

From: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

**Sarah Hammond, Interim Corporate Director:
Children, Young People and Education**

To: Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee – 19 July 2022

Decision No: N/A

Subject: Update and review of ICS approach to **Serious Youth Violence and Contextual Safeguarding**

Summary:

This report provides an update on Kents approach to Contextual Safeguarding, the Serious Youth Violence and Prevention project and Kent's partnership with the Violence Reduction Unit which supports both of these strands of work.

Recommendation(s):

Committee Members are asked to:

- NOTE the success of the Serious Youth Violence and Prevention Project
- Endorse Kent County Council's approach to Contextual Safeguarding
- NOTE the success of the Violence Reduction Unit securing an additional three-year grant from the Home Office in April 2022

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of Kent County Council's approach to Contextual Safeguarding, the North Kent and Medway Serious Youth Violence and Prevention Project (SYVP), and the role of KCC's Integrated Children's Service (ICS) in the police-led, multi-agency, Violence Reduction Unit (VRU).
- 1.2 **Serious Youth Violence and Prevention Project - background**
- 1.3 In October 2018 the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) established the Supporting Families Against Youth Crime (SFAYC) Fund to support the delivery of the Government's Serious Violence Strategy. The strategy emphasises early intervention and prevention, aiming to tackle the root causes of violence and prevent children from becoming involved in crime.
- 1.4 In 2019 Kent County Council, in partnership with Kent Police and Medway Council, successfully secured £1,362,645 from the SFAYC Fund, to lead and deliver a collaborative North Kent (Dartford, Gravesham, Sevenoaks and Swale)

and Medway project.

1.5 The aim of the project was to:

- Increase awareness of the risk of gangs, youth violence and weapon use amongst children, to their families, and communities including schools and professionals.
- Provide the highest risk, most vulnerable children, who are thought to already be involved in county-lines or gang related activity, with long-term intensive protective support.
- Provide vulnerable children, who are at risk of being drawn into such activity, with preventative support.
- Increase the quantity and quality of trusted relationships between children and adults who are there to support them.
- Ensure children and their families can identify and develop strong networks which will support resilience when services are no longer in place.
- Through feedback into the formal Evaluation, contribute to the understanding and development of community spaces so that people who use them feel safe.
- Contribute to the development of a Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) toolkit for use across all agencies.

1.6 The service also complements the work of the Kent and Medway Gangs' Strategy, 2018-2021, which has 4 strands:

- **Preventing** people from engaging with gangs and youth violence, including through raising awareness for children, their communities, families, and professionals who support them.
- **Protecting** vulnerable children by increasing community inclusion, safeguarding activity, and providing intensive support.
- **Pursuing** via cooperation with professionals to share intelligence which supports prosecution and disruption activity.
- **Preparing**, reducing the impact of criminality where it takes place (through methods including sharing of intelligence).

1.7 The delivery model was co-designed with young people who have offended (including some in Cookham Wood Young Offenders Institution), including the recruitment of staff; tender specification and award of the commissioned provider.

1.8 The project started in July 2019 and has been extended until June 2023. The project team includes two seconded Police Officers who obtain, collate, analyse, and share intelligence to support the identification and management of risk related to serious youth violence. Given the impact of County Lines and the movement of children and families from London Boroughs to Kent and Medway, the project has collaborated with the Metropolitan and British Transport Police services.

1.9 Kent Police initiated a cross-border notification process to inform other local authorities of safety moves out of Kent and inviting other Police Forces to inform Kent when children and their families move into Kent away from gangs and

county lines.

- 1.10 The model is aligned to and informed by KCCs Contextual Safeguarding approach; the Kent Adolescent Risk Management framework (which in their summing up Ofsted referred to as "exceptional"); the Medway Task Force and the VRU.
- 1.11 The project has commissioned specialist mentoring to help children to develop personal resilience to withstand peer pressure and make positive choices. This complements and enhances statutory intervention, which remains necessary where children are at risk of harm. Mentoring can feel more flexible and child-led by being delivered when children need it the most, including at weekends and evenings and, in the most high-risk cases, up to 3 times a week for 12-months.
- 1.12 The service contributed to the development of the Child Exploitation Toolkit and the Missing Return Conversation, both of which are now embedded in front line practice. These tools enable effective risk management approaches to be utilised beyond the lifetime of the project.
- 1.13 The project has delivered an accredited Knife First Aid course which aims to help children respond to knife incidents, but also raises awareness of the risks involved in carrying a knife.

2. **Serious Youth Violence and Prevention Project Outcomes**

- 2.1. The service is being evaluated by London Southbank University (LSBU) to develop the UK research base with the desire to create a legacy of evidence based 'what works' toolkits, risk identification and management processes.
- 2.2. To date, Salus have worked with over 150 children and their families, across two cohorts:
 - A Protect cohort, those involved in county lines or serious youth violence and
 - A Prevent cohort, those at risk, or on the periphery of county lines or serious youth violence.
- 2.3 Salus met the target of supporting, at any one time, 60 Protect and 30 Prevent children, with the higher risk cohort being offered more intensive and longer-term intervention.
- 2.4 As the project has been operational during the Covid pandemic, interim outcomes analysis needs to be considered with caution while the full evaluation is ongoing with the full LSBU report is due to be released in the autumn of 2022.
- 2.5 Indicative data illustrates, for those involved in the project:
 - children self-assessing improvements in quality of life, specifically their emotional well-being,
 - a 19% reduction in arrests
 - a 45% reduction in police call outs
 - a 52% reduction in missing episodes

- a 65% reduction in exclusions from school

2.6 LSBU used this data to forecast cost savings based on nationally available unit cost data for arrests, police call outs, exclusions, and missing persons. The initial findings of their cost-benefit analysis suggest savings in the region of £24,500 to £42,000 per child engaged.

2.7 LSBU have undertaken focus groups and interviews with stakeholders, partners, parents, and children. The aim was to gather information on their experiences of the project -and perceptions of its effectiveness in reducing children joining gangs or experiencing gang-related violence. The full information will be available in the final report but the quotes below provide a narrative of the feedback received about the service:

3. Serious Youth Violence and Prevention Project - Feedback from children

3.1 [the best bit is] *“Being able to talk to [Mentor]. That was Number One, that I can, literally, tell her everything and then she would be able to give me advice”*

3.2 *“Before I met her [mentor] I didn’t really know what I wanted, I didn’t really know what I was focused on, because my mind was just like all jumbled up, but she sort of just helped me like focus on my goals and she helped me achieve them, like basically she helped me change my mindset to want to do well for myself.”*

3.3 *“if you can’t tell your parents because you’re too worried that they are going to like be angry or upset, then you’ve always got that somebody else [mentor] to speak to about it.”*

3.4 *“I’ve been arrested about three times this year but, last year, it was fifteen times. There’s a lot of difference. When you have a professional who understands everything that’s going on in your life and tries to make it right, a lot of stuff changes. And, yes, I appreciate Salus have helped because, otherwise, without them, I probably would be banged up right now.”*

4. Serious Youth Violence and Prevention Project - Feedback from parents/carers

4.1 *“And it’s hard to believe that my son ever put us through what he did because he’s a completely different person now. And I don’t think that’s because of the punishments or the arrests: I don’t think any of that is the reason that he’s changed his behaviours. I do think it’s because of [Key worker] and I believe that, when she came in, it was almost as if she wrapped this big bubble around us and we became a team.”*

4.2 *“Initially, my son wasn’t keen to engage but the worker, they do have a rapport. And I think for my son it was just to have a focus about the direction his life was taking but also for someone else, other than me or his siblings to... I think sometimes with kids, they like to take advice from other people. So, I think it worked well.”*

4.3 *“Through the school, I’ve noticed a big change in my daughter. Certain things she was doing at her old school, and she’d speak to her support worker about, and her support worker would advise her on ways to deal with situations and I can see her putting that to use at this new school that she’s at...I can see a big change”.*

5. Serious Youth Violence and Prevention Project - Feedback from professionals

5.1 *“The mentor has done an amazing job to try and bring them out their shell, look at different hobbies, try and build up confidence.”*

5.2 *“And recently this person had actually started saying to my face and the mentors, giving us compliments and I couldn’t believe it, I nearly fell off my chair, which is really nice and he just seems happier which is lovely and he’s comfortable so that is really nice.”*

6. Contextual Safeguarding - The local, regional and national landscape.

6.1 Nationally, the Contextual Safeguarding Approach emerged from the (2015) PhD studies of Dr Carlene Firmin, MBE. Dr Firmin coined the term ‘Contextual Safeguarding’ to describe an approach to child protection in which extra-familial contexts, the interplay between them and their varying weight of influence on young people’s decisions, could be the target of assessment and intervention. It is a framework which assists professionals to understand and manage the push and pull factors for extra-familial risks, such as Missing; Criminal Exploitation; Substance Misuse; Offending Behaviour; and Sexual Exploitation. It recognises that the different relationships that children form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse, but that parents and carers have little influence over these contexts.

6.2 In 2019 Kent were successful in bidding to be part of the 3-year University of Bedfordshire (UoB) ‘scale-up’, working with Professor Dr Carlene Firmin and her team to move beyond a conceptual framework and to design and test out practice approaches and to develop policy.

6.3 Kent developed a contextual framework in 2019. Together with key partners including Police and VRU, our Adolescent Services led the testing, improvement and embedding of the model throughout 2020 and 2021.

6.4 In that time, despite the pandemic, Kent achieved the cooperation of District partners to develop a framework of identification, assessment, and response to contextual risk. At a practice level, Kent improved our tools for practitioners to analyse and consider contextual risks, including the ‘Return from Missing Conversations’ tool and the creation of a multi-agency Exploitation Toolkit.

6.5 In October 2021, UoB reviewed Kent’s systems and processes and presented their findings to the Integrated Children’s Services Steering Group and Senior Management Teams. They noted the journey Kent had travelled since 2019, despite the covid pandemic. They noted our ‘outstanding progress’ from barely

recognising contextual safeguarding in 2019, to having an embedded, multi-agency model that identified, assessed and responded to context.

- 6.6 There remain key elements of our contextual safeguarding vision that need to be developed, including Kent's ambition to create an 'integrated adolescent plan' for high-risk adolescents who straddle multiple services (such as youth justice and social work). KCC are represented at a National Legal Round Table, in which the legal and policy framework for Contextual Safeguarding approaches, and the arising complexities, are explored. As a relatively new approach, the legal and policy framework pose conundrums for practice, and the national forum has participation of Ofsted, HMIP, DfE, University of Bedfordshire and legal advisors to help navigate and develop national guidance. Through engagement in this forum the Assistant Director with responsibility for adolescent service development is guiding our future direction of travel.
- 6.7 Furthermore, Kent have participated in a peer improvement partnership with one of the 'trailblazing' London authorities the London Borough of Waltham Forest, in a mutually beneficial learning approach, focussing on contextual safeguarding and adolescent harm.
- 6.8 KCC Chair the Southeast Regional Contextual Safeguarding Forum in which rich discussion explores how Local Authorities create safer spaces for children and communities. Kent are considered by this forum as a leader in these approaches, with more advanced and embedded processes than their peers. London and Southeast partners are seeking Kent's advice on our approaches in order to replicate our model.
- 6.9 These partnerships have proved beneficial to KCC and are ensuring we remain dynamic resourceful and at the forefront of new approaches.

7. **Kent's Contextual Safeguarding and Adolescent Risk Management Framework**

- 7.1 An Integrated Adolescent and Open Access Service went live in April 2019 bringing together professionals from Adolescent (social work) Support Teams; Youth Justice; Inclusion and Attendance Services; Youth Hubs; Children's Centres and created new Adolescent Early Help Units which specialise in working with teenagers impacted on by extra-familial risks.
- 7.2 At that time, at a national level, the Home Office were consulting on a new legal duty to support a multi-agency approach to preventing and tackling serious violence. The draft guidance was subsequently published in May 2021.
- 7.3 In September 2019, Kent and Medway Police announced their ambition to implement a Violence Reduction Unit, necessitating strategic and operational partnership collaboration. Using these platforms, Adolescent Services led the development of a new strategic and operational framework to better manage current and emerging adolescent risk, including matters of extra-familial ('contextual') safeguarding and public protection. **See Appendix 1** for an

illustration of how contextual safeguarding stretches beyond the traditional Child Protection framework.

- 7.4 Our contextual safeguarding approach responds to extra-familial forms of abuse and:
- Targets the contexts in which that abuse occurs, from assessment through to intervention
 - Addresses extra-familial risk through the lens of child welfare, as opposed to crime reduction or community safety
 - Utilises partnerships between children's services and agencies who have a reach into extra-familial contexts (such as transport providers, retailers, youth workers, residents' associations, parks and recreation services, schools)
 - Measures success with reference to the harm, rather than solely focusing on any behaviour changes displayed by children who were at risk in those contexts

See Appendix 2 for an illustration of extra-familial risks.

- 7.5 Kent trained over 400 staff in the first year of the project and have since trained wider agencies and non-traditional partners. Contextual Safeguarding is now delivered across Kent and Medway by the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership.
- 7.6 The Kent multi-agency framework is a clearly defined set of relational operational and strategic processes. **See Appendix 3.**
- 7.7 **District Contextual Safeguarding Meetings (DCSMs).**
KCC collaborates with multi-agency partners to hold a DCSM aligned to the 12 districts. DCSMs aim to identify and assess the risk and safety that children experience within a specific context (for example, a location); and reduce harm and increase protection in that space. The focus is on the space/context, rather than on the individual child.
- 7.8 Professionals can refer a location, child, group of children, or local concern into DCSM. The partnership also uses VRU and Missing children's data to identify places of concern. Non-traditional partners (e.g., bus and taxi companies, McDonalds) attend DCSM where relevant.
- 7.9 **Complex Adolescent Harm Meetings (CAHMs)**
These forums differ from DCSMs, as they focus on identifying, assessing, and creating contextual safety for a child or a group of children and vulnerable adults (including the 18+ Care Leaving Service). A CAHM brings together professionals who can share information about and respond to contextual issues and is an extension on statutory processes (e.g., strategy discussions and Child Protection plans) to safeguard in incidents of extra-familial harm.
- 7.10 Children at CAHM level can access specialist, flexible support via the Missing Outreach Project. This service is part of the Adolescent Response Team and responds urgently to children who have returned from a missing episode.

- 7.11 A vital component of CAHMs is the sharing of intelligence across the partnership, including the VRU, and peer network 'mapping.'
- 7.12 **Protecting Vulnerable People (PVP) meetings** are Police-led, multi-agency forums which consider contextual themes and trends across districts. PVP inform priorities for prevention and intervention activity to address emerging and known risks.
- 7.13 **Kent and Medway Joint Exploitation Group (JEG)**
Shares intelligence, emerging trends and good practice from across the county and neighbouring counties and boroughs, with contributions from key Kent and Medway partners. A quarterly Kent and Medway contextual safeguarding report is presented at JEG, co-written by Kent and Medway local authorities; each District DCSM; VRU; MCET; Prevent; and with contributions from the voluntary sector.
- 7.14 In March 2019, Children's Cabinet Committee agreed to utilise s.106 district property development contributions to implement and resource a detached youth work service to support contextual safeguarding. The model tackles risks identified through the multi-agency DCSM. Detached youth workers can identify and address children's needs within their locations and peer groups. By meeting children in their communities, detached workers can build an understanding of the issues that children experience and the relationships they form, enabling intervention in harmful contexts. Through this, and by sharing intelligence with partners, Youth workers provide a key role in enhancing the safety of children.
- 7.15 Innovative projects have been created to engage children in the community including collaborations which encourage community guardianship with businesses and groups including fast food chains and local football clubs. These projects (for example, 'pop up football') encourage children 'on the street' to engage with youth workers and help to enhance safety.

8. **Kent's Contextual Safeguarding - The Voice of Children**

- 8.1 Kent has piloted a school's project, supporting the Pupil Referral Units to undertake a contextual assessment of safety, and to respond to this to increase safety for their pupils. This project was co-produced with children at every stage with the following feedback recorded:
- Children liked the idea of a whole school approach to explore how safe all students felt at school (including on the journey to and from school)
 - Children thought that their teachers needed support to address issues of harm in school, for example, bullying
 - Children suggested that those responsible for causing harm might also need help
 - Children worried about judgement from other students if they engaged in a school assessment and intervention and wanted adults to provide a safe space
 - Children thought that harm occurs in school in places that teachers were not aware of

8.2 Hearing the voice of children is key to KCC's development of contextual safeguarding and addressing the risks of serious youth violence in the community. Currently, DCSMs are predominantly influenced by data and professional intelligence about locations and spaces of concern. We are developing a consistent children's voice led, supported by data approach, which is being developed by our Youth Workers, to enable children to identify contexts of concerns, having successfully piloted this within our Pupil Referral Unit cohort.

9. Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) – background

9.1 The Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) was established in September 2019, with funding awarded annually by the Home Office until 2022. This year the Kent VRU has secured a three-year grant from the Home Office with an increase from £1,016,000 per annum to £2,040,000 for the first year and £1,500,000 for each of the two subsequent years.

9.2 The VRU is a partnership between the police, local councils, health service providers and other key agencies to lead and co-ordinate a 'whole system' public health approach in response to serious violence such as knife crime and child exploitation into gangs and county lines. This approach is based on identifying the local drivers and root-causes of serious violence and implementing a multi-agency response. <https://youtu.be/8ys53x3mDKw>

9.3 The Kent VRU is led by a Police representative and a Kent County Council secondee. The VRU identifies public place serious violence (knife harm, robbery, violence with injury or violence linked to gangs), either perpetrated by or upon those under 25 years.

9.4 There are four strands of the VRU approach:

- Data sharing and analysis with partners
- Multi-agency collaboration
- Voice of children and communities
- Evidence-based interventions

9.5 The VRU has been a key partner in the design and implementation of Kent's Contextual Safeguarding approaches, and the delivery of the Serious Youth Violence Project.

10. VRU projects

10.1 In partnership with Kent Police, Medway Council and Kent County Council, the VRU has funded numerous projects to test out innovative approaches to tackling the root causes of violence.

10.2 The VRU is committed to learning from children, families, communities, and professionals. They have co-designed a program with children in a Pupil Referral Unit to increase the social and emotional skills which was described as "the single most impactful project that I have been offered since taking leadership of a PRU" [Head Teacher].

- 10.3 A parent said that her family would have fallen apart without the support of a service commissioned jointly by the VRU and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner:

“My two children were both in very different but very bad places. [the workers] showed us how to rebuild our trust in each other and learn to work together again as a functioning family. They kept my children safe and out of trouble and gave me the confidence to turn things around and now my kids are happy and settled - one at school doing really well and one working at his dream job - we have travelled such a long way with their help, patience, skill set and support.”

- 10.4 In 2020, the VRU held a “hackathon” with 120 multi-agency attendees. A network including the Youth Hub, Borough Council, School, and Community Safety won £5000 at the hackathon to implement a contextual Youth Work approach, providing welcoming guardians to children on safety moves, vulnerable to influence or exploitation by gangs.
- 10.5 The VRU worked with the Ben Kinsella Trust to create resources for parents. Students from 28 schools have been funded to attend the Ben Kinsella experience to learn about knife harm. Work with the ‘No Knives, Better Lives’ campaign in Scotland has informed training and lesson plans for professionals to use with children.
- 10.6 Children have adopted ‘feeling safe’ as a county priority and are working with KCC and VRU Participation Workers to create a campaign. Gravesham’s Gifted Young Generation group have created an awareness video on knives and weapons and this work builds on the podcasts previously created by children and parents about County Lines exploitation. The VRU are funding three support groups for parents affected by County Lines, and the parents are working closely with Kent Police to inform the Police response to criminal exploitation.
- 10.7 In collaboration with the VRU, KCC are delivering a ‘Reachable Moment’ pilot at QEQM Hospital, Margate. The aim is to engage with children who present in accident and emergency when they have possibly been a victim of violence in the community or as a result of exploitation. Children are often too scared to tell Police or the authorities the real reason they have needed medical attention but at that moment of vulnerability, within an A&E setting children can feel helpless and are more likely to respond in that ‘reachable moment.’
- 10.8 The areas of focus for the VRU for 2022-25 will be: Violence with injury, Robbery, Knives and Weapons, Violence Against Women and Girls, Gangs, County Lines and Young Street Groups. Kent VRU will also adopt a focussed deterrence approach that increases both enforcement and support to children who are repeatedly involved in serious violence.

11. VRU- Serious Violence Outcomes

- 11.1 The levels of serious violence involving those aged under 25 have reduced since September 2019. The national lockdown in March 2020 had a significant impact

in reducing public place violence, and levels of serious violence have since remained lower than pre-lockdown periods.

- 11.2 There has been a reduction each year in the numbers of children aged under 18 involved in all serious violence across the County, since monitoring began in October 2018.

Children involved in serious violence	Oct 2018 – Sep 19	Oct 2019 – Sep 20	Oct 2020 – Sep 21
Age 0 – 17	2849	2562	2386

- 11.3 In respect to children aged under 18 who have been involved in the most serious violence (i.e., that which includes attempted murder, grievous bodily harm, or the use of weapons to harm others) there has been a more complex picture which suggests that a focus on those with the highest risk factors relating to serious violence is still required.

Children involved in the most serious violence	Oct 2018 – Sep 19	Oct 2019 – Sep 20	Oct 2020 – Sep 21
Age 0 - 17	300	352	285

- 11.4 This focus is a feature of the VRU oversight Board, which has KCC representation, together with the VRU reporting directly to the County Youth Justice Board.
- 11.5 In the period Oct 2020 – Sep 2021 there was a 7% reduction in the numbers of serious violence incidents involving children where injury was caused and a 29% reduction in robbery offences. Data shows a reduction in these offences compared to pre-lockdown levels, and a reduction compared with 2019 – 20 when the County was in lockdown.
- 11.6 According to the Office of National Statistics, young people aged 10 – 19 years constitute approximately 12% of the Kent population. VRU data illustrates that from 2018 – 2021, 25% of all victims of serious violence were children. Children identified by the VRU as being involved in serious youth violence are often victims and the partnership with the VRU enables swift identification of children who require statutory services to safeguard them from serious violence.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 Kent’s operational and strategic approaches to contextual safeguarding are illustrated by our partnerships, processes, and practices. The framework reaches across all levels of support from universal through to targeted and statutory provision, across all aspects of Kent’s Integrated Children’s Services, but predominantly led by, and involving, Integrated Adolescent Services.
- 12.2 This report illustrates the successes of Kent County Council’s approach to Contextual Safeguarding, and the collaboration within the North Kent and Medway Serious Youth Violence and Prevention Project (SYVP), and the role of

KCC's Integrated Children's Service (ICS) in the police led multi-agency, Violence Reduction Unit (VRU).

Recommendation(s):

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- Endorse Kent County Council's approach to Contextual Safeguarding
- NOTE the success of the Violence Reduction Unit securing an additional three-year grant from the Home Office in April 2022

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