



Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children’s Social Care, Children and Young People’s Services, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report will demonstrate the work carried out by the Erase team and how it contributed to its overall mission during the reporting period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Executive summary

- 2 In Durham we have two specialist teams who work with children who are at risk due to contextual safeguarding: the Adolescent Safeguarding and Exploitation Team (ASET) and ERASE Teams.
- 3 The ASET vision is a future where young people feel safe beyond their own homes because their communities and our safeguarding system can, and will, protect them from harm. ASET provides assessment and care-planning in line with statutory safeguarding procedures and deliver interventions to young people who are victims or at risk of extra-familial harm or experiencing complex issues and comorbidities.
- 4 ASET will also provide specialist advice and guidance to workers where a young person and/or their siblings are already open to services. This will reduce the need to change workers while ensuring young people receive a specialist service. ASET are a specialist knowledge hub who will provide advice and guidance and support the delivery of evidence-based practice while upskilling of the wider workforce.
- 5 All work with families will be based on a solution focused, strengths based, and relation-based approach using the Signs of Safety framework for assessment and intervention.
- 6 The Erase Team’s mission is:
 - to help and support young people in reducing the risk of exploitation and missing from home;

- to provide young people with a safe space to share their views and wishes, while working holistically with other professionals to disrupt, safety plan and help increase safety and happiness for our young people;
- to support young people in building their understanding of exploitation, building their resilience, and empowering them to identify signs of grooming and exploitation;
- to support parents and carers to spot warning signs of exploitation, implement rules and boundaries, safety planning and understand how to respond to their young people to support in the aim of reducing the risk of exploitation and keep them safe”.

- 7 There are two functions of the Erase Team:
- (a) to fulfil the statutory responsibility for Return Home Interviews when children go missing from home/care; and,
 - (b) to provide interventions to those at high risk due to exploitation.
- 8 The Erase Team are considered the leads in contextual safeguarding in Children’s Services and therefore they provide advice and guidance to the workforce, particularly when children are assessed as medium and low risk.
- 9 In 2022/23, 386 children were assessed using the Child Exploitation Matrix; of those 65 were assessed as high, 223 as medium and 98 as low risk. When the Erase team have been involved for those assessed as high risk, the risk has reduced. Most children’s risk was reduced; however a small number are receiving ongoing interventions.
- 10 The team are now holding multi-agency mapping meetings which is a collaborative response to exploitation to ensure joint up working. There have been five mapping meetings in the past year, these will increase throughout 2023/24.
- 11 The team’s performance in relation to children who are missing is improving, but not yet meeting targets. The number of children missing reduced to 356 in 2022/23, but the number of missing episodes increased to 1,535. We aim to offer every child a return home interview and complete it within 72 hours.
- 12 Feedback that the team receive is very positive, one young person has written a testimonial to demonstrate the work that we do to support our young people.

Recommendations

13 Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to:

- (a) note the contents of this report.

Background

Staffing

- 14 The ERASE team is made up of one Team Manager, four Child Exploitation Workers and three Missing Coordinators. There have been some changes to the staffing team throughout 2022/23, however recruitment has been successful, and all vacancies have been filled.
- 15 The ASET Team consists of a Team Manager, Social Work Consultant and six Social Workers.
- 16 The team has access to a Therapeutic Social Worker from Full Circle. Their role is to offer a therapeutic lens when supervising plans for our young people, this happens through Supervision of Child Exploitation workers. The Therapeutic Social Worker is also available to offer clinical supervision to staff, providing a safe space to reflect on the complex and highly emotive work being carried out with some of our most complex young people in Durham. This helps to ensure staff have the resilience and skills they need to carry out this complex work.

Performance of Child Exploitation Service

- 17 The ASET Team is a social work team carrying out the statutory social work responsibilities. Referrals to the team come via the front door or transfer from Families First Teams.
- 18 Referrals can be made into the Erase Team by any professional working with a child. The referrer will complete an Exploitation Matrix, which is a specialist tool designed to understand more about each young person's vulnerabilities to exploitation. This is then submitted to a multi-agency Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker (CEVT) meeting where a team of professionals with expertise in exploitation will review the matrix and assess the level of risk (Low, Medium, or High).
- 19 When risk is assessed as Low/Medium the CEVT meeting will offer advice and guidance to the child or young person's social worker or lead professional, the child/young person will not directly receive any ongoing support or interventions through Erase. It is the responsibility of their allocated worker to assess and respond to risk of exploitation within their existing assessments, plans and reviews. However, the Erase team can offer advice and guidance to all professionals on an ongoing basis.
- 20 When children are assessed as High Risk at CEVT meeting, they will be allocated a Child Exploitation Worker (CE Worker) and be referred to Child Exploitation Group (CEG). These children will often be open to ASET Team, however not all children meet the team's criteria, therefore

it is important we share expertise of both teams across the whole service.

- 21 CE Workers build understanding of exploitation, building resilience and empower young people and their families. They do this by building relationships with young people and their families, provide intervention, education, and support; and by working collaboratively with all agencies to intervene and create safety for a child. They will gather and submit intelligence to police to build a bigger picture of exploitation in Durham. They will educate and upskill families on safety planning, grooming, healthy relationships, staying safe online and in the community, risk and risk awareness, sexual health, perpetrator strategies, self-esteem, and confidence building.
- 22 The purpose of CEG is to provide strategic oversight of those children who are at most risk of exploitation in Durham.
- 23 In 2022/23 the CEVT reviewed 386 referrals, of which 65 were assessed as High Risk, 223 were medium risk and 98 were low risk. More children were referred due to sexual exploitation than criminal exploitation. Only four children referred were perceived to be at risk of both criminal and sexual exploitation. These young people were assessed as medium risk.
- 24 The outcomes for young people reviewed as high risk between April 2022 and March 2023 then allocated an Erase CE Worker and the outcomes for where they are now in relation to their risk of CE:
 - 59% of those young people who were identified as being at high risk of CSE had risk reduced to low;
 - 17% have a reduced risk level of medium;
 - 24% remain high risk.

It must be considered that those young people reviewed as high risk of CE in Q4 have had a limited amount of intervention since the point of being allocated a CE Interventions Worker, therefore there is still opportunity for this risk to reduce.

- 25 For young people who are identified as at high and moderate risk of sexual exploitation at CEVT and are in the process of transitioning to adulthood, referral advice to Changing Lives is provided to professionals currently supporting the young person. Changing Lives work with young people post 18 years old and can support with a multitude of issues. The CE team have a good working relationship with Changing Lives and support one another. Changing Lives professionals are invited to attend CEVT and CEG. If our CE workers don't feel that

the risk of exploitation has reduced enough by a young person's 18th birthday, they will make a referral to Changing Lives and to support the transition, as we know that exploitation does not end when children reach adulthood. Unfortunately, we are still in the process of identifying support for those at risk of criminal exploitation, especially specialised support for male victims.

- 26 41 referrals were re-referrals, which is 12% (2018-present day).
- 27 The CE Interventions Workers are now using the Teen Star tool with the young people they are working with. This has helped to illustrate the wider outcomes for the young people who are receiving support from the ERASE CE Team. They are mapped against different aspects of their life: drug and alcohol use, wellbeing, safety, structure and education, behaviour, and family using a scale where 0 is poor and 5 represents the best possible outcome. Analysis of the tool tells us that the areas young people have particularly noted an improvement are drug & alcohol and wellbeing, although there is a slight improvement in all areas, which is positive.

Mapping Meetings

- 28 In Durham we hold regular partnership mapping meetings, that allows professionals to see both risks and safety within peer networks and social circles, as well as in spaces and places outside of their home. These currently take place once every 2/3 months however, we look to improve this and are now starting to hold mapping meetings once a month.
- 29 Through carrying out peer mapping exercises, practitioners can identify and understand the nature and extent of the harm outside of the young person home, The aim is to bring together those tasked with safeguarding and those responsible for disruption and enforcement to ensure a joined-up response.
- 30 Five mapping meetings took place in 2022/23. Though only five larger scale mapping meetings have taken place so far, we are increasing these in frequency. Our child exploitation intervention workers also conduct peer mapping sessions with all young people they work with.

Performance of the Missing From Home (MFH) Team comparisons 2021/22 vs 2022/23.

- 31 The total number of missing children (CIN, CP and CiC) reduced from 402 in 2021/22 to 356 in 2022/23. However, the number of episodes increased from 1,488 to 1,535. The average number of hours children were missing increased from 19 to 23. The most common age of children missing is 15, which has come down from 16. The number of

return home interviews offered increased from 97% to 99% this year, offering young people with a safe space to share their views and wishes, However, the number accepted reduced from 71% to 69% and the number completed reduced from 71% to 68%. The number of return home interviews completed within 72 hours jumped from 24% to 49%.

- 32 For children in care we saw an increase in the number of children going missing from 125 to 142 in 2022/23. The number of missing episodes increased from 868 to 992. The average number of hours our children in care were missing increased from 20 to 23 in the past year. The average age reduced from 17 to 15. We offered 2% more return home interviews (99%) but the number accepted dipped from 71% to 68%, which was the same for percentage completed. However, when they were completed, there was a significant jump from 28% completed in 72 hours to 58%.
- 33 For the 69.6% of young people who accepted a return to home interview (RTHI), 99.1% of these took place. This means nine out of 1,045 young people did not receive the RTHI. When further investigated, the following reasons were identified:
- 34 Three children - RTHI did take place however the form was created on a consecutive missing episode. One form was used to cover multiple missing episodes.
- 35 Five children - RTHI is recorded on LCS – Data is incorrect.
- 36 Multiple attempts made to make contact were unsuccessful – Recorded incorrectly by worker on LCS.
- 37 The data tells us that an overall of 21 young people (-6 CIC) were not offered a RTHI, further investigation shows that in some of these cases, RTHI were completed but completed as part of a cluster of missing episodes where LCS is not able to distinguish this. Other reasons mirror those as listed above.

Summary of data for Children missing from our Care, comparison from 2021/22 to 2022/23

- 38 The data tells us that children in our care receive the same service, in terms of timeliness and response to return home interviews than those who live at home with family.
- 39 Compared to the same period last year, there has been an increase in the amount of young people who are looked after being reported missing, and a decrease for those who remain living with family. We recognise that push and pull factors are more prominent for young people who are looked after and in temporary placements. We

acknowledge that identifying suitable long-term accommodation for young people has been a challenge, resulting in changes in placement and care staff. We know that this increases the risk of young people going missing until their forever home is sourced. While those young people who are supported by family members are likely to have a stronger sense of belonging and networks of support to further disrupt and minimise worries around missing episodes.

- 40 Young people receiving a RTHI within 72 hours has improved quite significantly, over doubling the amount being completed this year in comparison to last year. This area has been a strong focus for the team throughout the last year and changes that have been made can be evidenced in the outcomes. This will continue to be an area of development.

April 2022 – March 2023 – Declined RTHI

- 41 The data shows that in the last year 358 children had a total of 1537 missing episodes; it also shows that 460 RTHI were declined by 138 children.
- 42 In terms of Children Looked After, there were 142 children with a total of 992 missing episodes. RTHI were not completed on 310 missing episodes which equates to 62 children.

Frequently Missing

- 43 The most frequent missing (top 11) Children Looked After make-up a total of 335 missing episodes. The table below outlines the number of missing episodes, the number in which were declined and %.

Young Person	Number of missing episodes	Declined	%
1	107	67	62
2	56	18	32
3	49	13	26
4	44	10	23
5	39	23	60
6	38	16	42
7	22	7	32
8	17	5	29
9	15	4	27
10	14	7	50
11	14	8	57

- 44 As you can see, the young person with the most missing episodes is significantly high and the declined from this young person missing periods, makes up 22% of all CLA declined RTHI's. It must be noted that this particular young person often returns then goes missing within hours. This pattern of missing impacts on the RTHI being able to be completed.
- 45 Current practice means one RTHI would be completed capturing several missing episodes; currently LCS does not capture this. Feedback from the Police Child Exploitation Team is there has been a significant improvement in quality of information captured by the RTHI workers. The analysis of information has improved, which has allowed better insight into risks YP are exposed to when missing, highlight hot spots and making correlations between YP missing at the same time or with the same people, where before with different workers completing the RTHIs it would not be possible to make these links.
- 46 There is a weekly CE Team discussion with the Police re: who we are most worried about that week, this ensures there is effective sharing of concerns and identified next steps. We are now recording post codes of where the young person went missing from and where they were found. We are also recording info re. school to ensure there is a more holistic understanding of the current worries and strengths for the young person.

Development Activity

- 47 **Governance:** ongoing work with the DSCP and Strategic CEG to align the practice within the Erase team to the strategic vision. Partnership developments of Harm outside the Home, awareness of the Government Response to the Care review and recommendations expected in the autumn. Work within children services to ensure the expertise of the Erase team supports the wider service. Informing the development of the practice guide and procedures for Harm Outside the Home for Children Services.
- 48 **Resources / Staffing:** work is ongoing to monitor demand and resources within both exploitation and missing. The work of the Missing Project has evidence demand required an increase in staffing to achieve the 72hr turn around and work on recruitment is progressing. Although there have been vacancies throughout the year, they have been successfully filled.
- 49 **Child Exploitation:** currently caseloads are high with some workers holding 20+ cases, it is recognised that such high caseloads do not provide the opportunity to build effective working relationship with young people at risk of being exploited and does not allow the intensive relational practice model to be embedded. We are in the process of

looking at increasing the resource within the child exploitation element team with a view that caseloads will reduce to less than ten.

- 50 **Missing Project:** Action Plan, this is an ongoing piece of work that involves the partnership, the action plan sets out clear development for the team in respect of quality of RTHI information, effective information sharing and disruption that reduces and disrupts the frequency and length of missing episodes. This work cuts across children services and into Early Help.
- 51 **Performance and Quality Assurance:** the missing power BI dashboard has been developed and it allows for the interrogation of performance in respect of missing as is evidenced in the detail of the report above. Further work is ongoing with the systems team to look at how we capture the impact of the work undertaken in missing on the child. This involves looking at case notes / forms that will inform further reporting. The same work is happening in respect of Child Exploitation. Performance data will be reported to monthly Quality and Performance Clinics where the team will be measured against targets set, with Head of Service oversight.
- 52 **Service Development:** a service specification is being developed with the team looking at their vision to delivering outstanding services to children who go missing and / or are being exploited in Durham. This will include developing the procedures for the team and performance measures.
- 53 **Collaboration and Co Production:** work with the Children in care Council and the Youth Council to look at how we improve the service to meet the needs of children and young people.

Main implications

- 54 No implications of note.

Conclusion

- 55 Children and young people in Durham who are at risk of extra-familial harm continue to be supported through innovative specialist services. These children benefit from multi-agency ownership of risk through the child exploitation group (CEG) and where risk is identified as high, review of children's outcomes tells us that risk reduces over time with specialist intervention. This work needs to further develop, to improve performance for children who are missing. To broaden the offer of support to those at low/medium risk of extra-familial harm to prevent further escalation. There is a multi-agency owned plan to support these improvements, which is regularly reviewed.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

Authors

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

No implications.

Finance

No implications.

Consultation

Children and young people are involved in consultation wherever necessary. Young People are being asked to consult on development of RTHI paperwork. They will also be consulted in future on 'what good practice looks like'.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

No implications.

Climate Change

No implications.

Human Rights

No implications.

Crime and Disorder

No implications.

Staffing

No implications.

Accommodation

No implications.

Risk

Effective support for children who are missing or at risk outside of the home is essential to reducing risk to children and young people in Durham. The developments identified within the report will support practice to go further in keeping children safe in the community.

Procurement

No implications