

# Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

## Project Learning Report

<b>Details of Bespoke Support Project (BSP):</b>	
Partnership name:	Brighton Safeguarding Partnership, BHSCP (Brighton & Hove Safeguarding Children's Partnership)
Core partner agencies involved:	Voluntary Sector Organisations, Statutory Services, Local Authority, Police, Health
Number of local authority areas covered:	Single
Regional area:	South, Brighton & Hove City Council, Sussex Police
BSP size:	Unitary
BSP methodology / methodologies	Action Learning Sets, action research, organisational culture
Digital / face-to-face / Mixed delivery	Digital Delivery
Date BSP commenced:	November 2020
<b>Reasons why the local area requested the TCE Support Programme:</b>	
<p>The local area applicants submitted an application to the TCE Programme in 2020 with the initial aim of exploring how an <a href="#">Action Learning Set approach</a> could enhance more collaborative multi-agency working across the partnership.</p> <p>The local area described having well integrated pathways and structures in relation to child exploitation, but recognised that the 'landscape' in the local area had changed at an operational level and there was scope for working more closely with the voluntary sector. The core group wanted to explore from a strategic perspective how best to equip and support their teams to work at a systems level.</p>	
<b>Overall goal of BSP:</b>	
<p>The partnership aimed to identify how best to influence the system (partnership and processes) to respond to exploitation in a more contextual and critical approach through consideration of an Action Learning Set or similar reflective practice approaches. This included the partnership considering how to work more effectively together to support collective learning.</p> <p>Through refining and scoping the objectives for the BSP, the local area identified two of the most relevant emergent themes to explore in relation to thinking systemically about how strategic influence on child exploitation could be best enabled. These were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● transitional safeguarding</li> </ul>	

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- leadership culture.

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

The TCE delivery team used a range of reflective learning approaches to learn about and map the system dynamics across the local partnership:

- **Learning sessions**

The key themes identified (transitional safeguarding and leadership culture) were each explored in a learning session through the lens of local area learning from national serious case reviews on exploitation cases. The findings were then captured as learning in [two seven minute briefings](#) and shared with the core group. The Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for the BSP presented these, along with the local area report on learning from the serious case reviews, to the Safeguarding Executive panel.

- **Multi-level mapping canvas**

Throughout the project, TCE used [a mapping tool](#) to identify and sequence desired change goals and 'system level' challenges that the local area wanted to address or explore. The tool was helpful to clarify whether or not the challenges identified were situated within the local system (e.g., safeguarding partnership dynamic) or without (e.g., Covid-19) and therefore what was within the groups' gift to influence.

- **Action Learning Set approaches**

Given the interest in Action Learning Sets, principles of critical thinking were incorporated into workshop sessions and core group meetings. This facilitated reflection, identification of actionable opportunities and allowed for positive challenge.

Through this approach, small, scalable 'test & learn' opportunities were identified as well as recommendations from the core group and partnership for enabling change at a strategic level.

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

### 'Start Small, Start Somewhere'

Some of the challenges described by partners were 'deep' and systemic, such as safeguarding thresholds, short term commissioning arrangements and reductions in local area funding. Being beyond the scope of the local area to address – certainly in the short-term – can leave individuals feeling disempowered.

As a result, TCE worked with the local area to find smaller opportunities – incremental steps towards strategic change – that were within the influence and remit of partners (such as the Test & Learn opportunities mentioned above). In order to do this, slowing down and 'taking the time to reflect' was key, but extremely hard for strategic leaders (even outside of a pandemic) to achieve. This was due to the pressures of work, attending back-to-back

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meetings and forums, as well as holding the complexity of leadership in a multi-agency partnership.

A reflection from one session was that some of the opportunities were not difficult to identify and actually quite simple to action. The group demonstrated their ability to take resources identified in their reflective space<sup>1</sup> and test them in practice safely, often in parallel to existing pathways and processes. The ability to rapidly test and then hold retrospective evaluative discussions on impact were seen as both useful and achievable activities.

One example came early on. The core group were looking for ways to use existing forums to prompt more disruption activities in local area contexts. Consideration of readily available tools to support this process led the team to the [contextual conference tools](#) on the [Contextual Safeguarding Network](#). They agreed to run a short, safe 'test & learn' by adding an agenda item to meetings to discuss young people and concerns within the local area.

Other easily actionable innovations included introducing joint chairs for meetings being conducted online to facilitate smoother running.

## Hearing the voices of children and young people

Discussion of leadership culture highlighted the importance of being accountable to the young people they serve. The group reflected on how they will take forward a more participatory approach and identify opportunities for the voices of young people to be heard in strategic forums in future. This has been an area of focus for the TCE Programme and there are a [range of resources](#) about how to do this in a meaningful and ethical way.

## Significant learning and transferability from the BSP for other areas:

Four themes were identified as key learning from this BSP:

### 1. Exploitation is everyone's business

Treating child exploitation and extra-familial harm as a challenge that only exploitation-specific services can work with can act as a (cultural) barrier to providing support to young people at risk of or experiencing harm. Having the space to pause, reflect and acknowledge the intersectional nature and complexity of child exploitation, as well as what this means for all partners in a local area, can be beneficial. This includes thinking about these challenges against the context of local partnership planning and response. It was suggested that taking such an approach could unlock additional opportunities for positive disruption.

### 2. Changing mindsets in relation to transition

Local area participants reflected that 'multiple transitional moments' can occur for a young person travelling through local area systems, particularly in relation to child exploitation. It is well-established that transitions (such as primary to secondary education, end of service involvement or changes in living circumstances) can be challenging for young people. They may represent heightened risk<sup>2</sup> and therefore require more vigilance from partners.

<sup>1</sup> This included some of the resources available on the [TCE microsite](#).

<sup>2</sup> See for example [this strategic briefing](#) from Research in Practice on transitional safeguarding.

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Partners told us that 'reframing' their approach to transitions was an important way to galvanise disruptive opportunities: thinking strategically in terms of protecting the relationships<sup>3</sup> which are altered or affected by 'transitions' between young people and services, and being considerate and alert to wider 'transitional moments'.

## 3. Leadership culture

Local area participants reflected that leading teams, organisations or partnerships in the context of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements is a daunting challenge – even without the added complexity of child exploitation. Strategic leads may benefit from thinking differently about what we mean by 'leadership' and adopting some of the features of systems leadership:<sup>4</sup> being agile, adaptable, more humble or willing to share responsibility and acting more as an enabler, perhaps in opposition to traditional ideas of being decisive and acting with authority.

Longstanding cultural differences between partners were also highlighted as a challenge. When serious issues occurred, such as reports of structural racism or institutional bias, they were said to result in persistent feelings of mistrust. Again, this was reflected as a 'system level' challenge to overcome, perhaps one for strategic leaders to reflect on as they strive to empower multi-agency professionals to work together in a more positive and disruptive manner.

## 4. Reflecting on the cultural impacts of commissioning arrangements in relation to child exploitation

'Commissioning out' exploitation services can create an unhelpful perception that responding effectively to young people at risk of or experiencing exploitation requires unique or specialist skills. Whereas in practice, it is important that all those in the local area who might encounter these young people are able to respond appropriately. Hence the emphasis placed at strategic level on better partnership working with the voluntary sector who are providing commissioned services, in order to start closing any gaps of understanding and approach.

### Immediate reflections from the local area:

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: 3.11.21

Signed by Head of Delivery: E. FAIRGRIEVE

<sup>3</sup> This chimes with research that highlights the fundamental importance of the trusted relationship when working with children and young people, eg <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/building-trusted-relationships-for-vulnerable-children-and-young-people-with-public-services>

<sup>4</sup> See for example [https://thestaffcollege.uk/wp-content/uploads/VSC\\_Synthesis\\_exec\\_complete.pdf](https://thestaffcollege.uk/wp-content/uploads/VSC_Synthesis_exec_complete.pdf)