From: **Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education**

**Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education**

To: **Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee – 7 May 2019**

Subject: **Adolescent Risk Management in Kent**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

**Past Pathway of Paper:** CYPE Cabinet Committee

**Future Pathway of Paper**: N/A

**Electoral Division: All**


**Summary**

Cabinet Committee requested a paper explaining the approach being taken to the management of adolescent risk in Kent through the Change for Kent Children programme.

This paper sets out the changing profile of adolescent risk nationally, putting this within the Kent context. It looks at the national and local responses to this changing position and then sets out our plan to address this locally.

*Recommendation(s):*

**The Children's, Young People's and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to**

(i) Note and comment on the contents of the report.


## 1. Introduction

1.1. This paper sets out the changing risks facing adolescents both nationally and in Kent. It illustrates how concerns for adolescents around going missing, those at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation, gang involvement, "county lines" criminality, drug dealing and serious youth crime, have changed over time and the effect that this has had on how services are best configured

1.2. It makes the case for a differentiated approach that recognises these changes and the fact that many come from the wider environment rather than solely the family. A new contextual model that that works with those influences rather than the traditional casework model is therefore required.

1.3. Equally, it recognises that many adolescents suffer vulnerabilities not related to the concerns identified above, but because of the way services are currently delivered do not always receive the levels of support that they require to prevent their needs escalating. Better co-ordinated services delivered by staff with a different skills base may be more effective at

preventing those needs becoming more serious and may allow more adolescents to be safely supported to remain at home.

1.4. The paper examines the national response to these changes, including the Kent pilots and finally outlines the Kent response through the Change for Kent Children programme and the new structure which went live on 2 April 2019.

## 2. Background

2.1. The traditional social care/ early help approach to working with adolescents who are causing concern is through a casework-based approach where an individual worker assesses and supports the young person and their family, calling on some resources where it is appropriate and utilising child protection procedures and processes to ensure that they are kept safe.

2.2. However, the threats to adolescents have begun to change over recent years. Increasingly, agencies are aware of the risks around young people who are excluded from education or who go missing, the increasing link between being missing and being vulnerable to sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation and the links between gang involvement and criminal activity including drug dealing. The association between "county lines" drug dealing gangs and serious youth violence is well documented and in the larger metropolitan authorities has become a major concern.

2.3. Concerns around children who go missing and their vulnerabilities have been highlighted in a number of national reports. In 2012 the Joint All-Party Parliamentary Group and the Children's Commissioner, both highlighted the extreme risks to those children, especially those who were missing from care and were at risk of sexual and other exploitation. The Children's Society[1] estimated that approximately 25% of those missing are at risk of serious harm. In Kent, addressing the needs of this group was a particular focus of the CYPE South Kent pilot on vulnerable adolescents in 2018 during which an evaluation of the pilot identified a 65% reduction in missing episodes across the target cohort of young people.

2.4. The link between gangs, gang violence and "county lines" drug dealing has been recognised as a significant issue nationally. The Home Office published "Ending Gang and Youth Violence" in 2011 which set out the growing problem of gangs and gang violence and marked the beginning of a new approach to cross departmental working through the Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme.

2.5. In 2016 Government published a six-point priority plan for dealing with gangs, with priority areas being:

- Tackle "county lines" crime (the exploitation of vulnerable young people by hard core gang members to sell drugs)
- Protecting vulnerable locations, including Pupil Referral Units and Residential Care Homes.
- Reducing violence and knife crime.

[1] The Children's Society: *Still Running 3: Early findings from our third national survey of young runaways* (2011)

- The safeguarding of gang associated young women and girls
- Promotion of early intervention
- Promoting meaningful alternative to gang membership.

2.6 In Kent we recognise that "county lines" crime has been an increasing issue, that it is exacerbated by a small number of young people being placed in the County who already have links with gangs, and also by families moving out of London in an attempt to distance their children from the risk of violence. Some of these families have existing gang connections and some are vulnerable to exploitation. More recently the police have reported the development of three "home grown" gangs in different locations which have begun to mirror the approaches of the "county lines" rings.

2.7 Kent's response to gangs and the exploitation of vulnerable children by them is captured in the Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy, 2018-2021. It identifies a response based on **Prevent** people from engaging, **Protect** vulnerable young people by increasing safeguarding activity, **Pursue** via prosecution and disruption and **Prepare,** reducing the impact of criminality where it takes place. The creation of an integrated Adolescent and Open Access service places the CYPE directorate at the heart of how we respond to this problem, linking strongly not only internally and with key partners but with the key strategic groups namely the Kent Safeguarding Children Board, the Community Safety Partnership and the Risk, Threats and Vulnerability Group. CYPE are also working with Kent police to develop a consistent strategic approach to Adolescent Risk Management Panels (ARMs).

2.8 Whilst we recognise and are responding to the identified concerns, they must be seen within a context. The number of first-time entrants into the criminal justice system in Kent continue to decrease and re-offending rates for young people continue to sit below both national and statistical neighbour averages. Equally, the number of knife related incidents (relating to young people) have reduced from a peak of 141 offences in 2016, to 127 in 2017 and 107 in 2018. There has only been one fatal stabbing of a young person in the last three years in Kent.

2.9 Our thinking about a new approach to working with adolescents is not based solely on the looking at the needs of the highest risk groups. We know that the majority of adolescents do not demonstrate the concerns identified above, but for a small number, difficulties at home do result in their needs escalating and some of them entering the care system. Whilst considerable effort is always put in place to support them at home, when they do come into care, because of their ages and established behavioural patterns, the ability of the care system to improve their outcomes at such a relatively late stage in their lives is often problematic with sometimes limited evidence of success. This can result in a pattern of changing placements and escalating costs. A new approach to working with these young people most at risk of poor outcomes is another key driver behind the new approach.

## 3. National Learning, best practice and Kent pilot

3.1. Evidence of best practice is only just beginning to emerge nationally, but by combining our knowledge of the research, with findings from the regulators (Ofsted and Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons) and our own Kent pilot we have been able to assemble a solid base on which to develop a new and better approach.

3.2. The Research in Practice paper "That Difficult Age: Developing a more effective response to risk in adolescents (2014)" identifies:

- Missed opportunities to work as a team with the adolescent and often their family in combatting risk
- Misunderstandings about the fundamental drivers and contexts of risk, with the result that resources are channelled to the wrong places (e.g. risk is assumed to be within the adult world rather than the peer group) (Firmin,2013)
- Harmful assumptions made about adolescent choice (on the one hand choices are minimised, and on the other they are perceived as adult 'lifestyle choices')
- A failure to recognise (and therefore address) the challenges involved in preventing and reducing adolescent risk (e.g. the frequent challenge to engage young people in interventions).

3.2 Unless addressed, the existence of the above will lead to responses to adolescents being poorly defined and with limited impact on changing the behaviour and outcomes for adolescents and their families.

3.3 Recent Joint Targeted Area Inspections (Ofsted), the Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons report from Hertfordshire, recent Ofsted inspections and the developing work in Contextual Safeguarding are starting to recommend best practice proposals in working with adolescent risk. There is a growing recognition across the sector that the traditional child protection system is not working effectively for those older young people who experience risk of harm outside of the family home. These risks are comorbid with a wide range of needs such as poor physical and emotional health, barriers to learning and SEND.

3.4 The service design will build on evidence from the Children's Social Care Innovation Programmes**:**

- Waltham Forest – Think Family Approach. 'Right conversation, right action, right time'.
- Ealing Brighter Futures Intensive Engagement Model – young people were provided with choice of Lead professional, as not all professional. had direct contact with the young people. This also include daily team meetings and group supervision
- Hackney – Contextual Safeguarding. Case consultation process. 'Context conferences.' Hacknely have received DfE innovation funding to develop a radical new approach to safeguarding, which shifts the focus of social work from the family home, to consider much wider influences.

3.5 Starting in January 2018 a pilot project to address adolescent risk was implemented in Ashford and later rolled out to other districts. The project focussed on;

- Integrating and co-locating a multi-disciplinary team

- Engaging effectively with partners around a cohort of “at risk” adolescents
- Adopting multiple assessment tools and utilising contextual safeguarding

3.6 The evaluation highlighted a number of strengths of the pilot approach such as a reduction in case work demand and missing episodes. These were as a result of improved information sharing, case mapping and planning.

## 4. The Adolescent and Open Access service

4.1. Phase 1 of the Change for Kent Children programme focussed on the integration of early help and social work services. One of the most significant aspects of this has been the creation of an integrated Adolescent and Open Access services which is a direct response to the contextual changes identified above and what we know about best practice nationally.

4.2. The Adolescent and Open Access service comprises the following teams:

- Early Help Units focusing on adolescents and reconfigured from previous whole county early help units
- The Adolescent Support teams, which are an existing social work resource focussed on supporting adolescents on the edge of coming into care
- The Youth Offending Teams
- The Education Access and Inclusion services, previously linked to early help
- Open Access youth hubs and children centres.

4.3. The structure recognises that tackling these concerns requires a multi-dimensional, multi-agency response and whilst partners in the police, health and others are not set out in the structure, they are very much a part of the approach which will build on the learning from the South Kent pilot. The intention is that by putting the management of the above services under one structure, we will create a better more joined up service that is able to work more seamlessly with adolescents causing concern and that is, by identifying risk earlier, able to hold that risk lower in the system and prevent escalation to more expensive and sometimes statutory services.

4.4. Alignment of existing adolescent support teams with a resource ring-fenced from the existing early help units made sense as it aligned teams that were essentially doing the same work, but under a clearer leadership structure. Placing the existing adolescent support teams with a resource ring-fenced from the existing early help units brings together existing expertise and resource under a clear strategic leadership structure. Placing the Youth Offending Teams and Attendance and Inclusion service within this structure allows for a closer connection and understanding of risk management, recognising the link between being out of school and becoming involved in offending behaviour and becoming missing.

4.5. We recognise that as the needs of this group are changing and are often very different to those of younger children, so the skills required to engage and support them have changed. In response we are examining the skills base of our teams and have been selected to work alongside the University of Bedfordshire on a "Contextual Safeguarding" model. This is an approach that views the needs 'at risk adolescents' as existing in a much wider context than the immediate family, requiring staff to understand the context of and engage with that wider network as the key mechanism for creating change and making those young people safer.

4.6. The focus of this new approach has been to bring together services including open access services and create a single service under one manager. The ability to quickly link youth provision, attendance at youth centres, possible outreach work and support programmes for parents together was uppermost in our thinking. Whilst there is limited empirical evidence linking rising youth violence, gangs, and fatal stabbings with the closure of youth services, there is a plausible logical link and it is our intention to combat the national trend through the approach described.

## 5. Financial Implications

5.1. There are no financial implications of the proposals in this report as the structural changes which have been implemented have been provided from within existing resources.

## 6. Conclusions

6.1. The approach taken to the management of adolescent risk builds on national research, emerging best practice and the conclusions of the Kent pilots. It reflects the approach outlined in national guidance and the Kent and Medway Gangs strategy. However, it equally recognises that there are many adolescents in Kent who require support but are not experiencing gang related exploitation, CSE and may not be missing on a regular basis. Expanding the skills base of our staff to working with that whole group and building robust and effective ways of working with partners is key to our response.

6.2. The new service, whilst now live, is in a transition period during which cases will be aligned to new teams, new criteria will be established and agreed and partners will begin to work alongside the new model.

**7. Recommendation(s): The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to:**

(i) Note and comment on the contents of this report

## 8. Background Documents (plus links to document)

8.1. Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy. Our approach to ending the criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults by gangs. 2018-2021: https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s90178/Kent%20and%20Medway%20Gangs%20Strategy%202018-21.pdf

Children Social Care Innovation Programme:

Waltham Forest Think Family Approach:
https://thehub.walthamforest.gov.uk/meetings-events/launch-think-family-approach-and-good-practice-guidance-workshop

Ealing Brighter Futures Intensive Engagement Model
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ealing-brighter-futures-evaluation

Hackney
https://www.hackney.gov.uk/contextual-safeguarding

## 9. Contact details

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