

Multi-Agency Deep Dive Audit into how agencies in the Wakefield District respond to children involved in Serious Youth Violence

June 2024

7 POINT BRIEFING

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SUMMARY

As part of ongoing Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) preparations in Wakefield, the Wakefield Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) undertook a deep dive multi-agency audit on the current JTAI theme of Serious Youth Violence to examine the effectiveness of the district's arrangements. The audit considered four cases involving children in Wakefield who were all known to Youth Justice Services and were convicted of an offence with a Police Gravity Matrix of five or above.

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WHAT IS MEANT BY SERIOUS YOUTH VIOLENCE?

Serious Youth Violence is defined by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) as 'any Drug, Robbery or Violence Against the Person offence that has a gravity score of five or more'. Examples of this include Section 18 Grievous Bodily Harm offences, Robbery and Supply of Class A Drugs.

Serious Youth Violence is major social concern that has dramatic effects on the lives of children and families and evidence from research by the Youth Endowment Fund shows that across the UK, it is reducing children's sense of safety and wellbeing.

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AUDIT FINDINGS - AREAS WORKING WELL

- **Recognition** of the concerns and vulnerabilities affecting the cohort of children in respect of exploitation, substance misuse and mental health was positive with the appropriate referrals made to specialist services including Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (FCAMHS) and the Child Exploitation Team (CET). Where there had been instances of domestic abuse in one family, a referral was made to the Families Achieving Change Team (FACT) to provide intensive support to re-build and strengthen family relationships.
- **Assessment and planning** were strong with appropriate risk assessments in place early which included historical information alongside the child's known current needs and with clear action to address the issues. Assessments were responsive to new information when received and there was reference to existing plans in place. Communication and joint planning with parents, where appropriate, was good and there was evidence of a trauma informed approach.
- The **Voice of the Child and Family** were clearly evident in the cases audited where they were attending planning meetings to set out and agree the plan of work. In one example, a paediatric consultant was able to capture information in respect of how the child felt, his thoughts, likes and dislikes and triangulate to share that information with his Youth Justice Services (YJS) worker; this was done in a time-limited setting which can often present its own challenges.
- There existed positive and effective professional relationships between case managers/workers and the children and families they supported which further enable their voices to be heard.
- **Interventions** offered for the cohort of children audited were effective and included victim empathy and Education, Training and Employment (ETE) work being completed.
- Direct interventions were offered via monthly home visits and this work enabled children's wishes and feelings to be captured. In one example, services focussed specifically on supporting a child to deal with their anxiety and emotional wellbeing via a specific screening tool. This has resulted in increased confidence, self-esteem and increased empathy towards others and no further offending behaviour.
- **Joint Working** was positive and evident through information sharing at an early stage and professional curiosity and appropriate challenge to triangulate information and ensure it was shared with the relevant professionals.
- There was effective communication and support provided to a school by YJS to promote the child's attendance to help them remain in school on a full timetable. Good joint working was applicable between parents and practitioners with support given to one family to improve housing arrangements which enabled the child's carers to better protect and care for him.
- For some children the **impact** of the support they received from services and actions taken have been significant in ensuring positive outcomes for them. For one child in the audit, there was no further offending behaviour, he was able to sit all of his exams and was seen to be engaging with a more supportive peer group.
- Where services specifically focussed on helping one of the children to deal with anxiety and emotional wellbeing, the impact of this was a notable improvement in his confidence and self-esteem and being more empathetic. Intervention equipped him with the skills to be able to respond to conflict in a more constructive manner rather than being reactionary.

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AUDIT FINDINGS – AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- The audit identified that where **recognition and referrals** were of good quality, in one example there was a delay in the assessment and in contacting other agencies for information due to a parent's reluctance to work with an assigned practitioner. It was identified that where there is a lack of engagement on the part of parent(s) which can lead to drift and delay, other services or solutions are considered and consulted at the earliest opportunity.
- There was limited recognition of the children within the audit from a health perspective more broadly, particularly in the context of GPs and their awareness of the current risks. GPs are not always considered to be a key agency to involve and there is potentially a need for a culture shift around this approach.
- There was limited involvement and visibility in **assessment and planning** with fathers and male carers in some instances. There were opportunities to capture the views and voice of fathers, particularly in one case where there had been difficulties around the child's school attendance and a decision was made to home educate by mother. Engagement with the father may have supported to encourage school attendance and participation.
- Ensuring that services coordinate to effectively capture the **Voice of the Child and Family** in the right setting and at the right time for them was an area for consideration. This related to an instance where the child was due to be seen in his education setting but had expressed a desire not to be removed for any interventions where possible; this resulted in some resistance to the offer of support.
- The audit considered what **interventions** could have been implemented at an earlier stage; in one example consultation and direct work could have been undertaken with the Children Vulnerable to Exploitation Team (CVET) where one child was being reported missing frequently, was not attending school and had begun committing offences.
- In another case, it was considered if there was opportunity to divert into the Early Help arena as part of the Community Resolution process to access support for the child and family at an earlier stage.
- Education as a protective factor was evident in the cases audited. For the children within the audit who were not in education, an area for development was for services to explore what action can be undertaken to ensure children who are offending in the community and at an increased risk of exploitation are provided with an offer of full-time education and supported to engage.
- **Joint Working** was strong but an area for consideration was what the appropriate multi-agency response should be when a child is involved in a serious violent offence as either a perpetrator or a victim, or there is a significant risk of harm. The audit considered what meeting or response should be applied in those instances, for example a Professional Discussion, to allow consideration of the risks and next steps in that context.
- An area for development is in respect of ensuring services are able to check-in with other services for support to strengthen joint working and proportionate safety planning, particularly in instances where police bail conditions may be in place and require careful oversight.
- **Impact and outcomes** for some children were limited, particularly in respect of school attendance and engagement. There was recognition of earlier identification in respect of one child's Special Educational Needs (SEN) which may have provided mitigation for some aggressive behaviours which latterly resulted a Youth Conditional Caution. An area to further develop is to consider involving YJS in decision making and plans to support children in school, particularly where violent or aggressive behaviours may be a feature.

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WHAT WILL WE DO WITH THESE FINDINGS?

The WSCP will consider the key learning points from the audit:

- To consider the appropriate multi-agency response where a child is a victim or suspected of being involved in serious violent offence, and if this should automatically result in a Professional Discussion or where appropriate, a strategy meeting.
- To consider early engagement with GPs as a key agency in respect of sharing details of emerging concerns and assessments where appropriate.
- For services to continue to promote and take up learning offers (single and multi-agency) on working effectively with men in families to all practitioners.

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NEXT STEPS

- The findings of the audit have been shared with the WSCP Safeguarding Effectiveness Group (SEG) and JTAI Working Group and key multi-agency actions have been identified for services to implement.
- All agencies involved in the audit will feedback specific good practice and areas for development identified for their service.

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RESOURCES

There are a range of resources and training available to inform practitioners to provide to support children and families who may be involved in or are at risk of serious youth violence. Visit the below links for more information:

- [Masterclass on Serious Youth Violence](#)
- [Speak up. Stand Up. Stop Exploitation! WSCP Knowledge Hub](#)
- [Engaging with Fathers, Male Partners or Carers and Other Significant Adults](#)
- [Professional Curiosity & Challenge page - Wakefield Safeguarding Children](#)
- [Wakefield Families Together – Wakefield Families Together](#)