

THE PREVENTION OF HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

STRATEGIC SUMMARY

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to describe the approach that the Council and its partners will take to preventing sexually harmful behaviour in the borough. The document sets out what we want to achieve in terms of vision and outcomes. It also sets out how we propose to do that, describing our approach, the values that underpin it and the governance arrangements that we will employ.
- 1.2 In Waltham Forest our vision is to secure high quality services for children, young people and adults developing their independence, giving them resilience and power to influence their journey through life and achieve their ambitions
- 1.3 We know that effective integrated working makes a real difference to the lives of children, young people and their families. Key to effective integrated working is a strong partnership between the Council, NHS, Schools, voluntary sector and Police as we share responsibility for improving outcomes.
- 1.4 Partners have worked together, through the Waltham Forest Improvement Board and the Best Start in Life Board, to develop a values-based approach to working together. These values are expressed in seven core beliefs that guide and give purpose to our work with children, young people and families. The way we conduct this work will demonstrate that we are:
- Protective: we will prioritize the safety and protection of children and young people;
 - Collaborative: we will establish strong local partnerships, working together to achieve shared goals;
 - Inclusive: we will include, promote and embrace equality, diversity and human rights;
 - Responsive: we will listen to and act on the views of children, young people and their families, involving them in decision making that impacts on their lives;
 - Proactive: we will design and commission services to meet changing needs and demands;
 - Preemptive: we will support and intervene at the earliest possible time to prevent needs from escalating;
 - Productive: we will work hard to ensure that we maximize the outcomes and improve the life chances of children, young people and families.

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- 1.5 The local Threshold Criteria for Early Help and Intervention, based on the London Continuum of Need, establish a consistent approach to working with children, young people and families across the whole spectrum of risk and complexity of behaviour and need. We will use this 4 level framework to ensure that we prevent and manage harmful sexual behaviour effectively by working at the right level, providing thorough robust assessments, comprehensive intervention plans, enabling swift and easy access to appropriate services, and helping to remove barriers to integrated service delivery, including access to specialist services where needed.

2. HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

- 2.1 HM Inspectorate of Probation recently looked at the issue of harmful sexual behaviour in the report *'Examining Multi-agency Responses to Children and Young People who Sexually Offend (2013)*. In examining the issue Inspectors focused on the quality of work undertaken with these young people and its outcomes, how the different agencies worked together and what had been achieved.
- 2.2 The report found that behaviour of this small but significant group of children and young people can be extremely damaging, often involving other children as victims. Yet the evidence from the inspection is that these children and young people do respond to intervention from youth offending teams and can be prevented from reoffending before developing entrenched patterns of behaviour.
- 2.3 The report also found that a sizeable number of these children had been referred on previous occasions to children's services but the significance of their behaviour was either not recognized or dismissed. This, to the Inspectors, represented a lost opportunity, both for the children themselves and their potential victims, and resulted in significant cost to public services.
- 2.4 It is the complex nature of their behaviours, alongside the young person's range of risk and needs that has raised the profile of this area of work. It is essential that these young people benefit from good quality assessment and appropriate interventions within a multi-agency framework that recognises both the child welfare/child protection system and the criminal justice system have a role in promoting safety and meeting the young person's needs. In many cases therapeutic services, education, substitute carers, police, health and mental health services will also be required to engage in the processes.

3 BACKGROUND TO OUR STRATEGY

- 3.1 The development of human sexual behaviour is a normal part of a child or young person's journey to adulthood. There is a distinction between healthy and harmful sexual behaviour and it is important that we have a shared understanding of that difference so that we can intervene early

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when we need to in order to seize opportunities to prevent an escalation of harmful behaviour and the risks to perpetrators and victims.

- 3.2 Where harmful sexual behaviour has been identified, a large number of well-conducted studies support the move away from assuming that most perpetrators are at high risk of re-offending. There is now clear acknowledgement that they are a diverse group requiring a diverse range of responses; they can be of either gender, from any race, religion, culture or social class and be of differing ages and abilities.
- 3.3 As such there is a range of typologies, which raises varying issues for consideration by the professionals working with them, for example; those who abuse children may well have different features and causes than those who assault peers or adults. Those who abuse males may have different recidivist rates to those who abuse females and those who abuse both male and female.

However it is worth noting that many of these young people will often share a variety of psychosocial problems and will have aspects of their personality that has much in common with other troubled and troubling young people.

- 3.4 Research suggests that 25-33% of all sexual abuse is perpetrated by 10-19 year olds¹ yet there is currently insufficient evidence to clarify the link between juvenile and adult offending. Having said that, 50% of adult sexual offenders report that their offending commenced in adolescence².
- 3.5 Waltham Forest's OFSTED Inspection for Looked After Children, in 2011, recommended that: "provision is made to address the needs of children who show sexually harmful behaviour but have not committed an offence." A task and finish group undertook an audit of the range of provision across schools, Children and Families and the Youth Offending Service. It found variable practice, with pockets of good practice in the YOS, and areas where the response was inconsistent with skills/knowledge gaps within areas of the children's workforce. The purpose of this strategy, therefore, is to bring clarity, consistency of good practice to all areas of provision.

¹ Cawson et al (2000). Child Maltreatment in the United Kingdom: A Study of the Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect. London. NSPCC

² Abe, G.G, Mittelman, M.S. and Becker, J.V. (1985) 'Sex Offenders: results of assessment and recommendations for treatment', in Ben-Ron, M.H, Hucker, S.J and Webster, C.J. (eds). Clinical Criminology: The Assessment and Treatment of Criminal Behaviour, Toronto, M& M. Graphics

4 OUTCOMES TO BE ACHIEVED BY THE STRATEGY

4.1 The outcomes that this strategy seeks to achieve are:

- Joint ownership by statutory partners of this area of work and the strategic approach outlined below;
- Clear pathways of response based on the London Continuum Model and a framework of shared assessment and intervention;
- Effective early intervention – intervening whilst a child/ young person is still young and developing carries the greatest hope for change and saves much greater future spending on the incarceration, treatment and supervision of adult sex offenders;
- A low recidivism rate amongst those children or young people that been identified and responded to;
- Reduced costs to the public purse, as more staff members are equipped to respond in house rather than needing a specialist service to respond;
- Effective targeting of specialist resources at the most vulnerable young people;
- Increased front line worker efficacy in working with this group and reduced levels of worker anxiety; and
- Improved interagency working and decision-making.

5 OUR STRATEGIC APPROACH

5.1 Preventing harmful sexual behaviour is an interagency safeguarding issue. Our strategy provides a clear vision and strategic partnership objectives that promotes shared understanding, early intervention and prevention, risk management that balances welfare concerns with judicial responses and connects with individual agencies' legislative requirements and core business.

5.2 Agencies are not being asked to take on something beyond the scope of their core business, but rather address more effectively a child protection issue that compliments and enhances their existing roles and duties. It will in turn develop the skills of individuals and the ability of services to address a wide variety of needs and collectively offer a suite of interventions.

5.3 The strategy will strengthen existing initiatives aimed at safeguarding young people and improving lives and will not aim to address harmful sexual behaviour in isolation. There is a close relationship with other strategies; providing a joint approach to those children at risk of sexual exploitation with an emphasis on working with perpetrators of harmful sexual behaviours, the strategy to keep young people in full time education by attempting to address harmful sexual behaviours at the earliest opportunity and working closer with education providers to do so

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- 5.4 We will secure a dedicated expert coordinator role to drive the work across agencies. This role will support the agencies to develop and implement policies, procedure, protocols and systems. The role will ensure that groundwork to develop our interagency response is effective, that it becomes embedded and then maintained.
- 5.5 We will develop an inter-agency framework for intervention and assessment using the AIM model, which is evidence based. This will reduce the isolation and anxiety which are commonly felt in decision making about this group and which can often result in over or under estimation of risk, without a clear research based assessment model to make informed decisions.
- 5.6 We will use the locally agreed Threshold Criteria for Early Help and Intervention, which reflect the London Continuum Model framework, to identify the right setting within which to intervene and the appropriate intensity of intervention. The threshold criteria propose 4 tiers:

- Universal;
- Vulnerable;
- Complex; and
- Acute.

We will step up and step down between levels as the needs of individual children and young people change taking into account, particularly those that are most vulnerable. Children in Care, children with Learning Disabilities, children at risk of permanent exclusion and those at risk of being removed from their families will require thorough understanding and the flexibility of services to address their needs.

- 5.7 We will deploy training and supervision in line with the Threshold Criteria to ensure that interventions can be delivered at the right tier through local generic children's services where indicated, in order to avoid potential negative consequences to children and young people e.g. lengthy treatment programmes, family separation and legal restrictions for those who pose little risk. This in turn will assist in the direction of specialist resources to those most at risk.
- 5.8 We will take a whole family approach to working with children and young people who show and engage in harmful sexual behaviour because they are not isolated individuals. Rather, they are members of peer groups, families and communities, and we believe that a systemic approach will be more effective.
- 5.9 We will ensure that appropriate links are made to other related programmes and strategies including the borough's gang violence prevention programme and the boroughs violence against women and girls strategy.

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6 GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

- 6.1 We will develop multi-agency governance arrangements and work within the MASH information sharing protocol, to ensure that this work is progressed appropriately.
- 6.2 All professionals working with children and young people in Waltham Forest have a responsibility to use the key tools of Integrated Working to deliver a coordinated response to children, young people and families that need support or intervention. Multi-agency work will be governed through existing multi-agency arrangements outlined in the Threshold Criteria for Early Help and Intervention document.
- 6.3 Agencies will be accountable to both the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Community Safety Partnership who will oversee jointly the strategic development of work to prevent harmful sexual behaviour.