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Children and Families Committee

10 July 2023

**Update on progress against the Joint Targeted Area Inspection
Action Plan**

**Report of: Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's
Services**

Report Reference No: CF/14/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report provides the Children and Families Committee with an update on the partnership's progress against the action plan from the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to the criminal exploitation of children in Cheshire East.

Executive Summary

- 2 The joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to the criminal exploitation of children in Cheshire East took place in July 2022. The findings, outlined in the [inspection letter](#), showed that the Cheshire East partnership needed to take priority action and make significant improvements to how we support children and young people at risk of exploitation to ensure we achieve good outcomes for children and young people, and effectively protect them from harm.
- 3 A comprehensive multi-agency 12-month action plan was developed to address the findings within the inspection letter. This was submitted to Ofsted as required on 5 January 2023 and reported to the Children and Families Committee on 16 January 2023. This report provides the committee with an update on the partnership's progress against the action plan.
- 4 Concerted effort has been made across the partnership to improve the arrangements to support children and young people, and the

partnership is making good progress in delivering the actions within the plan. 82% of the actions are now complete. We now have a better understanding of our cohort of children and young people at risk, and there is evidence that the quality of practice has improved.

- 5 The partnership recognises that further work is needed to sign off the action plan by January 2024, to continue to improve our support and arrangements, and to evidence the impact we are making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Scrutinise the report on the progress to date and impact on outcomes for children and young people at risk of exploitation.
2. Continue to offer support and scrutiny to the partnership in this important work.
3. Agree to receive a report in early 2024 with a further update on progress made against the JTAI action plan.

Background

- 6 The joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to the criminal exploitation of children in Cheshire East took place in July 2022. The findings, outlined in the [inspection letter](#), showed that the Cheshire East partnership needed to make significant improvements to how we support children and young people at risk of exploitation to ensure we achieve good outcomes for children and young people, and effectively protect them from harm.
- 7 A comprehensive multi-agency 12-month action plan was developed to address the findings within the inspection letter. Governance arrangements were established to ensure there is dedicated and senior oversight and scrutiny of progress against the plan. Monthly scrutiny of progress against the plan is provided by a multi-agency Improvement Board.
- 8 The partnership has received support, scrutiny, and challenge around the improvements from a Department for Education (DfE) Children's Improvement Advisor since January 2023. The DfE Children's Improvement Advisor has met with key strategic leads and observed operational partnership meetings which consider the risks to individual children and young people and provides challenge and scrutiny as the independent chair of the partnership Improvement Board.
- 9 On 7 June 2023 a six-month review took place led by the DfE, and involving the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive for the Council, Lead Member for Children and Families, key representatives from the

partnership, and a group of partnership frontline practitioners, to review progress in making improvements since the inspection. The DfE acknowledged the progress and impact for children and young people at risk of exploitation which had been achieved by the partnership. This feedback will be evidenced in a letter to the chair of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership which is expected to be received shortly.

- 10 Concerted effort has been made across the partnership to improve the arrangements to support children and young people, and the partnership is making good progress in delivering the actions within the plan. 82% of the actions are now complete.
- 11 Multi-agency identification of children and young people at risk of exploitation has improved. A daily multi-agency information sharing meeting was introduced in October 2022 within the integrated front door to support effective intelligence sharing between agencies. The police had improved the quality and timeliness of recording on their systems.
- 12 Significant activity has taken place within the emergency departments to ensure staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills to recognise and respond to children and young people who are at risk of exploitation. Audits demonstrate that East Cheshire Trust have significantly improved safeguarding practice within their emergency department – 90% cases audited had a safeguarding risk assessment completed in quarter 4 of 2022/23, compared to just 30% in quarter 1 (at the time of the inspection). 96% cases audits had a clear plan at the point of discharge in quarter 4. There has been a sustained improvement in the number of child exploitation screening tools completed by the emergency department at Mid Cheshire Trust. Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Liaison Psychiatry team who assess 16-18 year olds in both emergency departments have completed additional training around child exploitation.
- 13 There is consistency in flagging children and young people at risk of exploitation across the partnership. We are confident we are identifying the right children and young people.
- 14 We have improved arrangements within the front door, ensuring children and young people are referred to the right service swiftly. An effective weekly partnership contextual safeguarding screening meeting reviews the immediate safety planning for children at risk of exploitation to ensure that the right plans are in place. On 3 May 2023, the JTAI Improvement Board agreed that the priority action around the front door had been addressed and the immediate action taken during the inspection had been embedded within practice. This was a significant milestone.

- 15 To ensure multi-agency frontline staff understand what good quality practice looks like, the partnership has carried out a significant amount of training and awareness raising sessions:
- Developed a new awareness session on child exploitation in November 2022, which is being provided on a regular basis as part of the partnership's training programme.
 - Held a partnership learning week in January 2023 which included a range of training and learning opportunities, as well as a Child Exploitation Conference which was attended by a keynote speaker from Research in Practice who shared the principles for practice to tackle exploitation developed from the latest research. 2,143 people attended sessions over the week.
 - Launched a new partnership training programme for 2023/24, which includes monthly bitesize sessions on learning from reviews, and short 'how to' sessions as these were positively received during the learning week.
- 16 Awareness raising sessions have been held across the partnership on how education can be a protective factor for children and young people at risk of exploitation, and this has been included as part of the regular partnership training programme. As a result, the education department have been receiving more notifications from partners about children on transition plans to full time education. It is our expectation that the multi-agency team around the child/young person work together to develop a timetable of planned activity for the child, including education, to act as a protective factor to disrupt their ability to be at risk of harm.
- 17 We have seen an increase in schools providing reviews and closing transition plans. Every school will be offered a targeted support meeting to explore attendance, transition timetables and vulnerable students in the summer term.
- 18 In January 2023, the partnership launched the Contextual Safeguarding and Serious and Organised Crime Strategy. This ensures there is a clear partnership approach to protecting children, adults and communities from exploitation and serious and organised crime across Cheshire East.
- 19 We are working with our Sector Lead Improvement Partner allocated by the DfE to create a dedicated multi-agency contextual safeguarding team which will improve coordination of support for children and young people at risk, as well as provide specialist expertise. This will be operational by September 2023.

- 20 An independent scrutineer was commissioned in October 2022 to undertake a review of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership arrangements; its structure, oversight of outcomes, and effectiveness in driving improved outcomes for children and young people. New partnership arrangements are being developed in line with the findings which will ensure the partnership has a direct line of sight to frontline practice and the impact this has for children and young people. Changes to quality assurance arrangements based on this review have already been implemented.
- 21 We now have a better understanding of our cohort of children and young people at risk. The number of children and young people at risk of exploitation has reduced as a result of increased scrutiny of this cohort, which is ensuring that children and young people are receiving the right support at the right time.
- 22 The partnership is currently carrying out a multi-agency audit of children and young people at risk of exploitation which will allow us to assess the quality of partnership practice, and outcomes for children and young people, and will identify the areas we need to continue to focus on and improve.

Consultation and Engagement

- 23 The three statutory partners (Cheshire East Council, Cheshire Constabulary, and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board) developed the multi-agency action plan in response to the JTAI findings and continue to evaluate progress against the plan on a monthly basis. The action plan and progress updates have been shared with the wider membership of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership Executive. An independent scrutineer for the partnership has provided constructive feedback on the plan to ensure it will drive change for children and young people in Cheshire East.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 24 The Children and Families Committee has an important role in ensuring children's services effectively protect children and young people from harm, and support them to achieve improved outcomes. Addressing the JTAI findings relates to the priority in the council's Corporate Plan 2021-2025 to protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk, and families from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
- 25 The Children and Families Committee received an initial report on progress against the JTAI action plan on 16 January 2023, where it agreed to receive six monthly reports on progress.

Other Options Considered

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Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	The committee is not sighted on progress against the JTAI findings so cannot assure itself that the findings are being addressed appropriately and that the support we offer children and young people at risk of exploitation is being improved. Scrutiny and challenge to services around improvements is not in place.	Children and young people at risk of exploitation are not being effectively protected.
Receive less frequent updates	This is not recommended as the inspection found action was needed as a priority in this area, so the action plan is expected to be delivered within a short period. Changes need to be achieved quickly for children and young people. The impact is the same as the above option.	As above.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 27 JTAI inspections are carried out under section 20 of the Children Act 2004.
- 28 The Safeguarding Children's Partnership has a statutory responsibility to safeguard children and young people within the borough and to ensure that the services operate within the relevant legal framework.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 29 The Safeguarding Children's Partnership is funded primarily by the three statutory partners with an additional contribution provided by probation services and schools. The 2022/23 outturn reflected an existing shortfall in the partnership contributions. The funding arrangements are currently under review to ensure that the partnership has sufficient resources to fulfil its responsibilities.

Policy

- 30 There are no direct policy implications. Addressing the JTAI findings relates to the priority in the council's Corporate Plan 2021-2025 to protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk, and families from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

**A council which
empowers and cares
about people**

Protect and support our
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 31 Some children and young people are more vulnerable to being exploited due to their social, economic, and/or cultural environments or backgrounds. Good quality practice involves assessing and supporting children and young people's individual needs.

Human Resources

- 32 Recruiting and retaining high quality frontline practitioners and managers is crucial in supporting the partnership to fulfil its safeguarding responsibilities. This is also applicable to the Safeguarding Children's Partnership Business Support Team to ensure that the partnership can fulfil its obligations.

Risk Management

- 33 We need to have an effective Safeguarding Children's Partnership in place to deliver effective partnership services that support children, young people and families in a holistic way and help them achieve good outcomes. Not doing so could mean children and young people are at risk of or experience harm which could have been prevented. There are also reputational and financial risks to not providing a good Safeguarding Children's Partnership. The council must continue to ensure that these risks are mitigated by ensuring effective plans are in place to improve where areas for development are identified. Progress against the JTAI action plan is on the council's corporate risk register.

Rural Communities

- 34 Vulnerable children and young people are present in all communities in Cheshire East.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 35 The multi-agency action plan intends to improve the experiences and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people across the borough.

Public Health

- 36 Exploitation of children and young people is a public health issue and tackling it and the impact of it cuts across many agencies and partnerships. By improving how we support children and young people at risk of exploitation we would have a positive overall impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Cheshire East.

Climate Change

- 37 There are no implications for climate change as a result of this report.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	None

<p>Background Papers:</p>	<p><u>Update on progress against the joint targeted area inspection action plan – report to Children and Families Committee on 16 January 2023</u></p> <p><u>Joint targeted area inspection of Cheshire East – letter of inspection findings</u></p>
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