

Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

Project Learning Report

Details of Bespoke Support Project (BSP):	
Partnership Name:	Somerset
Core partner agencies involved:	Somerset County Council; Children's Services, Public Health, Education Avon and Somerset Police Somerset CCG Somerset NHS Partnership Trust SHAL Housing Barnardo's
Number of Local Authority areas covered:	Somerset County Council
Regional Area:	South West
BSP Project Size:	Standard
BSP Methodology/ methodologies	Partnership/Strategy
Digital / Face to face / Mixed Delivery	Digital
Date BSP commenced:	June 2020
Reasons why the local area requested the TCE Support programme:	
Somerset originally approached the Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) Support Programme for support in building on the foundations which were in place around an effective partnership approach to respond to child exploitation. The partnership wished to develop their strategy to child exploitation to include both sexual and criminal exploitation and ensure that the principles underpinning it were reflective of and responded to the needs of a large rural county with a vast spread of services.	
Overall goal of BSP:	
<p>Throughout the scoping phase of the project, the following change goal was developed by local leads.</p> <p>To develop a revised, shared strategy for child exploitation, which is jointly owned across the partnership. In support of this, the TCE delivery team agreed to work with local partners to begin exploring the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on what is currently in place across the system. • Consider what is currently working well and identify where further work is required. • Agree core principles that underpin what the partnership would like to achieve and secure strategic mandate to deliver on these. • Develop an action plan which enables the partnership to develop a new and revised child exploitation strategy following the input from the TCE Support Programme. 	
Approaches / methods taken to achieve project goal and deliver the BSP:	

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The approach adopted throughout this project was one of reflection, collaboration and exploration with an emphasis on the co-creation of shared partnership actions. Although originally due to begin in April 2020, the start of this project was put on hold whilst the TCE team worked to revise the delivery approach to digital post-pandemic.

Throughout the project, a range of different methods were used to support delivery including scoping, partnership workshops, individual agency conversations, offline mapping exercises and senior leadership briefings. This mix of activity allowed the delivery team to gain a good understanding of local context, partnership priorities, challenges and opportunities. It also gave local participants a range of different means to engage and contribute to the project as it developed.

Key issues that arose during the delivery of the BSP:

- for a local area and those delivering the BSP

Complexity of the local partnership landscape

Across Somerset, exploitation is a priority that straddles three strategic partnerships; Children's Safeguarding, Adults Safeguarding and Community Safety (Safer Somerset). At the outset of this project, we heard about the good practice and activity that exists across the partnerships, but also the silo's experienced by some in terms of how exploitation was understood and responded to across partnership boundaries. This led local leads to seek clarity about where strategic oversight and governance sat across the partnership landscape. Understanding and navigating this complexity became a central theme throughout the work of this project.

Strategic mandate underpinning the project

As part of the delivery of this project, a group of senior partnership leads were identified and formed a core part of all sessions. Although this group are responsible for exploitation within their respective organisations, there was a sense throughout that the strategic mandate for the project sat with the Safeguarding Partnership Executive. The TCE delivery team worked alongside local leads to facilitate this and were able to secure a briefing session with the partnership Executive mid-way through the project. Reflections on this and learning identified to support other areas are picked up throughout this report.

Challenges between operational issues and overall strategic vision

In the early stages of the project, many of our discussions with local leads centred on operational issues within the local response to exploitation. These issues were clearly an important part of the challenges the local partnership was facing. As a programme focused on supporting local areas to develop their *strategic* approach to exploitation, the TCE delivery team supported the partnership to notice when discussions reverted to operational issues, which were perhaps overriding local strategic needs. The TCE delivery team and local colleagues worked together to identify ways in which operational issues could be utilised to underpin and shape strategic discussions through tangible illustrations, so that the actions emerging from the project might best enable the local partnership to develop a sustainable and long-term approach rather than focusing solely on immediate or operational quick fixes.

Digital delivery

One of the themes emerging from this project was around the power and value of relationships. Delivering the project digitally meant that familiar and tried and tested approaches for the delivery

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team to build and foster positive relationships with local colleagues had to be adapted. In this project, this caused the delivery team to adapt their approaches such as by introducing single agency conversations after a wider partnership workshop was cancelled due capacity across the partnership. Had this been a project delivered in person, these adaptations might not have felt so readily accessible to the delivery team, with this project demonstrating the flexibility digital delivery can offer and the way that can be utilised to support and complement a local partnership context.

Joining the dots:

Describes the thematic approach taken by the TCE Support Programme to respond to system challenges. These three themes are intended to prompt new and innovative thinking and constructively challenge the status quo by encouraging the sector to make new links and approach strategic decisions from new angles and perspectives.

Key reflections on the Joining the dots themes within the BSP:

1. Leading with care
2. Bridging boundaries
3. Holding complexity, uncertainty and curiosity

The question of influence and how that relates to leadership within a partnership was a key feature of the learning emerging from work on this project. Across the strategic partnership landscape in Somerset, exploitation is one of many priorities. Whilst governance and oversight can and in the case of Somerset, does come from an Executive level, leadership of the priority often sits with senior partnership leads who have collective influence to set strategic direction and drive forward activity across the partnership(s).

Within Somerset and across the TCE delivery team, opinions on where influence and leadership should sit differed. Some felt that leadership and influence must be top down in order to support and embed strategic priorities. Others felt that leadership comes from empowered individuals who are well placed to create and respond to conditions within the local system to drive forward system change. A reflection from the TCE delivery team is that perhaps both can be true at the same time, with an Executive approach that recognises and provides a platform for priorities and offers support (which can include resourcing) to empowered and passionate leaders across partnership systems to work collectively to embed and deliver sustainable change across the local system.

Child exploitation is an increasing area of work within a complex landscape. In Somerset, as in many other local areas, we saw this complexity mirrored in the way partnership structures, processes and services have emerged alongside new priorities, often creating unintended silos across the partnership, particularly at a strategic level. For Somerset, recognition that exploitation as a priority is one that spans the boundaries of several strategic partnerships was a central theme running throughout this project and a challenge that local leads were facing in shaping this work going forward. There was real strength in local leads acknowledging this and as a result inviting participation from a wide range of local agencies to support a strengthened strategic and collaborative approach in the design of the project. As a result, we saw developing relationships across partnership boundaries underpinning many of the actions identified by partners to support this work going forward. Partners from Housing, Education and Public Health in particular provided constructive connections and a way to join the dots across a complex landscape.

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Significant learning and transferability from the BSP for other areas:

Securing a strategic mandate for bespoke support projects

Strategic oversight and governance surrounding child exploitation sits at different points within a partnership landscape depending on a local area's context and priorities. For some local areas the strategic mandate may sit at Executive level, as it does in Somerset. The Executive provided a mandate for this project at the application stage. All members of the Executive attended a session as part of the project, though due to availability this wasn't held until the mid-way point. On reflection, had it been possible, holding this session at an earlier point may have allowed local colleagues to feel they had a stronger foundation on which to further develop and embed this work going forward.

The value of collective time to reflect and the opportunity to look forward

One of the key reflections from local colleagues about the work of the TCE project in Somerset was the value of providing a collaborative and reflective space. Work in this field is often fast paced, with local partners responding to operational issues at pace due to the harm young people can experience as a result of exploitation. Understanding and definitions of exploitation are also emerging and constantly evolving which can lead to a sense of running to keep up with developments at both operational and strategic levels. Within this context, finding time to pause, reflect and intentionally focus on strategic direction can be a challenge but when it is created it can add real value to local activity.

Purposeful and intentional involvement of a range of partners and perspectives

In many TCE Bespoke Support Projects, we have seen delivery focus around a small group of individuals who in the main represent statutory safeguarding partners. In Somerset however, we saw the value a larger and more diverse group of local partners can offer to this type of strategic work. The group involved in this project grew with each phase and each individual joining the work was invited to bring a different perspective or because they were able to provide a pathway into or through the system, which had been identified as a challenge or priority for the project. For example, whilst it would have been simple to focus on members of the child exploitation subgroup as central to this work, there was a recognition that the sub group in its current form was one of the challenges which the partnership was seeking to address. Looking beyond its membership and the existing decision-making accountability within that as part of the project allowed different questions to be asked and different solutions to be explored.

Delineation between the operational and strategic within a partnership context

As already described, there can be complexities with local response to child exploitation as operational issues compete with strategic priorities for space within a busy partnership landscape. What we observed in Somerset was that there is a need for both to be addressed, with a recognition that to be effective this must be done in parallel rather than simultaneously. In practical terms, this means a clear delineation between where and when these parallel activities take place. For Somerset, this discussion emerged when considering what a revised and refreshed exploitation sub group may look like. It was recognised by local colleagues that agendas which sought to blend the operational and strategic would quickly become saturated with pressing and often time limited operational issues. The need to manage this structurally and consider who is

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best placed within the partnership to lead the two elements is one which the partnership is exploring as a result of this work.

Emerging evidence of how the project has positively disrupted the system response to child exploitation and extra-familial harm:

Throughout the project, we noted a number of positive movements towards system change begin to emerge. Although these differ in scale, they collectively provide a basis for emerging evidence of a shift in strategic response to child exploitation across Somerset.

- Membership, chairing and terms of reference for the exploitation sub group are being reviewed with specific consideration being given as to how the operational and the strategic can be managed and taken forward as part of this.
- Work is underway exploring links across the strategic partnership landscape in Somerset to determine what data in relation to child exploitation can be drawn together to support activity with support being provided via Public Health.
- Joined up, multi-agency discussions around commissioning are being progressed to ensure strategic oversight is in place around funding rounds and commissioning cycles across the partnership landscape as well as identifying opportunities for collaboration.
- Relationships have been strengthened between strategic partnerships at a senior level with Chairs of groups such as the exploitation sub group and the Early Help board committing to exploring a matrix approach to actions, tasking and communication going forward.
- Recognising the value that came from extending agency participation in this work. Local colleagues have highlighted the need to reflect on this further and consider how children, young people and communities may form part of the strategic approach to exploitation as this work continues to progress.

Immediate reflections from the local area:

The workshop format provided a dedicated space for partners to consider the current position, which we already knew needed some revision. We were clear on the need for the strategic group membership to be clarified so that members could be held accountable for decisions made, and indeed to make those decisions. The strategic and operational split is being progressed. The needs analysis led by Public Health with the authority is in progress and will drive the strategy refresh.

We would like to thank TCE colleagues for their commitment to this process.

Please tick this box if there is an agreement for the Project Learning Report to be shared via the TCE Support programme's Microsite for other local areas:

Date: 22.03.2021

**Signed by local area: Lisa Bird, Head of Service-
Prevention SCC, On behalf of the CE**

Subgroup

Date: 30.04.2021

Signed by TCE Lead: Amy Hurst