



Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

Project Learning Report

Details of Bespoke Support Project (BSP):	
Partnership Name:	Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent
Core partner agencies involved:	Staffordshire County Council Stoke-on-Trent City Council Staffordshire Police Health partners from across the locality
Number of Local Authority areas covered:	Staffordshire County Council Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Regional Area:	West Midlands
BSP Project Size:	Complex
BSP Methodology/ methodologies	Data
Digital / Face to face / Mixed Delivery	Digital
Date BSP commenced:	June 2020
Reasons why the local area requested the TCE Support programme:	
<p>As part of their application to the TCE Programme, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent wished to develop a performance framework as part of wider Safeguarding Partnership activity which would support them in understanding the impact of local activity in relation to child exploitation. As part of this, local partners wished to pull together a range of multi-agency data sets and begin exploring how to incorporate feedback from children, young people and their families.</p>	
Overall goal of BSP :	
<p>Throughout the scoping phase of the project, the local leads worked with the TCE project team to define the goals of the project as follows-</p> <p>To explore the use of data in relation to child exploitation and extra-familial harm¹ across Staffordshire and Stoke. In support of this, the TCE Programme offered to work with local partners to begin exploring the following areas-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producing intelligence about extra-familial harm and exploitation • Using data to describe the narrative / experience of young people in relation to exploitation and give consideration as to how to facilitate the inclusion of young people's voice as part of the approach • Using that intelligence to understand quality across the partnership and how that directly relates to practice. • Mapping and reviewing the quality of existing data • Developing an action plan for robust reporting on child exploitation and extra-familial harm in line with the reporting requirements of the Safeguarding Partnership 	
Approaches / methods taken to achieve project goal and deliver the BSP:	

¹ Exploring the use of data is a key theme across BSPs. TCE have produced [a series of resources](#) for the microsite that focus on this issue.

Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

The approach adopted throughout the project was one of collaboration, holding space and seeking to provide the enabling conditions for reflective discussion and exploration across the partnership as they began to unpick their approach to data and how that might relate to their partnership approaches more broadly.

Although originally due to begin in April 2020, the impact of Covid-19 saw a delay in the project due to the reframing of the TCE Programme's delivery approach to account for digital delivery. Throughout the summer, however, progress was made in terms of scoping and the partnership and TCE delivery team were in a position to progress with a project which was delivered digitally.

Initial data maturity conversations were held with individual agencies across the partnership to provide space to consider current strengths, challenges and opportunities relating to data within the system. These conversations considered data collection, systems, recording, analysis, sharing and decision making, leading to reflections which formed the basis of both single agency and partnership actions plans.

Following this, a series of activities took place with colleagues from across the partnership-

- Data Leads Workshop- a sessions for data leads to explore the data held across the partnership currently and to reflect on how it is utilised to inform an understanding of child exploitation and extra-familial harm.
- Data Mapping- online survey for data leads to share more detailed information about how they currently collect, analyse and share data in relation to child exploitation
- Strategic Leads Workshop- a session for strategic leads from across the partnership to come together to reflect on messages emerging from the work and establish clear actions to embed this work going forward

Throughout the project, actions were identified, captured and reflected back to the partnership, providing a basis for local colleagues to further develop and embed this work beyond the life of the TCE delivery team's involvement.

Key issues that arose during the delivery of the BSP:

- for a local area and those delivering the BSP

Different starting points for different agencies

Throughout the project we heard from a range of different agencies across the area, all of which were at very different points in terms of their journey with collecting, analysing and utilising data. For some partners, data, both qualitative and quantitative, was felt to be something which was readily available and utilised as a core part of their understanding of and the shaping of responses to child exploitation. Other partners, including a number of health colleagues, reflected that for them, data was not so readily available and a deeper level of understanding might be required in order for them to understand how they might most meaningfully contribute to the wider partnership approach to data.

Coordination and resourcing across a complex landscape

Working across a large geographic area incorporating two Local Authorities and a number of CCGs and Health providers, the landscape for a strategic approach to child exploitation across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is complex. Local colleagues shared with the delivery team that

Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

previous activity to develop a single performance framework had stalled due to capacity and ongoing resourcing issues. In response to this, the delivery team sought to ensure that discussions around sustainability and thinking beyond a single report to an ongoing way of working across the partnership were central to the discussions throughout the project.

Safeguarding Partnership Board Structures

At the outset of this project Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent were part of a single, joint Safeguarding Partnership. Throughout the life of the project however, the partnership separated with each local authority area establishing individual partnerships. Although there is a commitment across local partners to maintain close joint working in relation to child exploitation with a joint child exploitation task group likely to remain, the learning from this project should be considered in light of the revised arrangements and the impact, both positive and negative, they may have on all partners involved in the strategic response to child exploitation.

Digital Delivery

Local leads reflected that although digital delivery had some advantages in terms of engagement, there were some challenges highlighted. Most notably these challenges related to the small, personal interactions which occur when people are brought together in a physical space with conversations sparking in the margins of workshop session and connections made and strengthened in the spaces created before and after sessions. Local leads also reflected that they would value the opportunity to come together with other local areas who have worked with the TCE Programme to build wider peer networks with those on similar journeys and this is something the delivery team are exploring as we move into Year 3 of the programme

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. Blurring boundaries
3. Holding complexity, uncertainty and curiosity

Throughout the project the TCE delivery team worked to act as a vehicle to amplify the views of those working with data across the partnership, highlighting the challenges and opportunities they had identified when exploring the change goals of this project. Strategic leads across the partnership were responsive to this and took on board reflections which highlighted the value people recognised in coming together as a network in order to share learning and to develop a collaborative approach across the partnership. This sensitive and responsive approach to local leadership was a real strength of the project (which echoes [key features of systems leadership](#)) and one which placed significant value on the reflections of data and practice leads who were and will remain central to shaping the local approach to data.

Curiosity was a theme running throughout this project with questions posed throughout which sought to challenge the assumption that by reporting on what we already know we can understand the local picture of child exploitation. By asking questions about what we *want* to

Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

know, or asking what [we don't know and what might be missing from our current data](#), local leads were able to engage with the complexity across their local system and begin to reflect on what might be needed locally to move beyond the idea of traditional performance management frameworks towards an approach which placed the experience of children and young people at its centre.

Throughout the project, the TCE delivery team had a number of conversations with partners who although not central to the initial focus of the project, provided valuable insights and offered potential opportunities to explore sustainable approaches to embedding local activity going forward. One example of this was engagement with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner who were exploring opportunities around a partnership analyst post to support violence reduction activity across the locality. Through making connections and identifying opportunities for ongoing collaboration, local strategic leads have a strong basis to continue the conversations started within the project and translate them into shared and sustainable solutions to support the local system.

Significant learning and transferability from the BSP for other areas:

The power of relationships

As we have observed in other TCE projects, in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, whilst the starting point for our work may have been data, at the heart of the learning was the power of relationships and making connections across partner agencies. Creating time and space for data leads from a wide range of local agencies to come together allowed new relationships to be forged and existing connections to be strengthened. The power which can come from holding space for individuals to collectively reflect on what they currently know, what they don't know and what their key questions might be to support deeper understanding was evident in this work and there is a real desire from local colleagues to ensure this type of space is available to them going forward². Reflections from strategic leads throughout the project highlighted that intentionally creating space for people to come together allowed the partnership to uncover the depth and breadth of data which is available across the partnership and skills available across a range of agencies to collect, analyse and interpret that data in a way which is meaningful to the local strategic landscape.

Space to pause, slow down and start small

At the outset of this project local leads presented a clear steer from the safeguarding partnership to develop a performance framework. Throughout our work together, thinking on this shifted as it became apparent that there was more foundational activity required in order to support all partners to actively engage in a shared data approach. The concept of starting small, but starting somewhere emerged throughout the project with a recognition that an approach to data can be part of an evolving partnership process which is underpinned by deliberate reflection and review processes. Recognising that partners are at different points in their journey in terms of understanding of child exploitation was a key part of this with strategic leads observing the value

²² There is a growing body of evidence to support this relational way of working, for example: <https://www.scie.org.uk/children/relationships>
<https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/insights/what-do-public-servants-need-to-work-in-ways-that-centre-relationships-care-and-complexity>

Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

which can come from meeting people where they are at and using it as a jumping off point for further shared exploration.

Thinking beyond performance data and asking what we really want to know about exploitation

A recurring theme in all of our discussions with local partners was a desire to move beyond simply 'counting the beans' and to begin to understand what life is like for children and young people across the local area (a key theme identified in the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's Annual [Report](#)). In order to do this, throughout the project the delivery team worked with local partners to subtly shift the narrative from asking what do we currently know and what does data tell us about child exploitation to thinking about what we *want* to know and asking whether the data that we currently collect, analyse and report on actually helps us answer those questions. These questions rather than the data itself are the starting point for further collaborative work both in terms of understanding performance and in shaping response.

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

Reflections from local leads across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent highlights that learning from the project is beginning to support local activity which will have a positive impact on the local strategic response to child exploitation. This was apparent in a number of ways, including-

- A commitment to support data leads to continue to meet as a network to share learning and explore opportunities to work collaboratively
- Recognition that clearly defining strategic questions which explore what the partnership wants to know about child exploitation will provide a strong foundation on which to embed this work in the longer term
- Highlighting the benefits of slowing down with the safeguarding partnership(s) in order to ensure a sustainable approach is adopted going forward
- A commitment to ongoing collaboration in relation to child exploitation and data specifically across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent within the context of new local safeguarding arrangements
- Reviewing the terms of reference for the joint child exploitation sub group to ensure learning from this work is picked up and embedded going forwards
- Exploring future opportunities for a shared partnership resource or joint systems to support further development

Immediate reflections from the local area:

The TCE have been exceptional in supporting us as a local area to develop our thinking around a performance framework. As a partnership we were always clear that we did not want to count beans but wanted to really understand what it was like for our children and young people. Like many areas we are constrained by resources, but the project has enabled us to build relationships particularly with our data leads to really understand the art of the possible. We now have some clear manageable steps identified and supported by our strategic leaders in supporting the beginnings of a performance framework.

Huge thanks from all partners to everyone from TCE who has supported us on this journey.

Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

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: TICK

Signed by local area: Hazel Williams (Head of Service, Staffordshire Youth Offending Service)

Signed by TCE Programme Project Lead: Amy Hurst