

Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

Project Learning Report

Details of Bespoke Support Project (BSP):	
Partnership Name:	Portsmouth
Core partner agencies involved:	Portsmouth City Council Children's Services Youth Services Education Youth Offending Service Early Help Hampshire Police Portsmouth Hospital Trust Solent NHS Trust
Number of Local Authority areas covered:	Portsmouth City Council
Regional Area:	South West
BSP Project Size:	Standard
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>At the point of initial application to the TCE Support Programme, Portsmouth originally wished to develop a theory of change to support their emerging adolescent offer. With delays to beginning the project linked to Covid-19 and further discussions which took place as part of scoping, the emphasis of the project shifted towards the use of multi-agency data in the context of early intervention and child exploitation.</p>	
Overall goal of the BSP :	
<p>Throughout the scoping phase of the project the overall goal of the project was refined as:</p> <p>To explore the use of data in relation to child exploitation and extra-familial harm across Portsmouth within the context of a developing adolescent offer in the city.</p> <p>In support of this, the TCE Programme was asked to work with local partners, including Children's Services, Police, Youth Services and Health colleagues, to begin exploring the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying key questions which the partnership wishes to explore around exploitation. • Adopting the use of data as intelligence to describe the narrative / experience of young people in relation to exploitation across the city.¹ 	

¹ The TCE Programme has developed a suite of [resources](#) for local areas on using data for intelligence in relation to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.

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- Using intelligence to support the development of an action plan which considers the use of existing resources to meet the requirements of the emerging adolescent offer in the city, which takes account of place-based and contextual working.

Approaches / methods taken to achieve project goal and deliver the BSP:

The approach adopted throughout the project was one of collaboration, holding space and providing the enabling conditions for reflective discussion and exploration across strategic and senior operational tiers of the partnership.

Initial 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. Alongside this, simple mapping activities were carried out to highlight the wealth of data currently available across the partnership and the various meeting structures in place in which data is utilised to support, direct and report on activity.

Following on from this, a number of sessions were held with colleagues from across the partnership:

- **Strategic Leads Workshop:** using school exclusions as a basis, reflecting across the partnership on what can be drawn from data, what gaps we can identify, key questions and considering what sits outside of data collection and reporting which can help inform partnership activity.
- **Spaces and Places Workshop:** a session for strategic, practice and data leads to come together to consider the opportunities, challenges and barriers which exist across the partnership to take forward an approach to data which uses spaces and places as a starting point for understanding patterns and trends in relation to child exploitation.

Across the project, an iterative partnership action plan was maintained to support local leaders in identifying areas of consideration and next steps which they may wish to progress beyond the life of the TCE Programme.

Key issues that arose during the delivery of the BSP:

- for a local area and those delivering the BSP

Narrowing the focus of the BSP to maximise external support

During the scoping phase of BSPs, there can be a desire to think broadly about objectives for a partnership that go beyond the lifespan of a BSP (which is up to 3 months). In Portsmouth we saw this happen initially, but through a period of reflection and refinement of the project, and change goals with a range of partners, the focus began to narrow and take into account where external support to pause and reflect on key issues might be maximised within the timescales available .

Data sharing and the mechanisms and resources which enable it

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Throughout all discussions with local colleagues, we heard about the rich and varied forms of data being collected by different agencies across the partnership. Some of this data was in easy-to-share formats and stored on systems which allow for the running of regular reports. Some data however, particularly qualitative data and that which sits within individual files or rests with individual workers based on personal interactions, is much more challenging to extract and bring into the partnership context in a meaningful way. Often the richest data we hold as professionals takes a qualitative form. In Portsmouth we heard about the challenges in recording this type of data, but also of the opportunity it presents to add colour to the local picture and ensure strategic leaders are presented with information which reflects young people's experiences.

The capacity for taking forward new ways of working in relation to child exploitation and data

One of the biggest challenges highlighted throughout the project in Portsmouth was that of capacity across the partnership to take forward new ways of working in relation to child exploitation and data. At a strategic level, the commitment and energy to do things differently was evident throughout our work together, but the impact of this was a question which was highlighted on a number of occasions by those working in analyst roles across agencies. If the partnership wished to adopt new ways of working, what could they stop doing as a result to release some capacity? Where analytical capacity or the technical resources do not exist in certain teams or organisations, what can strategic leaders do collectively to take a whole-system approach? These are challenging questions and ones which come with significant resourcing implications if we are to solve them effectively, but what we saw in Portsmouth was a willingness to engage in the discussion and to reflect on *why* we might need to do things differently, which opened partners up to creative and collective approaches.

Thinking differently about how data might build a picture of child exploitation

Across the work on this project, we heard from a range of partners who didn't immediately recognise that the data and information they collected could offer any additional insight into the emerging picture of child exploitation across Portsmouth. Opening up the discussion around what we already know, what we'd like to know and what we don't know allowed partners to begin to consider how the data they hold could feed into the narrative of what young people's experiences are in the local area as a whole. By thinking about things in this way, questions started to emerge such as, what allows young people to feel safe or, who is missing from core data sets? Through these questions the partnership were able to broaden out their view on the types of data which might be relevant, considering things such as qualitative data held by the youth service, which often draws directly on conversations with young people about their experiences, alongside quantitative data such as police incidents, and begin to piece together a wider picture in which each partner had an active role to contribute.

The impact of Covid-19 on delivery of the BSP

As well as prompting a pause to the start of the BSP the impact of Covid-19 was felt throughout its delivery. As local strategic leads managed the pressures of lockdowns on the local system, finding the time to come together as part of a developmental project such as TCE proved, understandably, to be challenging at times. For the TCE delivery team, the impact was felt in terms of finding the space to effectively plan sessions with local leaders to ensure that delivery was a good fit for local needs. Honest and open communication provided a way through this with space for reflection on both sides when things hadn't progressed as originally planned. Towards the final stages of the project, joint planning sessions with key local leads and the TCE delivery team, as well as co-

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facilitation of a final workshop, ensured that local colleagues were left with some clear next steps which were relevant to the local context, providing a bridge into future local activity.

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

Leading with care

Leading with care was a theme which was evident throughout this project, most notably in the way in which senior leaders nurtured a culture across the partnership of openness and reflection. There was a strong sense that operational and data leads were comfortable in reflecting challenges up to a strategic level and a recognition that their views were welcomed, respected and acted upon. The value placed by strategic leads on operational expertise was evident throughout the various workshops and individual agency conversations, with views taken on board to effectively inform strategic direction.

Bridging boundaries

Those working with data across partnerships can sometimes be several steps removed from being able to see the impact of their work. Analysts and data leads are often working in isolation from their peers in other agencies, and feedback loops are sometimes difficult to establish. In bringing together individuals from different agencies as part of this project, we began to see the value that can be gained by creating spaces which allow multi-agency discussions on data to emerge, both in terms of understanding the limitations of data and in beginning to explore and work with its possibilities.

Holding complexity, uncertainty and curiosity

Thinking about early intervention and prevention requires a shift in the way in which partnerships understand and respond to young people's experience. When thinking about data, for some agencies it can be challenging to unpick the information they hold and to consider how it might add to the complex picture of young people's experience of a locality. For Portsmouth, curiosity sits at the heart of their approach, with all partners coming forward with questions which provide a starting point for beginning to unpick complexity in a collective way.

Throughout our work together we observed local colleagues question and challenge the objectives of the project as they began to recognise that data in and of itself may not offer solutions. Data supports local partners to ask meaningful questions, identify patterns and trends and, importantly, to identify who or what might be missing from the local picture when observed through a particular lens. The value which emerged from these conversations was clear with local leads looking to identify small yet tangible next steps which could be taken forward beyond the life of the BSP.

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Significant learning and transferability from the BSP for other areas:

Start small, but start somewhere

- Small actions such as bringing people together to reflect on opportunities and challenges, can be a powerful way of beginning to work towards change in a local area.
- By ensuring a focus on developing a clear plan, a local partnership can begin to work collectively towards longer term strategic change.
- Open and honest conversations across strategic and operational levels within a partnership are vital in ensuring activity has meaning.

Data isn't always the solution to the challenges we are facing

- Data provides a starting point from which a partnership can ask further questions.
- For those working with data, strategic tasks are important as they allow reporting to be adapted and tailored to local needs.
- By reflecting on issues of concern across the partnership (as Portsmouth did in relation to school exclusions), it is possible to identify actions which can be taken forward utilising resources which are not linked to analytical capacity.
- The triangulation of data, practice and strategic expertise and knowledge is central to enabling a partnership to understand the challenges they are facing in relation to child exploitation. For Portsmouth, considering how to include the experience of young people², families and communities, either directly or through the use of qualitative data sources, will support the partnership in ensuring that they are well placed to understand and respond effectively to the local picture.

Capacity

- The resources available to work with data differ from agency to agency within a partnership. At a strategic level, discussions around how to enable system-wide approaches to data are vital in order to ensure capacity is both understood and taken account of.
- Working differently can require strategic partnerships to stop doing things which they have previously done as a matter of routine. This is often apparent when thinking about approaches to data specifically as standard reports have often been developed over a number of years. Asking questions about what it is we want to know and where we might

² The Programme has been doing some focused work on meaningful engagement of young people, [see these resources](#).

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need to look for answers can support partnerships in thinking critically about the activities they may need to start, stop or change.

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

As part of this project, local colleagues identified a number of core reflections and themes which they wish to pick up and explore further in order to support them in taking forward activity in the long term:

- This work isn't just about data, we also need to think about how responses shaped by intelligence may need to shift.
- There is a need to think about capacity before embarking on any further activity. For work to be meaningful it should be ongoing and embedded throughout the partnership approach.
- There is a need to be clear about the parameters and limitations of this work at both strategic and operational levels.
- Consider what is within the gift of the partnership and promote and share current tools / approaches which already exist rather than looking to start from scratch with entirely new ways of working.

These reflections provide a basis for the local partnership to further develop their strategic approach to child exploitation and extra-familial harm. These reflections represent the significant local investment in thinking critically about current and future approaches, and demonstrate the care which has been taken by local strategic leaders to hear from and respond to operational colleagues who are responsible for implementing strategic direction.