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**Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review**

Child AA

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1. **Introduction** 
   1. The East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership (ESSCP) agreed to undertake a Local Safeguarding Children Practice Review (LCSPR) regarding Child AA. Child AA was aged 17 when he was stabbed in Eastbourne town centre with life threatening injuries, and as a result will require long term medication.
   2. Liaison with safeguarding partners and the family established that the assault took place in the context of Child AA being criminally exploited and being the target of this attack because of his involvement in drug dealing. The two perpetrators, who have now received custodial sentences, were involved with a county line drug dealing operation from outside of East Sussex. The motivation for the attack is understood to be related to the alleged perpetrators wanting to remove Child AA from dealing drugs in an area where they were doing the same.
   3. Although the rapid review assessed the circumstances leading up to the assault, the ESSCP Case Review Group (CRG) and Strategic Safeguarding Partners agreed that local agencies should use the opportunity of a LCSPR to examine current partnership practices, to better understand the risks presented to children in this context, and to identify ways of improving effectiveness in diverting and protecting such children at risk of criminal exploitation.
   4. This review has been undertaken in a proportionate way to ensure the key learning is identified to support improvements in policy and practice. It is deliberately not detailed about the family but provides a brief summary of the family circumstances and key agencies’ engagement with the family.
2. **Process for Conducting the Review**
   1. In keeping with Working Together 2018 guidance, rapid review reports were requested from all the agencies that knew Child AA and their family, or who responded on the day the serious incident occurred.
   2. The ESSCP CRG acted as the review Panel and first met in July 2021 to discuss the Rapid Review learning. The CRG subgroup was of the opinion that the Rapid Review by itself was not sufficient to identify all of the likely learning from this case.
   3. It was decided that sufficient case detail had been provided by all agencies into the Rapid Review process, so agency reports were not requested for the LCSPR. However, additional rapid review returns were sought from two further schools/colleges that Child AA had attended, that had not been known at the time of the initial rapid review request.
   4. CRG agreed that a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) should be proportionate and focus on two themes:

* Robustness of multi-agency activity to **disrupt criminal exploitation and county lines**:
* **Impact of missing education** for children and young people vulnerable/at risk of County Lines.
  1. A further CRG panel meeting was scheduled in September 2021 to review the terms of reference and consider feedback from the national panel regarding the decision to hold a LCSPR.
  2. The Terms of Reference set out a range of key questions for each strand of the LCSPR:

1. Robustness of multi-agency activity to **disrupt criminal exploitation and county lines**, including:
   * 1. Robustness of the ‘PURSUE’ element of the ESSCP MACE Action Plan and involvement of multi-agency partners in agreeing disruption activity.
     2. The challenge of county wide strategic decision making in agreeing local operational action.
     3. The impact and outcome of work undertaken to respond to the recommendation for action regarding child exploitation in the 2020 Joint Targeted Area Inspection report on mental health in East Sussex.
     4. The effectiveness of the East Sussex Child Exploitation Disruption Tactics Toolkit.
2. Impact of missing education for children and young people vulnerable/at risk of County Lines, including:
   * 1. Record Keeping and transfer of records
     2. Systems in schools – triangulate the systems so referrals are appropriate and timely
     3. Package of support for those vulnerable students moving from area to area; school to school
     4. Communication between the different agencies
   1. The CRG commissioned two independent authors to review the separate themes of the LCSPR, the learning from which is combined in this final overview report. The Independent Chair of the ESSCP was commissioned to lead on the review of multi-agency activity to disrupt criminal exploitation. The education element was led by a deputy head of a local secondary school who was on secondment to the Local Authority, in one year post as the ‘Exclusions Prevention Coordinator’.
   2. The methodology for reviewing **multi-agency activity to** disrupt criminal exploitation and county lines included:

* a review of local and national documentation available on tackling criminal exploitation, considered in the context of East Sussex;
* interview with the joint leads of the East Sussex Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Group.
* Follow up meeting with the Detective Superintendent with Strategic Lead for Exploitation in Sussex Police and the Detective Superintendent East Sussex Division responsible for the local delivery of exploitation.
  1. The methodology for reviewing the **impact of missing education** included:
* A half day learning event with practitioners from schools and education establishments which Child AA had attended. Colleagues from the Police and Local Authority education services, that had engaged with Child AA, also attended.
* The learning event explored the risk factors and critical moments in Child AA’s education journey, which made him vulnerable to missing education and child exploitation.

1. **Child AA and summary of agency engagement**

Involvement in criminal activity and exploitation

* 1. Child AA’s first recorded involvement in criminal activity was in summer 2016, when Child AA was aged 12. Child AA was referred to the Youth Offending Team having received a youth caution for an offence of criminal damage. Two years later (September 2018) Child AA assaulted a teacher at school and received a further youth caution for being in possession of a bladed article. Both times YOT involvement ceased with Child AA due to non-compliance.
  2. A year later (October 2019), Child AA was a victim of assault whilst walking home from school, by six unknown males, no further action was taken by the Police. Parents had considerable concerns about Child AA’s safety travelling to and from, and while at, school, resulting in the decision to educate at home. Around this time Child AA was also a suspect of causing criminal damage to an associate’s parent’s house.
  3. In July 2020, the Police record an incidence of Child AA’s threatening behaviour at home address and a report of a threat made on Instagram to stab Child AA.
  4. In September 2020 a social care family assessment was completed following a self-referral by Child AA, raising concerns of a deteriorating relationship with parents, and wishing to leave the family home. Contact with the parents’ identified concerns that Child AA was involved in criminal exploitation, with Child AA being aggressive in the home and family members receiving threats due to Child AA’s criminal behaviour. During the family assessment Child AA described becoming involved in supplying drugs to adults in the period before his sixteenth birthday. He stated his motivation for this was to obtain money to buy cannabis for himself, but he was now worried that his cannabis use was becoming problematic and having an impact on his emotional wellbeing. Child AA was motivated to attend college and he accepted the need for him to address his cannabis use through a referral to the Under 19’s Substance Misuse Service. The assessment also concluded that Child AA should be referred to the MACE Operational Group given the clear evidence of his criminal exploitation. Child AA was assisted to find supported accommodation and a place was found for him at the start of October 2020. The family assessment was closed with continuing professional support identified by the Under 19’s Substance Misuse Service.
  5. Child AA’s case was discussed at the MACE Screening Hub in mid-October 2020 but a referral to the full meeting was declined on the basis that there was no evidence of current exploitation.
  6. Child AA was arrested in December 2020 for the supply of Class A drugs and for an assault on a Police Officer which Child AA pleaded guilty to both.
  7. Child AA’s case was returned to the MACE Screening Hub Meeting in January 2021, following his arrest in December and escalating concerns that Child AA had expensive clothing with no obvious means of funding this, as well as knife carrying. Child AA did have some associations with other vulnerable young people and was regularly visiting the home of a vulnerable adult. Child AA was described as resistant of professional support. Child AA was adopted at MACE with an amber rating. As part of the action plan disruption activity was identified, including Under 19’s worker to liaise with police re: NRM referral; Police to disrupt attendance at vulnerable adult’s flat; and Police to look in to claim he was offered money not to attend court.
  8. In February 2021 there are multiple records on Police files recorded for Child AA. These include an arrest for damage to property, verbally abusing his girlfriend’s father, an arrest for burglary with intent to steal, and as a suspect in an assault/robbery of phone from another individual.
  9. Child AA was discussed again at the February 2021 MACE meeting whereby police updated that there had been no new intelligence linking Child AA to exploitation and Child AA continued to deny any involvement in county lines. Child AA continued to be avoidant of professionals and showed limited motivated to address drug use or engage with services. Considering ongoing concerns around substance misuse and vulnerability to exploitation, it was agreed at this meeting that Child AA would move across to the Vulnerable Adolescents Referral Panel (VARP). Child AA case was due to be considered at the March 2021 VARP meeting however it was not discussed.
  10. Child AA was stabbed in Eastbourne town centre in April 2021.

Child AA’s journey through education

* 1. Child AA had been identified as needing behaviour support since primary school and throughout the secondary phase. As he became older, criminal exploitation was identified, with several referrals being made to YOT and Children’s Services either by the school, the Police or by Child AA self-referring. His attendance at school also became more erratic as he got older, with parents withdrawing him to electively home educate (EHE).
  2. At primary school he was referred to the East Sussex Behaviour & Attendance Service (ESBAS) in the January of Year 6. Support from ESBAS lasted until April, when the school took over the support.
  3. In his secondary phase he attended four different schools, was electively home educated, and was a ‘child missing education’ (CME) twice, once in Year 8 and again at the end of Year 10. The first school he was at for just over three years and was permanently excluded from at the start of Year 10. He attended College Central, the local Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), for two months after his permanent exclusion before going to his next secondary school for between 1 – 4 months (the exact length of time is not clear due to poor attendance). He attended his final secondary school for one month before not attending and then four months later was EHE until he officially left school at the end of that academic year.
  4. In the National Safeguarding Panel’s report on child exploitation ‘It was hard to escape’ it states that ‘permanent exclusion was identified by practitioners and family members as a trigger for a significant escalation of risk.’ Child AA became identified as being at risk of criminal exploitation after his permanent exclusion in Year 10.
  5. Child AA left school with no formal qualifications and as an EHE student had no access to taking his GCSEs through his former school.
  6. Child AA did have his application accepted at East Sussex College for Year 12 however he did not enrol. The college never saw him.
  7. The Practitioner Learning Event identified eight critical moments in Child AA’s education journey:

1. **Early Intervention in transition from primary to secondary school**: Poor behaviour was identified in primary school, with ESBAS working with Child AA in Year 6. This support was offered again in Year 7 however this was not as successful due to Child AA’s poor attendance. It was identified that had this early intervention continued there could have been a change in Child AA’s pattern of behaviour.
2. **Request to Electively Home Educate (EHE):** EHE was threatened in Year 8 by Child AA’s father and becoming a Child Missing in Education, Child AA ultimately went back on roll at his original school. This was repeated when Child AA moved across the County in Year 11, resulting ultimately in Child AA leaving secondary education with no qualifications. It was identified that this period out of education established a pattern that could have been prevented.
3. **Permanent Exclusion in Year 10:** This was identified as a critical moment as this started Child AA’s inconsistent engagement with school having had a period of a year attending school with no major incident recorded. In the space of the next year Child AA attended 3 other schools and had a period of CME as well as moving across the county.
4. **The transfer of Child AA** **from the PRU to the secondary school:** Child AA was relatively engaged at the PRU and this engagement continued into his new secondary school, however the family moved across the County to a new town resulting in Child AA moving schools. From this point Child AA was at high risk to being vulnerable to criminal exploitation as they had significant periods of time out of education or not attending an educational establishment.
5. **Inconsistent information sharing between schools:** the sharing of safeguarding concerns for Child AA was slow between schools from different areas of the County. This had an impact in terms of the relevant school’s understanding the complexity of Child AA’s move. As a result no support was requested from the receiving school to ESBAS for transition support.
6. **The assault on Child AA:** Child AA was assaulted by six people after school, resulting in him not attending school and becoming EHE in Year 11. Despite the safeguarding strategies put in place by the school the family felt Child AA was not safe in school and in his travel to and from school.
7. **The role of social media in the family sharing information:** When Child AA was attacked by the six older men it was recorded and stills from the video were shared by the parent of Child AA on WhatsApp, however not with the school. The police did address this with the family and information filed, however there is no record of it being passed on as information to the College in September.
8. **Child AA self-referred to Children’s Services**: in the September of Year 12 stating he wanted to decrease his cannabis use and go to college. His application to college was accepted however there was no enrolment resulting in Child AA being NEET and he remained a NEET at the time of the incident.

Engagement with Child AA and family

* 1. Child AA and their family were invited to engage with the review at the start of the LCSPR process, which they declined, and in the course of the review. The lead reviewer for the ‘education’ element of the review held a telephone call with Child AA’s mother and father, following the practitioner event. The lead reviewer also tried on three occasions to meet with Child AA, however Child AA pulled out at the last minute each time.
  2. The parents stated that they were shocked at the permanent exclusion at the start of Year 10. Child AA had struggled since primary school and they felt that it did not help him that there was no diagnosis at Primary school or Secondary School for any need, he had always struggled to fit in. They identified that he started to get into trouble with the police and was in the wrong crowd at the age of 13. As the issues were outside of school, they felt that there was nothing really that the school could do about that. He did work with the Youth Offending Team, and they stated he did ‘ok.’ However, because he had to do it he couldn’t wait to leave and it had no lasting impact on his behaviour.
  3. Child AA’s parents noted that Child AA did have a trusted adult at his school after he was permanently excluded and he was successful at the PRU, College Central and his subsequent school. They felt they understood him and was one of the few schools who did. Their experience of previous schools had been that the teachers did not understand him and that they had written him off. Having repeated suspensions did not help Child AA feel that he was wanted or belonged to the school community.
  4. The parents had been unclear about the impact of EHE and had not understood the implications of it on him gaining qualifications and being able to sit exams. They felt strongly that they needed more family help as Child AA’s behaviour was difficult at home, in the community and at school. The parenting classes were not relevant to them and the strategies, they felt, were weak. They identified that there is a lot of knife crime and they were not supported in addressing the dangers with Child AA.
  5. They stated that he never managed to keep friends for long and found forming friendships difficult. He had been assessed by CAMHS for ADHD however he did not meet criteria. They had wanted someone to take an interest in him and ‘take him under their wing.’ Had this happened, they felt, outcome may have been different.
  6. The assault in Year 11 at his new school in Eastbourne was significant and affected him. They stated that they knew something serious was going to happen but didn’t know how to stop it.

1. **Learning and Analysis**

Multi-agency activity to disrupt criminal exploitation

* 1. Often the most challenging part of any strategy to tackle crime and behaviour is that of prevention. The purpose of the ‘pursue’ element of the strategy is to prevent children becoming exploited in the first place. This is multi-faceted, requiring a focus on the vulnerable, the exploiters and the environment in which such exploitation can breed. The complexity is a multi-agency challenge and the incident involving Child AA has identified that despite considerable agency involvement with the child, and the existence of a now long-standing MACE strategy, Child AA was at considerable risk of losing his life. It is in this context that this element of the review was commissioned.

*Learning Area 1: Robustness of the ‘DISRUPT’ element of the ESSCP MACE Action Plan and involvement of multi-agency partners in agreeing disruption activity*

* 1. The East Sussex MACE strategic group embarked in 2020 upon an effort to educate and raise awareness across agencies on the importance of applying disruption measures in cases of child criminal exploitation. Prior to this work approximately 12% of cases[[1]](#footnote-1) recorded the use of disruption measures. These efforts included a number of joint initiatives such as webinars for front line staff, implementation of toolkits and disruption activity that is now recorded for every case monitored by MACE. At the end of November 2021 there was evidence of a significant improvement in practice, via the disruption measures recorded for MACE cases: during July-September 2021 50% of MACE cases had a plan that included a disruption measure. This included measures such as placement moves to court orders.
  2. Further work is required with regards the application of specific disruption orders that are focussed on curtailing adult offender behaviour, such as Slavery and Trafficking Risk and Prevention Orders. Likewise, the successful prosecution of adult exploiters is rare but often children with a joint victim and preparator profile are the offenders prosecuted in local cases.
  3. An East Sussex Partnership Intelligence Policy has been developed to address communication challenges and to wait for wider Pan Sussex agreement would be slow. With buy in from strategic partners to support a pilot in East Sussex would enable appropriate resourcing and enable rapid progress locally.
  4. There is a need to ensure the positive drive currently in place is delivering the required outcomes.

***Recommendations:***

1. ***Child Exploitation Partnership Intelligence Policy to be piloted in East Sussex with a view to being rolled out County wide.***
2. ***East Sussex MACE Silver Group to review measures of effectiveness of disruption tactics currently used in plans and what legal orders, if any, would be most effective in supporting disruption plans.***

*Learning Area 2: The challenge of county wide strategic decision in agreeing local operational action*

* 1. In 2021 the MACE Strategic Group undertook an evaluation with the Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) support project to understand some of the barriers and challenges to effective partnership working. The TCE report drew attention to the potential disconnect between Pan Sussex strategy and local operational issues. This was presented to and considered by the ESSCP. There was a general acceptance that this disconnect requires a wider consideration across Sussex. One element emerging from this work was the development of a Partnership Intelligence Policy. The Partnership Intelligence Policy was initially drafted in June 2021 because of East Sussex agencies encountering a problem with intelligence submissions not reaching the correct local policing teams. Its implementation has potential resource implications and would benefit from being considered as a Pan Sussex initiative to be most successful.
  2. Strategic responsibility for exploitation across Sussex Police sits with the Force Lead for Exploitation – encompassing areas such as child exploitation, county lines, modern slavery and human trafficking, and serious violence. At an East Sussex divisional level, the Detective Superintendent responsible for the local delivery of exploitation chairs an internal Tactical Tasking and Coordination Group (TTCG). The TTCG coordinates the Police response to exploitation across the different strands of policing (from teams such as neighbourhood policing, special investigations, intelligence, and missing people). The TTCG is deliberately single agency and since its introduction in 2019, is viewed within the Police as having successfully opened up a broader range of tactics, and coordinating Police resources to exploitation, which then informs multi-agency MACE operational meetings. The same Detective Superintendent also chairs the East Sussex Serious and Organised Crime Partnership meeting, which involves a wide range of multi-agency partners.
  3. While there is no lack of clarity within the Police on ownership of the exploitation agenda strategically, or responsibility for delivery in East Sussex, the perceived split across teams has been confusing to some multi-agency partners. This is most prominent at the operational MACE level. More could be done to communicate the role of the TTCG and clarify responsibilities, and in sharing relevant information from TTCG with partners, to strengthen partnership working.
  4. The Force lead for exploitation has explored different models for coordinating work on exploitation used by Police forces in England, some models include dedicated and co-located teams. However, given the good and improving picture locally to tackle exploitation there is not sufficient evidence to change delivery models. Different delivery models do exist in the three Sussex Police Divisions, and more could be done to share best practice across the areas.
  5. There is also a lack of continuity of care where vulnerable children become adults at age 18. At present, support to child victims of exploitation through social care, YOT etc typically ceases when they reach adulthood. This has been escalated to the East Sussex Safeguarding Adult Board and ESSCP but a strategy is still to be developed.

***Recommendations:***

1. ***Sussex Police to strengthen communication with MACE partners to ensure effective involvement of partner agencies.***
2. ***ESSCP and East Sussex Safeguarding Adult Board to develop a strategy to ensure there is adequate transition provision to support criminally exploited children as they move to adulthood.***

*Learning Area 3: Impact and outcome of work taken to respond to the recommendation for action regarding child exploitation in the Joint Targeted Area Inspection report on mental health in East Sussex?*

* 1. Child Criminal Exploitation was an area of focus in the February 2020 JTAI regarding children’s emotional wellbeing and mental health. Although many positives were noted regarding the multi-agency leadership and development of responses to exploited children, there were also observed areas of weakness. Most notably, the volume and quality of referral to MACE operational meetings, a lack of focus on disruption and mapping, and the need for a clear record of timescales and responsibility for actions.
  2. The Police and Local Authority operational leads undertook an audit of JTAI cases and a review of MACE operational processes in May 2020 in response to the feedback received both formally and informally at the time of the inspection observed meetings. One change was the introduction of MACE Hubs which were developed as a response to the problem of high referral volume and deficiencies in the quality of recorded referral information. The hub process was also reviewed by a multi-agency panel in September 2020 and was found to have had a significantly positive impact on the quality and progression of referrals.
  3. The other significant focus since the JTAI has been on the quality of plans. The plan itself has been revised to enable a sharper focus upon the recording of risk, actions to ameliorate including disruption, owners of actions and timescales.
  4. A challenge for agencies is timescales, particularly criminal investigation and police use of “Release Under Investigation” for youth matters including serious violence - this presents partner agencies with a real challenge regarding work with young people in the interim. Locally, the impact of this has been seen in several high-risk cases where young people are assessed as both victim and perpetrators of exploitation, coupled with autism and low cognition, the lack of a timely consequence for alleged offending behaviour combined with messages from their “exploiters” that they are “untouchable” can act as a negative empowering factor and result in escalating violence. This is a national challenge and has been escalated to the Youth Justice Board.
  5. The relationship of MACE and VARP processes with the area Policing teams is variable - some area operations are multi agency and others (e.g. Eastbourne) are not.

Impact of Missing Education

* 1. From an education perspective there are several learning points that need to be considered. Child AA had had one period of being ‘electively home educated’, two periods of missing in education, they changed secondary establishments four times and the transfer of Child AA’s records was inconsistent. Child AA’s behaviour had been highlighted as a concern since Year 6 of primary school and their family was known to Children’s Services. He was a NEET as he had submitted an application form for college but had not been enrolled.
  2. Child AA had been doing well in primary and in subjects they liked, they did above average but in subjects they didn’t like it was ‘a car crash’. Child AA did try to re-engage, several times himself and made self-referrals to Children’s Services. This demonstrates some ambition and willingness to engage with education.
  3. The National Child Safeguarding Panel’s report on child exploitation ‘It was hard to escape’ highlighted learning around school exclusions, identifying permanent exclusion “as a trigger for a significant escalation of risk.” Child AA became identified as being at risk of criminal exploitation after his permanent exclusion in Year 10.
  4. The following learning has arisen from the analysis of the critical moments (see 3.18) in Child AA’s education journey, with the aim that the systems and process could be reviewed so ‘practitioners can anticipate them and be ready to capitalise on the receptiveness of children at such times.’

*Learning Area 1: Information Sharing*

* 1. In the period between Child AA’s permanent exclusion in Year 10 to the critical incident in Year 12 they had attended - or applied to attend – two schools, the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and applied to the Further Education College twice, as well as having moved area and been registered as EHE and recorded as a child missing education (CME).
  2. In reviewing Child AA’s moves between establishments, there are various examples where information sharing was not as good at it could or should have been. For example, there were delays in the transfer of safeguarding information between schools, information about Child AA’s vulnerability to criminal exploitation was not shared with the EHE support team when Child AA started elective home education in Year 11, and safeguarding information not shared with the FE college, which meant Child AA’s application was not prioritised or lack of enrolment not queried. Critically, this was compounded by the fact that when Child AA moved across the County, he also moved across Behaviour & Support Panels[[2]](#footnote-2) (BAPS) who had different Chairs and different methods of information collation and sharing. It is important to review how the BAPs share critical information about key children who are vulnerable and move not only across County but also across BAPS.
  3. Better information sharing would have ensured a more informed approach to the interventions that were put in place for Child AA when he moved from one establishment, and one area of the County, to another. Local guidance has since been strengthened regarding the transfer of safeguarding files; in line with *Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2021* the transfer of safeguarding files between schools must be within 5 working days. At the Practitioners Learning Event many attendees highlighted that schools do not use any one system[[3]](#footnote-3) for recording safeguarding, which hinders the timely accessing and sharing of key safeguarding information when children move schools. It was identified there needs to be a system in place that facilitates this in the most effective way possible so the integration of the child into a new educational setting is effective and safe.
  4. The different agencies working with Child AA also had limited contact with the relevant educational establishments. The information sharing between the school and other services was inconsistent, such as with the EHE service, with Family assessment closing and YOT involving ceasing, had this been robust the involved services and agencies would have had more information to base their decisions on. The exchange of key information between the agencies and schools would have been critical in tracking Child AA’s exposure and potential exposure to criminal exploitation at key points.

***Recommendations:***

1. ***ESSCP to review the process of the Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships in East Sussex to ensure consistency to the allocation of Fair Access Placement students across the county.***
2. ***Embed the referral process to MACE with schools. This would be monitored through the number of referrals and being raised at the BAP.***
3. ***ESCC SLES Safeguarding team to facilitate improved information sharing of safeguarding records between schools and colleges.***

*Learning Area 2: Poor Attendance as a risk factor to criminal exploitation*

* 1. There is a direct relationship between school attendance, Child AA’s engagement at school and his exposure to criminal exploitation.
  2. Although there were no serious concerns noted in primary school, from Year 7 his attendance to school became more erratic, compounded by suspensions, the family threat of elective home education and subsequently Child AA becoming a ‘child missing education’. The Learning Event specifically highlighted that had the school and local agencies been more challenging to the family’s threats of EHE at this early stage, then the family decision to EHE in Year 11 would have been potentially prevented. Had there been greater communication between the schools and family in understanding why they felt the need to EHE and to change schools early on there would have been more chance of Child AA engaging with school. The schools needed to have the expert input of the outside agencies on how to engage more positively with the family to ensure Child AA remained in one educational establishment and build the relationships they needed to succeed.
  3. Significant progress on the multi-agency sharing of information for children who are electively home educated, or at risk of EHE, has been made since 2021 in East Sussex, following work on another LCSPR involving an EHE young person. This progress was shared at the Practitioner Learning Event and schools have made changes to their practice since.
  4. The significant changes in how schools can engage with MACE about vulnerable children was shared at the Practitioner Learning Event. This included the role of the Education Review Meetings. They have been introduced as part of the graduated support available for MACE and VARP (Vulnerable Adolescent Risk Panel) pupils at risk of exclusion. This was introduced with the aim of reducing suspensions of some of the most vulnerable students and ensuring they are in full time education. These changes have been implemented since April 2021.
  5. Child AA needed to have stability at school which could not happen due to the fact he only had two years, Year 7 and Year 9, in the same school. His attendance was compounded by suspensions, permanent exclusions, and periods of EHE and missing education. This disruption to Child AA’s education will have impacted on him and his family being able to form positive relationships with people in school and resulted in him having periods of time away from school where he was vulnerable to criminal exploitation. Early intervention was key to Child AA staying in school.

***Recommendations:***

1. ***Develop recommendations for support and challenge to schools regarding persistent absence***
2. ***Enhance the focus on non-engagement with education, suspension and exclusion and poor attendance within the section 175 audit for the next academic year.***
3. ***Ensure the changes that YOT and EHE have made to their practice is shared more broadly with schools and that they are used regularly and effectively to prevent children from becoming EHE at critical times in their education where it is not appropriate.***

*Learning Area 3: Transition between educational establishments for children who are excluded from school*

* 1. It was during Child AA’s extended period out of school that his engagement in criminal activity increased and he was at high risk of criminal exploitation. There was a delayed start to the PRU after the permanent exclusion (PEX) due to family non engagement. There was a significant time delay between coming off roll at his school in Year 10 post PEX attendance to the PRU and starting at the new school when Child AA moved across County. This will have compounded the weak information sharing, particularly between the two schools across County at the end of Year 10. The school that Child AA was allocated to as a Fair Access child following the PEX did not request the safeguarding information until the beginning of October from their previous school.
  2. When Child AA was applying to post 16 courses the Further Education College were not aware he was at risk of being CCE and had been open to Children’s Services, YOT, MASH and known to the Police. At the Practitioner Learning Event attendees discussed the need for a robust system in place where information on key vulnerable children at risk of CCE was easily flagged and accessible to the relevant education setting. It was noted a system was currently in place ‘Single Point’ but that schools found this difficult to access and use.
  3. Local agencies and schools need to ensure that systems are in place to ensure everything is done to get any child who is out of education, and vulnerable to exploitation, back into having at least daily contact with a school. Although there are systems and processes in place, current systems do not provide the sufficient long-term oversight of children who are permanently excluded, and that therefore an informed plan of support put in place to ensure that children are less vulnerable to criminal exploitation and ensure they do not become ‘lost’ in the system.

***Recommendations:***

1. ***Develop a robust register of children who are permanently excluded which is monitored and reviewed to ensure support and a full-time education offer for this vulnerable group.***
2. ***Local Authority to establish a clear pathway for how alternative provision is accessed and the role the PRU has for children who are permanently excluded.***
3. ***Transfer of records needs to be tighter with a clear embedded protocol in place for all schools to follow. Task & Finish Group to explore schools’ use of Single View and identify further training and support required to maximise this resource***

*Learning Area**4: Understanding that behaviour is communication*

* 1. It was recognised at the Practitioner Learning Event that Child AA had a chaotic family life where stability was not always evident. At the Practitioner event it was disclosed that he was identified as gypsy Roma, however this had not come up in any of the information gathering prior to the event. Child AA’s younger sibling had recently been permanently excluded from primary school. There was intervention and some support from Children’s Social Care Services however this had closed.
  2. Child AA’s journey through education was familiar all who attended the Practitioner Learning Event; one where there are a number of school suspensions culminating in permanent exclusions for dangerous behaviour. However, what was less familiar is records of using a therapeutic approach to address the difficult behaviour. After the permanent exclusion Child AA was offered reintegration support by ESBAS at his next school and two sessions were delivered on knife awareness. There is no record of a deeper unpicking of the reasons behind the action with strategies in place to support Child AA over a sustained period of time. This is exemplified by the fact Child AA was not allowed to return to his course on Motor Mechanics in Year 11 when he had an altercation with other students on the course. There was an investigation into the incident with safeguarding measures put in place by the school for him to return safely to them. There was, however, no support offered to Child AA in terms of addressing his belief that he needed to sort out the issue not the school.
  3. At the time of this incident East Sussex had started to train all schools in Therapeutic Thinking, looking at trauma-based behaviours and the reasons for this with strategies to support the child. Had this been in place at the time it is hoped that the support of Child AA and their family would have been more comprehensive. The multi-agency approach is used more effectively and regularly now and would have helped significantly in this case.

***Recommendations:***

1. ***ESSCP to encourage the use of therapeutic thinking across all secondary schools in East Sussex so that suspensions and permanent exclusions are used as a last resort. The underlying reasons for difficult and dangerous behaviour needs to be unpicked with appropriate proactive interventions in place.***

*Learning Area****:*** *Family Engagement and environmental factors*

* 1. From the very start of secondary school Child AA’s family were wary of school and did not work effectively with any school except the one Child AA joined following his permanent exclusion in Year 10 and time in the PRU. However it must be stated that Child AA was only at that school for a short period of time before the family moved area.
  2. Engagement with the family by school and other services was pivotal in the decision making by the family around EHE. The family life had a significant impact on the way Child AA viewed education and his exposure to criminality. More positive engagement with the school and other agencies could have influenced the family’s and Child AA’s decision making about moving area and being EHE. This would have impacted significantly on Child AA’s further involvement in criminality.
  3. Environmental factors also need to be considered. Child AA was one of a number of siblings but the only child of his father whereas the others were the children of the Step-dad. Child AA had a chaotic home life and was known to being exposed to substance misuse, engaging in risky behaviour and criminal behaviour. It was when Child AA was out of education that he started to really become involved in criminality.
  4. There were several people and agencies working at times with Child AA and the family. The schools, from the evidence, contacted home regularly and tried to form relationships with the parent/s. However, the lack of trust by the family about schools’ ability to keep Child AA safe and happy in school resulted in decisions to EHE which impacted on him being open to exploitation.

***Recommendations:***

***12.*** ***Further CPD and Training for schools and services on operational instructions on sharing information on children who are at risk of criminal exploitation updated regularly at the safeguarding events.***

1. Of the 25 active cases held at MACE in April 2020, 3 had disruption measures recorded. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There are four Behaviour and Attendance Panel in East Sussex, two in Area Group 1 (one for Wealden and one for Lewes and Coastal); one in the Eastbourne Partnership, Area Group 2; and one in the Hastings and Rother Partnership Area Group 3. Each school in that area will send the senior teacher for Behaviour and Attendance to sit on the Panel. This is where complex cases (for example those at risk of exclusion, excluded pupils, safeguarding concerns, etc) are discussed for Behaviour and Attendance and Fair Access Placements (FAPs) are allocated and discussed. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In East Sussex schools tend to use either ‘CPOM’ or ‘My Concern’ software for recording safeguarding information [↑](#footnote-ref-3)