



Reality Check Visit Merseyside Police

A report produced by the
Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee
July 2019 Final Report



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1. Introduction

Further to the programme of Reality Check visits introduced by the Children & Families Overview and Scrutiny in 2017, members decided to extend the visits from Local Authority departments to the partner agencies involved with the safeguarding of Children and Young People. A previous visit to the health partners at St. Catherine's Hospital in December 2018 gave Members an opportunity to look at the concerns raised and make recommendations aimed at improving communications between departments. The success of this and positive feedback received from Officers and front-line staff prompted Members to request a visit to Merseyside Police to gain an understanding of their place within Multi Agency Safeguarding and the concerns highlighted within the Ofsted Monitoring visit on 27th September 2018.

Police and children's social care staff do not share information well enough or plan together to ensure that children's needs can be met in a timely way because criminal investigations sometimes take priority over the safeguarding plan for the child. This has resulted in delays in children's needs being assessed fully and met – Ofsted 2018

Further concerns had also been raised at Committee regarding the domestic abuse figures highlighted in Performance Reports.

With these concerns in mind, a visit to the various Merseyside Police teams involved with Safeguarding, Domestic Abuse and Early Help was organized.

2. Merseyside Police – Birkenhead Police Station

2.1 Overview

Members visited the Protecting Vulnerable People Unit (PVPU) domestic abuse team at Birkenhead Police Station and met with the Detective Inspector on duty. This team consists of 4 Police Staff Inspectors, 15 Detective Constables, 3 Detective Sergeants and a Detective Inspector who are responsible for investigating Domestic Abuse throughout Wirral.

The PVPU unit safeguard victims through a multi-agency approach which includes independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA), Social Services and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

The team targets and manages Domestic Abuse suspects through work with the Tactical Team and Integrated Offender Management Team, as well as the probation service.

Definition of Domestic Abuse:

Domestic Abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- a) Psychological
- b) Physical
- c) Sexual
- d) Financial
- e) Emotional

The department also investigates harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Forced Marriage and honour based abuse. The department also covers stalking, whether the parties are related or not.

Domestic Abuse is allocated to the department based on its Investigation Allocation Model (IAM) scoring and Merit Scoring (Bronze, Silver and Gold).

2.2 Member and Officer Discussion

- Members queried how sympathetic Merseyside Police were to offer support and collaborating with Children's services and other Council Services. Officers advised that they both see and work with children who are potential victims of abuse, exploitation and are looking at the barriers involved with identifying this. There is now real importance on listening to the voice of the child within Domestic Violence incidents, whereas previously less emphasis has been placed on the impact of abuse.
- Safeguarding children online is now a priority, and monitored by both Merseyside police and other agencies, however this is difficult to monitor because of the speed apps and websites are uploaded. In one instance, a 9-year-old had managed to upload an app

officers were not aware existed. Members expressed concern about this but appreciated how difficult it is to monitor the internet.

- Members asked about cases – often CID will work on domestic abuse cases, and there are 500+ cases at Level 2 investigations. There are currently 5 constables carrying 20 prosecutions. It was noted that a lot of police work is reactive, sometimes officers need to contact Social Services for information, it was agreed that it can be frustrating to be out the loop and it is sometimes difficult to make quick contact out of hours. However, it is now getting better and there is more collaboration between Merseyside Police and Children’s services. In cases where there needs to be counter investigations, EDT will be contacted and there is constant contact with Children’s services.
- Questions were asked about situations where vulnerable children required emergency removal – Members asked if there were ever instances where Police Officers were literally left holding the baby? There are times when cases are stacking up with both Merseyside Police and with the Emergency Duty Team. In some cases, a P.C will need to sit with children until Children’s Services can assist. If there is clearly a significant risk, Children will be taken to a Police Station. Officers are advised to use discretion and do what is needed to remove the child from risk or harm. It was noted that there are never any guaranteed outcomes. Every case is different & children’s services will give information when asked. However, it is sometimes difficult to get information when a crime is in action as the situation can move quickly.
- Officers deal with family members in location, and if anything needs cross checking then Police Officers will speak with Social Workers. It was noted that whilst MASH do have procedures, officers often deal with situations in an AD-HOC manner during out of hours situations.
- Members asked about standardized procedures and it was noted that MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) had been useful for making links. Officers responded by advising that standardized procedures and a coordinated approach are good for building relationships.
- Members expressed concerns regarding the last monitoring visit, Officers pointed out that capacity issues did cause problems. There may be meetings scheduled with families and Children’s services, but the Domestic Violence Officer may not be available due to other priorities.

- However, evidence is collated via the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors at the Solar Campus. Merseyside Police do ask for feedback – other forces do use dip samples to look at specific crimes. Officers advised that there has been a shift in relationships between IDVA and information sharing with MASH. There had been little representation from Children’s Services at MARAC, but this was needed.

3. Child Exploitation Team – Solar Campus

3.1 Overview

This team is known as ‘Compass’ and consists of officers from Children’s Services, Merseyside Police and Catch 22. The team investigates all allegations of Child Sexual and Criminal Exploitation in Wirral. Members met the team at the Solar Campus in Wallasey, where they are based. They work closely with Children’s Social Care, holding daily meetings to review new intelligence and work collectively to safeguard victims. The nature of this work is complex and often problematic due to some victim’s reluctance to engage with services, however the location of the team within Children’s services allows for effective information sharing.

Members received an overview of the service from officers and the presentation is attached as appendix 1. of this report.

Officers advised members that they are trying to achieve the 4 P’s:

- **Prepare** – Understand the issues and risks that face Children across Wirral and those Children Looked After who live out of Borough.
- **Prevent** – Children being targeted and groomed by perpetrators of exploitation.
- **Protect** – Those that have been exploited and support them to speak out.
- **Pursue** – perpetrators of this abuse to reduce the risk of harm to Wirral Children.

The team’s ambitions are to support victims and vulnerable people, tackle serious and organized crime, improve public confidence to reassure communities and support victims through the judicial system. They also aim to change the way the public and professional think about some of our most vulnerable and disengaged young people. Compass is to be a team young people are proud to be associated with and is synonymous with feeling safe in Wirral.

- To achieve this, they aim to do the following:
- Support professional who have trusted relationships with young people to educate them in understanding the signs and indicators and giving them the tools to move away from exploitative situations.
- Provide information to the relevant agencies who can disrupt criminal activity

- Undertake direct work with young people who have no identified trusted relationship
- Build up an evidence-based pack of resources to share with professionals working with Children
- Build up intelligence received from professional to identify themes and trends
- Investigate reported crime and target offenders
- Improve information sharing across Police and Council Boundaries.

Definition of Child Exploitation (CE)

Child Exploitation is the act of using a minor child for Profit, Labour, Sexual Gratification or some other personal or financial advantage.

3.2 Member and Officer Discussion

- There is a 72-hour target to find missing Children. Officers are that repeat ‘runners’ are vulnerable to exploitation and Members were reassured that action is being taken across Merseyside to deal with this.
- Officers look at monthly briefings, Integrated Front Door (IFD) referrals, missing children, child exploitation incidents. Catch 22 then triangulate this information to refer to Central Police.
- The officers in attendance were conscious that we can’t do things individually, and when conducting visits, it is often best to do this with multi-agencies. However, it is often the younger workers who can connect better with children and young people.
- Concerns were raised by members regarding ‘County Lines’ – this a form of child criminal exploitation whereby gangs and organized crime networks exploit children to sell drugs.

The name 'County Lines' comes from the movement of children through Counties to move and sell drugs. Gangs then use a network of mobile phone lines to conduct business. The Children's Commissioner estimates that 46,000 children in England who are involved in gang activity.

- Officers advised that whilst info is now being shared, there have been problems identifying children at risk to gangs and criminal organisations. 'County Lines' and Modern Slavery are new concepts to the CPS (Crown Prosecution Service).
- One of the main barriers to protecting children is the huge anti 'grass' culture in Merseyside, which is embedded and hard to break down.
- It was noted that culturally, people do not see drug dealers as child abusers. Members asked whether agencies were on board and saw the children as victims. Officers responded by noting that there was now a lot of discussion around Child Criminal Exploitation and protecting victims. Previously, only Social Services have seen the Children as victims. It was agreed that collectively, emphasis should be placed on deconstructing the myths. People see kids dealing drugs or engaging in violent crime, but they don't always see the adults behind the scenes.
- Members asked if people see criminally exploited children as 'lesser' victims (compared to CSE). It was agreed that this is often the case, but the mindset needs to change.
- It was confirmed by officers that Merseyside is one of the biggest exporters of Children outside the London Boroughs with children being sent all over the country. Geographically Merseyside is an excellent location for drug trafficking; it has docks, airports, is close to the M6 and easy access to Ireland, ROI and other major UK cities. Criminals in Merseyside have cultivated an excellent business model and 'County Lines' as a symptom of this.
- Officers advised that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) used to see children as a mechanism to prosecution. This mindset is changing but thought needs to be given to enabling court proceedings without using Children - victimless prosecutions. Additionally, there was support from both Members and officers that the CPS should be including modern slavery charges alongside drugs charges.
- Officers discussed the aftermath of Operation Corzola (the official name for the grooming gang in Wirral who targeted and groomed schoolgirls between 2010 and 2016). these victims of this are now in their early 20's. Members asked how do we

support children in the aftermath of exploitation? It was agreed that there is sometimes a drive to reinvent the wheel, however building up trust with professionals is often the most effective method.

- Historically public services are good at reacting however there now needs to be more emphasis placed on prevention. Services needs to get ahead of the curve and look at picking up patterns. As an example, officers are looking to work with McDonalds to disrupt congregated kids. This is not just an initiative to remove anti-social behavior; young people meet there as it offers free Wi-Fi, so it is easy for criminal gangs to target vulnerable young people.
- Members wanted reassurance that the issue of CE was being looked at more tactically. For example, if a local park is seen as an issue can officers visit and try to find out what is going on? Officers replied that Child Exploitation is now more transient. They work closely with neighbourhood teams, Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) and Multi Agency Threat Harm Risk (MATHR) teams
- It was agreed that Social Media is a huge issue. There are currently no procedures in place to respond to social media and child exploitation with the 7 Local Authorities within the Merseyside City Region.

4. Early help – Solar Campus

4.1 Overview

The members met a team of Police Community Support Officers and Local Authority staff who identify and support vulnerable people who have either been victims of crime or high demand generators in terms of needing agency support. The team develop plans to reduce individuals' vulnerabilities often referring them to third sector organizations or working alongside them coaching them to overcome their challenges. Members were presented with a Poem by Herbert Nehrlich 'The Ambulance down in the valley' which is attached as appendix 1 to this report, as well as several case studies which highlight the importance and effects of early help.

The team consists of:

6 PCSO's – The initiate contact and obtain consent due to the information being owner by the police

2 Local Authority Family Support Workers – they deliver interventions alongside the PSCO's

1 Family Wellbeing Co-Ordinator – provided by the Local Authority. They are currently developing the Adults Anger Management Course and a Men’s Mental Health Support Group with 2 of the PSCO’s

1 Local Authority Health Coordinator – writes recommendations, allocates work, provides reflective case supervision, attends daily CE and DA meetings and leads on team development

The approach is to reduce the impact of Domestic Abuse on Children and reduce further incidence from occurring. This is done by working with both parents and the completion of the DASH form (Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and Honour Based Violence).

Officers then immediately start work on ensuring the safety of the victim through Target Hardening (this aims to enable victims to stay in their homes by improving security, adding alarms and putting in measures to reduce the risk of arson), Adult and Child Safety Plans and Non-Molestation Orders.

Parents are then referred to the Gateway Programme delivered by the Local Authority. Weekly drop in sessions at Tomorrow’s Women Wirral are also facilitated by a PSCO and FSW.

Due to centers aim of Tomorrow’s Women Wirral being a safe place for Women (some of whom are perpetrators), children, men and transgender officers are not able to attend, so male or transgender officers must signpost victims there. As such, officers will now be providing a weekly drop in an appointment service from the Family Support Unit and Solar Campus. This will enable officers to support families and engage across the service. The Local Authority are also funding a further 2 family Support Workers, who will be able to provide one to one Gateway Services for people unable to attend the Courses.

Children Age 0-5 parents are encouraged to attend the early years’ service and attend groups including the gateway programme, which has creche facilities.

Children age 5 – 11 are referred onto the Leapfrog Programme

Young People 11 – 18 are referred to counselling through Response and Butterflies, however there is on average a 6-month waiting list for all the above services.

Safer Wirral Hub have recognized a need in the 11 – 18-year old’s who have experienced Domestic Violence and have Anger issues. Officers have facilitated an anger management course with Barnardo’s which is held during the school holidays (The course is open to all young people with not solely for young people who have experienced Domestic Violence). Officers are currently developing this project to include a bespoke, whole family, holistic approach offering support for parents and siblings as well as the young person receiving treatment.

This includes one to one counselling for the Young Person, parenting skills, art therapy and Gateway/family support for contributing issues such as housing and debt. Signposting and referrals to services such as WEB and The Hive will also be made during this process.

If a longer-term approach is required, consent is gained to reassign to Community Matters for an EHAT to be completed with the family the supported by TAF. Also provided is a four-week DVPO support package in place, which can also support children on a Child Protection Plan.

Officers have recognized that there is a gap in provision to undertake work with the perpetrator, which they feel is having an impact of their ability to stop repeat incidents. This is due to resources and training constraints; however, officers would be keen to deliver a preventative Programme/Course if funding can be sourced.

The Families and young people officers work with all receive bespoke support however this is dependent on consent and willingness to work with support staff. Regardless of whether consent is given, officers will receive correspondence signposting to services and SWH is always open to them in the future if they change their minds.

Both PSCO's and FSW's work with the FSU to step up or down cases and receive the correct level of support. Cases can be open to both services at the same time, receiving seamless interventions.

4.2 SWH developments since April 2019

Domestic violence

Officers have identified a need for the Domestic Violence Drop in service to be expanded from Tomorrow's Women Wirral. There are several factors to this. Children are unable to access the building, so this creates issues for women without childcare. Men are also unable to attend, which means male victims of Domestic Violence have no support. TWW is the only location servicing the whole of the Wirral. The premises itself has become so big; officers feel it is harder to engage with service users in a confidential manner. Concerns have also been raised to staff about the TWW application form – feedback from service users indicates it is very long, intrusive and does not include DASH assessments.

As such, officers are facilitating a weekly drop in at the solar campus on Wednesdays. This will support the FSU on MARAC days as it means there is still the capacity to ensure phones are answered. The drop-in service will also be open to Male visitors attending to access support.

Officers are also leasing with NEO Community. This is a nonprofit based in Rock Ferry aiming to establish a drop in for male and female victims of Domestic violence. Neo's 75 volunteers have completed mentoring courses through Involve North West. Once drop-ins are up and running officers will invite Legal Advisors to attend.

Men's Mental Health Support Group

Currently in development, officers have been liaising with Liverpool FC, Everton FC and Tranmere Rovers FC to deliver support. The officers involved with this group all have extensive experience in delivering counselling, anger management and behavioral change programmes.

Officers are looking into the possibility of co-locating the group with NEO in Rock Ferry. This would significantly reduce set-up costs, whilst allowing NEO (as a registered charity) to access grants the Local Authority can't.

The aim is to enhance the limited offer in Wirral as well as supporting engagement to Men's web, Wirral Mind and Tranmere in the community. Officers hope that through partnership work they can provide preventative services to Wirral at no cost to the public purse.

4.5 Member and Officer Discussion

- Officers explained that the whole early help model aims to help people before they "fall off the cliff". They aim to help the victims of domestic violence, but also to stop further incidents. Officers aim to do this holistically, NMO's are implemented and assessments made, and then victims are referred to the Gateway Programme and Tomorrow's Women Wirral.
- Officers discussed the anger management courses offered by Bernardo's and confirmed that there is an added anger management course for adults, which helps pick apart childhood trauma.
- Members queried the use of CAMHS, and it was confirmed that they do use them. Young People can utilize and be open with both CAMHS and early help schemes.
- It was confirmed during discussion that most of the referrals are received through police call outs and then streamed through the Integrated Front Door.
- One of the key benefits of working with Merseyside Police PCSO's is that they can attend premises without consent and subsequently gain the consent needed to give support. PCSO's can also use the visit to check for other matters pertaining to Merseyside Police. Previously to gain access, officers had to send a letter to arrange a visit so the ability to send a PCSO's has opened doors in the literal sense.
- Members commented that this was beneficial to partnership working, but queried how this worked within a culture of not talking to the police? Officers confirmed that the

presence of a PCSO, people are more compliant – they are asked to engage or risk re-referral.

- Officers highlighted their concerns regarding the lack of perpetrator courses in Merseyside. They noted that the reduction in Children’s Centre’s has affected this – as previously there were perpetrator schemes in place. There are issues with the lack of support in this area, especially as the reasons/ causes for domestic abuse are so varied. Some perpetrators are ex-services and have PTSD whilst others have in-built attitudes.
- Members were concerned to hear that perpetrators rarely have just the one victim; it is not uncommon to find the victims of perpetrators scattered throughout the borough. Officers confirmed again that they were keen to implement an anger management course but would need funding securing.
- Members queried if there were any issues with partnership working. Officers thought it was getting better – previously “you don’t realise what you don’t know’; you only see a situation in time”. Officers confirmed that despite the high demand demonstrators, they enjoyed coming to work. They now have links with multiple departments and partnership working is being embedded. It was agreed by officers that they needed more input from health and adult Mental Health Services and access to their systems where possible.

5. Summary and suggested recommendations.

5.1 Merseyside Police

- Due to time constraints, members did not feel they explored this area sufficiently, and did not get the opportunity to meet the whole team. It is agreed there is still significant work to be done by committee around Domestic Abuse and police participation within Safeguarding Children in Wirral.
- Officers offered a further visit to the team at Birkenhead Police Station, and the members in attendance were especially interested to meet more front-line staff involved with Domestic Violence.
- It has been agreed that a workshop or an in-depth report be presented to committee as to give more insight into Domestic Violence in Wirral

5.2 Child Exploitation Team

- It was agreed that the exploitation of children is a huge issue, and that there are multiple factors involved. Members have expressed concerns that previously approaches to this seems and awareness of County Lines is patchy.
- Members agreed that the issues surrounding CCE should be made a regional priority, and a message should be sent out from the top that 'Wirral is not open for Businesses''.
- If agreed by Committee Child Criminal Exploitation, 'County Lines' and Social Media could be added to the Work-Programme in the next municipal year.

5.3 Early Help

- Members understand the importance of preventative work when working with families and children, and commended the work put in so far. They were reassured to hear that officers felt that partnership working was bearing fruit.
- Regarding 'community matters' Members agreed that the 3rd sector are very good at identifying need and spending their budget effectively. However, this is positive if are they suitably trained to identify and manage risks effectively. Members felt that 3rd sector organisations should be visited as part of the reality check programme in the next municipal year.

- Overview and Scrutiny are unable to make any recommendations that puts financial pressure on council reserves, however Members recognize the benefits of, and would support the funding of a perpetrator course should it become available.

5.5 Overall

- This visit highlighted strongly the complex nature of cross- agency and partnership working. Officers were engaged and enthusiastic about their own areas and their dedication was visible to members.
- Members appreciated the work the Child Exploitation and Early Teams were undertaking and were pleased that the co-location of staff at the Solar Campus was helping with partnership work.
- Members still have some concerns regarding the participation and differing priorities of Merseyside Police; however, they understood the very real pressures the services were under. It was agreed that this would be monitored by Committee and members may request further targeted visits to gain more knowledge.

6. Attendees

Councillors:

Cllr Tom Usher (Chair)

Cllr David Burgess-Joyce

Cllr Chris Carubia

Cllr Jean Robinson

Anna Perrett (Scrutiny Officer)

Officers:

Merseyside Police:

Det Ins Phil Atkinson

CSE Team:

DC Kerri Ward

Vicki Powell (Team Manger – Compass)

Early Help Team:

Gillian Jones (Early Help Co-Ordinator)

Brain O'Hare (PSCTO)

Appendix 1:

The Ambulance Down in the Valley Joseph Malins (1895)

'Twas a dangerous cliff, as they freely confessed,
Though to walk near its crest was so pleasant;
But over its terrible edge there had slipped
A duke and full many a peasant.
So the people said something would have to be done,
But their projects did not at all tally;
Some said, "Put a fence 'round the edge of the cliff,"
Some, "An ambulance down in the valley."

But the cry for the ambulance carried the day,
For it spread through the neighbouring city;
A fence may be useful or not, it is true,
But each heart became full of pity
For those who slipped over the dangerous cliff;
And the dwellers in highway and alley
Gave pounds and gave pence, not to put up a fence,
But an ambulance down in the valley.

"For the cliff is all right, if you're careful," they said,
"And, if folks even slip and are dropping,
It isn't the slipping that hurts them so much
As the shock down below when they're stopping."
So day after day, as these mishaps occurred,
Quick forth would those rescuers sally
To pick up the victims who fell off the cliff,
With their ambulance down in the valley.

Then an old sage remarked: "It's a marvel to me
That people give far more attention
To repairing results than to stopping the cause,
When they'd much better aim at prevention.
Let us stop at its source all this mischief," cried he,
"Come, neighbours and friends, let us rally;
If the cliff we will fence, we might almost dispense
With the ambulance down in the valley."

"Oh he's a fanatic," the others re-joined,
"Dispense with the ambulance? Never!
He'd dispense with all charities, too, if he could;
No! No! We'll support them forever.
Aren't we picking up folks just as fast as they fall?
And shall this man dictate to us? Shall he?
Why should people of sense stop to put up a fence,
While the ambulance works in the valley?"

But the sensible few, who are practical too,
Will not bear with such nonsense much longer;
They believe that prevention is better than cure,
And their party will soon be the stronger.
Encourage them then, with your purse, voice, and pen,
And while other philanthropists dally,
They will scorn all pretence, and put up a stout fence
On the cliff that hangs over the valley.

Better guide well the young than reclaim them when old,
For the voice of true wisdom is calling.
"To rescue the fallen is good, but 'tis best
To prevent other people from falling."
Better close up the source of temptation and crime
Than deliver from dungeon or galley;
Better put a strong fence 'round the top of the cliff
Than an ambulance down in the valley.