

MET Performance Briefing for the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel

Summary headlines:

Southampton's responses to MET issues continues to strengthen.

- Performance of the Missing/Return Home Interview service remains very strong, with 100% of RHI's being offered to children who have been reported missing (where this is deemed appropriate) and children taking this offer up between 84% - 87% of the time in the last 3 months. During the recent Ofsted focussed visit this was acknowledged as being a very strong performance in comparison to the national picture.
- Ofsted also commended the effective analysis of push and pull factors for missing episodes – this is strengthened by Southampton providing a service of specialist MET Workers completing the majority of RHI's. This sets us apart from other LA's in the pan-Hampshire area and contributes to us continuing to achieve significantly higher success rates for RHI's, ensuring children and parent/carers experiences of missing episodes are analysed and amplified to inform further support and planning.
- Last month there were 61 missing episodes for 40 children. This is fairly typical, with the average number of monthly missing episodes for the last 6 months being 68. 15 of these missing episodes were for 7 children looked after (CLA). The vast majority of children returned within 1 day (52 episodes), with 4 episodes lasting between 2-3 days and 1 episode lasting 12 days.
- The monthly MET Case Review meeting with partners continues to have oversight of our children at highest risk of exploitation. Partner feedback on this meeting is positive in that it allows a meaningful level of oversight and scrutiny of these children's circumstances and acts as an additional layer to identify disruptive actions which can be taken against potential perpetrators through discussion with our Police colleagues from the MET Team and High Harm Team.
- Capacity within the MET Hub continues to limit the level of oversight of children at lower risk however the majority of these children/families have direct input from Early Help or Social Care. MET Workers tend to work with around a third of medium risk children and offer consultation to any professional working with any children at risk/vulnerable to exploitation.

MET activity 2020 / 21:

- Southampton continues to experience issues with both county lines and local drug networks which at times impacts on our children and vulnerable adults. This remains a particularly challenging area to tackle. There is an increasingly normalised and glamourised view from young people about 'trapping' (supplying drugs) which is largely due to the impact of music and social media.
- During early 2021 there was a noted increase in cannabis farms being located by Police in the West of Southampton and Vietnamese child/adult victims of modern slavery within these.
- Where sexual exploitation risks are identified these remain largely opportunistic and usually involving individuals – they are more quickly disrupted when compared with criminal exploitation risks.

Impact of Covid –

- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in significantly reduced contact between children and professionals and a drastically reduced availability of positive activities.
- In some instances risk was seen to have reduced for children who were staying at home more, for others we saw risks increase due to spending more time out of home where there was reduced community oversight due to the restrictions. Overall we saw a reduction in number of children identified as high risk over the course of the lockdowns.
- Largely visiting has now resumed (with PPE/social distancing) which has been positive for meaningful engagement with YP.
- We have noted children struggling to resume their education provision and there is a need for education providers to think creatively about how these children are supported.

Partnership working –

- There has been some brilliant partnership working during this difficult period including:
- SCC MET Hub supported two joint operations by Police High Harm Team and British Transport Police at Southampton Central Train Station to tackle County Lines drug trafficking and identify and engage with young people exploited through this.
- SCC MET Hub delivered to our two primary commissioned supported accommodation providers for young people (YMCA and Two Saints) on MET issues to promote their confidence in identifying and responding to these issues. We've seen both organisations increase their level of intelligence sharing since this training and some very positive partnership working for individual young people.
- There an ongoing multi-agency working group identifying earlier intervention opportunities where a child's phone number is identified as being connected to a drug line number through the Police County Lines Team (Monument).
- Greater join up to consider Other Local Authority children looked after placed in Southampton where there are exploitation risks. Also joint working with Hampshire County Council to upskill unregulated placement providers in Southampton (who are used to accommodating a large number of Hampshire's children placed in our area, many of whom go missing or are at risk of exploitation).
- Development of an information sharing protocol with University Hospital Trust, Minor Injury Unit and Public Health Nursing to share details of Southampton children at high risk of CSE/CCE, should they present in their settings.
- Partnership working could be strengthened further with increased co-location/integration opportunities in the future, particular with our Police MET Team.

An emphasis on accessible training has also led to several e-learning and webinars being developed/delivered including:

- MET e-learning developed for SCC staff
- Pan-Hampshire Missing Child training
- Pan-Hampshire CERAF webinars and a SCC developed video tutorial/guidance available on SSP website.
- Trafficking and modern slavery briefings and e-learning
- Victim blaming workshops
- Child Criminal Exploitation - reframing our perspective workshop