Hackney and

defines our roadmap to strengthen the identification, assessment and intervention with vulnerable adolescents.

1.5   The CHSCB Vulnerable Adolescents Strategy focuses on the following priorities:

- **Knowing our problem, knowing our response**
- **Strong leadership**
- **Prevention and early intervention**
- **Protection and support**
- **Disruption and prosecution**

2.   Purpose and Scope

2.1   The strategy's primary purpose is to address the risks faced by vulnerable adolescents through clear direction and effective multi-agency partnership working. The CHSCB will ensure the effective coordination of partnership activity and oversee developments in respect of the difference that they are making to the lives of young people.

2.2   **The strategy's overall scope is focussed on safeguarding young people from abuse and exploitation**. It recognises that to do this effectively, a range of other vulnerabilities need to be better understood and interventions need to adapt, with partners, peers, families and communities being better placed to prevent and respond to these issues.

2.3   The strategy recognises the inherent complexities of young people's lives. It recognises that the risk of abuse and exploitation can be exacerbated by a range of vulnerabilities with the impact of suffering such harm leading to life-long consequences unless effectively addressed.

2.4   Practice knowledge increasingly suggests that it is unhelpful in our response to separate out and ascribe priority to diverse vulnerabilities. In this sense, the CHSCB will develop improved integrated arrangements that actively consider and effectively respond this complexity. Factors in scope include (but are not limited to):

- **Child Sexual Exploitation (including Harmful Sexual Behaviours)**
- **Children missing from home, care and education**

- **Children and young people exposed to risk through gang involvement, county lines, trafficking and serious youth violence.**
- **Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA)**
- **Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG)**
- **Adolescent Neglect**
- **Self-harm and Suicide**
- **Substance Misuse**
- **Radicalisation**
- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**

2.5 The decision to widen this strategic scope simply reflects the fact that young people often face multiple risks and can have multiple needs. Dealing with the response to certain threats in isolation can potentially hinder the understanding of vulnerabilities that frequently overlap and hence limit the effectiveness of intervention.

2.6 As noted by Hanson and Holmes (2014) in their paper for the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) "*The range and nature of adolescent risks are different to those facing younger and older age groups……… Adolescents are exposed to a wider range of risks than younger children. At age 14 they are most at risk of entering the realm of 'polyvictimisation' – i.e. being the victim of many different types of maltreatment. Ten per cent of 11 to 17-year-olds in the UK have experienced 12 or more forms of maltreatment during their lifetime.*"

2.7 Furthermore, as young people get older their experiences of abuse are often associated with public spaces in which they spend their time. As such, a critical focus of this strategy will be on how young people are better protected and supported by a wider range of individuals and bodies in a wider variety of contexts.

2.8 Such public environments also include those in the virtual world too. In this respect, how young people are safeguarded in the context of their '*access to technology and their use of social media*' is an underpinning concept to this strategy.

2.9 To improve the effectiveness of interventions, practitioners need to develop their understanding about context, the root causes of vulnerabilities and where these arise For example, managing a young person involved in county lines solely through a criminal justice response (where they are under significant duress from gang members and have a neglectful home environment) is unlikely to result in an

outcome that facilitates protection from exploitation and the receipt of good enough parenting.

2.7   Practitioners (and the organisations within which they work) should also tailor their local responses to align with the following set of principles, upon which a distinctive and adolescent centred approach to intervention can be based. (Hanson and Holmes 2014)

- o **Work with adolescent development** - *in particular perception, agency, aspiration and skill – for example, identity formation, friendship attachments, risk-taking. This includes avoiding policies and practice that respond to adolescent choice and behaviours in ways that could 'ensnare' them and constrain positive development and to avoid responses that 'do to' adolescents rather than 'work with' them.*
- o **Work with young people as assets and resources**
- o **Promote supportive relationships** *between young people and their family and peers (where possible)*
- o **Prioritise supportive relationships** *between young people and key practitioner(s) within the system response.*
- o **Take a holistic approach** *to young people and the risks they face.*
- o **Ensure services are accessible and advertised** *– for example, services should incorporate self-referral mechanisms, social marketing, and assertive outreach to target hard-to-reach groups.*
- o **Equip and support the workforce**, *including through high quality learning opportunities and regular supportive supervision.*

3.   Vision for City and Hackney

3.1   Our multi-agency work in responding to vulnerable adolescents will create the following conditions within the City of London and the London Borough of Hackney.

- **Strong leadership and partnerships** between key stakeholders are maintained and ensure an effective response to adolescent vulnerability
- Children and young people are **educated and empowered.** They better understand the range of risks that they can face as they grow up and are supported to develop healthy friendships and relationships.

- Children and young people recognise when they or others are at risk and are **confident to seek support**.
- Adolescents who are vulnerable are **identified**, **safeguarded and supported** for as long as they need. Practitioners, local businesses, families, parents / carers, friends and local people can identify the signs of vulnerability in a variety of contexts.
- Comprehensive multi-agency **assessments** identify risks within families, schools, peer groups and public spaces. Specifically, **extra-familial relationships and environments** that impact upon adolescent's safety are better understood.
- Families/carers, practitioners, and communities support vulnerable adolescents to **build resilience** against harm.
- **New partnership approaches** are implemented alongside peer group informed assessment models and interventions. **Relevant interventions** are developed that address risk and harness the strength of peer relationships.
- The **nature of public spaces** change and those responsible for these spaces are empowered to initiate and participate in child protection processes;
- **Whole-school responses** are developed that promote safe and supportive interactions and relationships; and engagement with community members to enable them to support adolescents through applying this approach.
- **A safeguarding adolescents system** is in place that focuses upon changing public and social environments (including schools) where adolescent's may encounter significant harm, rather than relocating them to remove them from harmful contexts.
- Those who seek to harm or exploit children are **identified, disrupted and convicted**. **Robust offender management** post-conviction and/or effective intervention strategies reduce the risk presented by identified abusers.

4   Strategic Priorities

4.1   The CHSCB understands the need to place this work in the context of other strategies and plans that influence the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. As such, it is essential that adolescent vulnerability form part of ongoing dialogue and scrutiny at key strategic forums; ensuring everyone is working together to respond to these issues and understanding their connectivity. It will involve ongoing dialogue with relevant groups representing local communities across both areas.

4.2   The following strategic priorities, informed by local issues and self-assessment, provide the focus for further developing our safeguarding arrangements and responses to vulnerable adolescents. Individual action plans covering the City and Hackney have been developed against these areas.

Priority 1: Knowing our problem, knowing our response

The focus of this strategic priority is to ensure that <u>all</u> professionals and volunteers working in the City and Hackney, along with parents/carers, local businesses, and young people, know about the problems facing adolescents in the context of exploitation. They understand the signs and symptoms of exploitation and the factors that enhance risk to young people. Individuals know what to do if they are worried about a young person. Leaders and managers understand the intelligence picture and use this to target interventions to make young people safer.

- Practitioners who come into contact with children and young people have relevant and proportionate **knowledge of the broader profile of adolescent vulnerability** in the City of London and Hackney. This includes the factors that exacerbate risk and the consequential vulnerabilities arising from exploitation.
- Practitioners, parents/carers, young people, local businesses, in addition to residents of the City and Hackney, **can identify adolescent vulnerability, know who to contact, and know what will be done in response.**
- **Engaging the broader community**[1] has created public confidence in the actions of agencies whilst encouraging communities to be vocal about exploitation and the unacceptability of abuse.

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[1] Community should be referred to in its widest context – not just communities based on geographic population, but those where a group of people have common characteristics.

- **Young people, families and communities are engaged to understand their perceptions and to gather relevant intelligence**. All participate in being part of the solution.
- **Analytical support is coordinated** across a range of agencies to identify themes, patterns and trends relating to adolescent vulnerability. Stronger intelligence gathering on individuals, peer groups and locational hotspots engages a tactical response from the partnership to make young people safer.
- Practitioners **recognise the impact of diversity and identity** on young people's vulnerabilities and how such aspects may lead to low identification of some issues (e.g. young males who are sexually exploited)
- Practitioners similarly recognise the impact of discrimination and disadvantage (including issues relating to child poverty) and how these can create conditions for enhanced vulnerability.
- Practitioners within the City and Hackney are confident in both how and when to **share information**. Any barriers are swiftly identified and addressed. Communication at an operational and strategic level is frequent and effective, with intelligence sharing extending beyond LA areas.

Priority 2: Strong leadership

The focus of this strategic priority is on the need for ongoing strong leadership to successfully tackle the range of risks facing adolescents in the 21st century.

This leadership is required from all levels, but particularly from those at the top. Political leaders, Chief Executives and senior leaders in all organisations, together with leaders in the local community, have a responsibility to set the culture within which abuse and exploitation is not tolerated.

Continuing to promote a culture that encourages professional curiosity, challenge and appropriate escalation of concerns is fundamental. Strong leadership ensures this approach is embedded into the professional and community response to child abuse and exploitation. Supporting this priority, vulnerable adolescents remains a key strategic focus in the CHSCB business plan and as such is subject to the objectives of the CHSCB; coordinating what is done by partners and scrutinising the effectiveness of operations.

Governance arrangements that include regular meetings with the respective Chief Executives of the City and Hackney and chairs of partnership Boards also ensure ongoing connectivity between policy areas impacting the welfare of adolescents. The CHSCB will ensure this strategy remains responsive to any work arising from the <u>London Safeguarding Adolescents Steering Group (LSASG)</u>.

- The safety and wellbeing of vulnerable young people at risk of exploitation continues to be **prioritised across all relevant organisations and community settings** and this is evidenced in respective strategic planning.
- The **culture of organisations set by senior leaders and active engagement with young people gains their trust.** They are confident that their concerns are taken seriously and help is provided when needed. This culture helps drive a stronger response by peer groups in helping protect their friends and associates.
- Partnership activity in the City of London and Hackney engages a **broader range of organisations and individuals in the protection of vulnerable adolescents** in extra-familial settings (i.e. schools, neighbourhoods, public, transport hubs, community centres, youth hubs / centres or in areas where young people congregate). Leaders fully commit to engaging their staff in this work.

Priority 3: Prevention and early intervention

The focus of this priority is to ensure an unswerving focus on early intervention to prevent vulnerability escalating. In the context of exploitation, this priority relates to risk being effectively mitigated by partners both before a young person reaches adolescence and when they are in the adolescence stage itself.

Strong early help systems, robust responses to domestic violence and the effective identification and tackling of neglect are key. Equally applicable is the work undertaken directly with children and young people, educating and empowering them to support their friends, build resilience to exploitation and better understand the risks that they might face (both off-line and on-line).

- The performance of early help systems across the City of London and Hackney reduce the need for statutory interventions – effectively dealing with need and vulnerability. Early help is subject to ongoing scrutiny by the CHSCB, testing the difference it is making to children and young people's lives.

- Young people who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation (i.e. looked after children, missing children) are identified early and supported by their families/carers, professionals, and their community to prevent and build resilience against exploitation.
- The following strategies and approaches across the City of London and Hackney are effective in reducing vulnerability to adolescents and subject to ongoing scrutiny and challenge by the CHSCB:

  - Community Safety in respect of gang activity / youth crime
  - DVA / VAWG
  - Neglect
  - Think Family – Parental Substance Misuse / Mental Health / Learning Disabilities & Difficulties
  - Prevent
  - Suicide Prevention
  - Young People's Substance Misuse
  - Safeguarding Children in the Context of their Access to Technology and use of Social Media
  - SEND

- Schools deliver high quality SRE and where they strive to take a whole-school approach to gender equality, safeguarding, and preventing exploitation
- Practitioners engaged in providing universal and targeted services to young people, through organisations such as Young Hackney, CHYPS Plus, City Gateway and VCS youth providers, identify vulnerabilities and harmful attitudes and are able to empower young people to build positive and healthy attitudes towards relationships and friendships, gender identity, and sexuality

Priority 4: Protection and Support

This priority focuses on two key aspects - the basics and innovation.

Building on the positive work to date, the focus on 'the basics' across the City of London and Hackney refers to aspects of practice that are known to be essential to

the effective protection of children and young people. This focus does not detract from the need to consider new ways to address adolescent vulnerability, but covers areas such as information being shared appropriately, risks being assessed comprehensively, work remaining focussed on the child or young person, escalation being engaged as appropriate and case recording being contemporaneous and accurate.

In terms of innovation, the focus is primarily upon the 'contextual safeguarding' project, a Hackney led initiative that is seeking to find more effective ways of working with vulnerable adolescents; beyond the "traditional" child protection responses that do not sufficiently effect change when applied to this cohort.

- Quality assurance processes by the CHSCB and partners provide reassurance that basic practice expectations remain robust.
- Implementation of the contextual safeguarding initiative in Hackney creates a system and approach that improves outcomes for vulnerable adolescents
- Enduring support to children and young people who have been exploited is delivered, ensuring that what is offered is appropriate for each individual child or young person based on their gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and the nature of the exploitation that they have experienced.
- Young people demonstrating harmful sexual behaviours are identified and support put in place to address their behaviours.
- The City of London and Hackney develop their collective expertise through joint learning exercises and strong partnership.

Priority 5: Disruption and Prosecution

The focus of this priority is on ensuring a clear focus on the use of a range of disruption techniques to build the trust and confidence of victims. Such techniques need to move beyond a focus on managing an individual or a group of individuals, to developing location-based interventions through, for example, schools or shopping centres or other spaces that young people congregate.

Through the implementation of such strategies, public confidence will increase; with individuals and communities empowered to report the signs of CSE and other forms of exploitation – knowing that robust and effective action will follow.

It also focuses on the targeting and pursuit of offenders that brings them to justice and interventions with young people to reduce and manage any risks that they may pose to others.

Critically, arising from the local learning from <u>Child L</u>, it also includes a focus on ensuring that vulnerabilities of young people engaged in the criminal justice system are effectively identified. It recognises that for some young people, they do not neatly fit into the categories of victim / perpetrator and this needs to be better understood when considering the most effective response to their needs and/or actions.

1. Professionals identify, assess and mitigate any vulnerabilities that might reduce the chances of young people exiting gang culture or involvement in youth crime and violence.
2. Robust policing responses to perpetrators are in place: agreeing and monitoring investigation plans to run alongside support plans developed in response to a child sexual exploitation referral.
3. All agencies effectively share information and routinely utilising intelligence-led disruption in relation to any local businesses, individuals or groups associated with exploitation.
4. Agencies flexibly applying the full range of disruption tactics available through both criminal and civil routes to protect children and young people, including powers available in relation to licensing, health and safety, fraud, housing provision and other related legislation.
5. Where identified, to strongly advocate changes in legislation to better protect and better deter offenders from exploiting young people for the purposes of criminal activity.
6. Robust offender management strategies post-conviction and/or effective intervention strategies that reduce the risk presented by identified abusers.