

## Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Panels

### Terms of Reference and Operating Principles

#### Overarching Principles

1. This document should be read in conjunction with the following documents

	Ctrl +Click Links
<a href="#">Joint Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy</a>	
<a href="#">Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Information Sharing Guidance for Practitioners</a>	
<a href="#">Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Child Exploitation Strategy</a>	
<a href="#">Child Exploitation Risk Factor Matrix</a>	

Where there are concerns a child may be at risk of exploitation, practitioners should refer to the Threshold Framework ‘Accessing the Right Help at the Right Time’. This will offer guidance regarding thresholds for statutory and non-statutory interventions.

Early intervention is crucial for agencies to proactively tackle exploitation. Practitioners within each agency or organisation has a responsibility and duty of care to the safeguarding and wellbeing of children. By becoming aware of and understanding the risk indicators and factors that push or pull children into exploitation, this enables practitioners to effectively intervene at an early stage, aiming to reduce and/ or eliminate the risk. The earlier the intervention, the better the chances of success and it is likely to be far more effective than intervention at a later stage, when the impact on the child's health and emotional development is likely to have escalated or constrained choices become entrenched.

In **Staffordshire**, District Operational Leads chair bi-monthly Panels where children are felt to be at medium to high risk of exploitation are discussed. The Risk Factor Matrix (RFM) is used to identify the level of risk and appropriate intervention agreed by this Panel. The purpose of MACE is to work together with partners to identify disruption strategies and will not discuss management of care planning for children

(although further review meetings for care planning may be requested as an action from MACE if concerns are identified).

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3. The following definition of Child Exploitation will be used.

*Child exploitation is a form of child abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur using technology*

### **Contextual Safeguarding**

It is important to understand and respond to children's experience of significant harm that occurs beyond their families. This approach is called Contextual Safeguarding, and it recognizes that the different relationships that children form in their neighborhoods, schools and online, can feature violence and abuse. In some instances, parents and carers can have little influence over these contexts, and children's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships. Parents and carers remain key individuals in supporting and protecting children at risk of or experiencing exploitation and practitioners must ensure that their support widens to them, alongside their support of the child.

**Working Together to Safeguard Children** (HM Government, 2018;) states that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Working Together outlines the duties of all organisations that work with children. An Amendment has been made to this guidance in December 2020 which changed the definition of contextual safeguarding to reflect abuse outside of the family home.

**Key principles of MACE are outlined below:**

#### **(i) The Child's best interests must be the top priority**

The best interests of children and young people and their rights to protection must drive all decision making. The paramountcy principle (Children Act 1989) must be adhered to where applicable and children's rights under UNCRC Article 3 fully honoured.

#### **(ii) Participation of children and young people**

Services need to involve children and young people when decisions are being made about their care, protection and on-going support and be kept informed on any issues that affect them throughout. Professionals must be mindful of children and young people's needs and equalities. Their UNCRC Article 12 rights must be honoured.

#### **(iii) Enduring relationships and support**

Support must be tailored to meet the needs of child, according to their age, identity, ethnicity, belief, sexual orientation, disability, language, and stage of development.

Children and young people have told us that a consistent person who sticks with them throughout the whole period of their protection and on-going care is crucial to their recovery.

**(iv) Comprehensive problem profiling**

The Joint Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Child Exploitation Strategy highlights the need for comprehensive problem profiles. MACE panels contribute towards this by providing detailed information in relation to local trends, locations and persons of concern via mapping.

Area intelligence is coordinated by each district panel and shared as appropriate with panel members to inform disruption activity and allow professionals to effectively safeguard children within a community context. This includes sharing of information with Staffordshire Police (and all agencies as appropriate) to support local problem profiling and contribute towards wider regional profiles and considers a wider multi-agency disruption of exploitation activity within communities. In addition to this, the MACE panels identify good practice and safe spaces, often supported by positive interventions and agencies operating within the area.

**(v) Effective information-sharing within and between agencies**

It is expected that all areas will hold a cross sector information sharing protocol, based around the safe handling, and sharing of information. Protocols should focus upon the best interests of the child and their welfare and should take guidance from all relevant safeguarding and information governance legislation; all relevant agencies and services should be signatories, with expectations of signatories made clear within the document. Supporting these protocols the Vulnerable Adolescents Multi-agency Panel operates under its own confidentiality agreement, all present are expected to adhere to the agreement both within and outside of panel.

**(vi) Supervision, support and training of staff**

Services should invest in the development and support of staff including providing regular supervision and the opportunities for them to reflect on practice. Those professionals who offer direct support to exploited children and young people might require further intensive training and must have regular opportunities to reflect on their practice with a killed consultant or supervisor.

**(vii) Evaluation and review**

Evaluations and regular reviews of the effectiveness of the Child Exploitation Strategy is necessary to ensure services and interventions are achieving their intended outcomes and meeting the child and young person's needs. Children and young people must be directly involved in this process in compliance with Article 12 of the UNCRC. This will ensure that performance is driven continuously by a cycle that leads to improvement.

The Local Authority will also look to review bi-monthly data, themes and trends following MACE which will also include reviewing locations good practice and analysing any gaps in service or training.

## **MACE Panel Purpose**

The MACE panels are not intended to replace or replicate existing statutory mechanisms for managing planned work with individual children or linked groups of children. Other forums such as Early Help Assessments (EHA), a Child in Need Plan (CIN Plan), a Child Protection Plan (CP Plan), a Youth Offending Service Plan or a Care Plan or Pathway Plan for those children who are in the care of the Local Authority; will continue to manage the day to day care planning for the child and will be complimented by the disruption activity and contextual safeguarding focus of the MACE.

Where it is felt there is a clear escalation in Child Exploitation risk, or concern for a young person, Child Protection procedures need to be followed. If threshold for Child Protection is not met, agencies should consider escalating concerns to the lead professional or alternatively, requesting care planning meetings are brought forward. This will utilise a multi-agency approach and can support the completion of a Child Exploitation Risk Factor Matrix. Advice and support in respect of Child Exploitation concerns can be sought from the Child Exploitation Coordinators in between MACE Meetings.

A further purpose of the MACE panels will be to ensure strategic oversight is enabled at a district and County level in respect of Child Exploitation. This will enable problem profiling as a County. This will also allow for oversight of prevention and targeted interventions, so that they can be aimed at groups and communities and routinely monitored. The panels will thus support actions to safeguard children and to disrupt and reduce the opportunity for them to be exploited within a community, rather than solely through individual care plans. This will be aided by the review of all local children and locations which have been shared with the CE Coordinators for inclusion in MACE by the multi-agency group. Additional actions to existing Early Help Assessments, CIN, CP, YOS Plans or Statutory Care Plans may be agreed as part of the panel's primary strategic objectives.

It is important that for any children referred to the MACE, the lead professional will attend the MACE and provide an overview of the Child Exploitation concerns. This should include all relevant information regarding links and associates, locations of concern, any ongoing CP/Police investigations and information around the child themselves and any interventions that are in place. All agencies supporting the child should be represented at MACE to ensure all relevant information is shared.

The MACE panels will provide performance management oversight of practitioner responses to individual Child Exploitation cases and ensure that the Child Exploitation Risk Factor Matrix is routinely used.

The MACE panels will receive aggregated information about children who go missing from home or care in a given area to ensure any links between missing activity and Child Exploitation are made and acted upon. Pre-MACE thresholding will also be completed (for further information see Pre MACE thresholding).

The Panels will identify examples of best practice and disseminate learning from this across professionals.

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Commented [BS(3)]: Would this not be done through bi monthly data rather than a direct outcome of MACE? Maybe we could move this to a different section?

Children and parents/carers should be informed by the professional/agency identifying the Child Exploitation concerns that their child is to be discussed at the Panels and what the purpose of this is. Their views will be ascertained by the lead practitioner and shared with the Panel by the presenting professional.

### **Accountability**

Panel data is collated and analysed throughout the year in line with Staffordshire County Council and Safeguarding Children Boards internal reporting timeframes. This will include a bi-monthly panel data report.

Practitioners are responsible for ensuring existing planning mechanisms for managing EHA, CIN, CP, YOS Plans and Statutory Care Plans/Pathway Plans are effectively in place in line with statutory requirements and the needs of the child. Each agency represented at the Child Exploitation Panel remains accountable to their internal structure and safeguarding policies/practices and are responsible for the recording of their own information relating to MACE.

### **Outputs of MACE Panels**

Review of individual children who are at risk of Child Exploitation via the sharing of intelligence, wider agency information and case information. This will be used to aid multi-agency disruption activity via tactics advised to consider within the Home Office Toolkit:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/794554/6.5120\\_Child\\_exploitation\\_disruption\\_toolkit.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/794554/6.5120_Child_exploitation_disruption_toolkit.pdf)

Mapping will be completed which will assist with the identification of any links between individual children/offenders that have not been made apparent via individual planning for children. This will be used to aid multi-agency disruption activity. Mapping will be a key output of the panels and will offer a visual representation of the links alongside the demographic of the community, taking in to account the physical locations of address, local hotspots or safe spaces and areas of further targeting.

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The MACE panel may make recommendations for enhancing actions identified within existing EHA, CIN, CP, YOS Plans and statutory Care Plan/Pathway Plans.

Through bi-monthly data and reporting, the MACE will consider practitioner compliance in completing the MACE Risk Factor Matrix. It will also identify training needs, positive support and interventions, aide safety planning and commissioning within local districts.

The MACE will also look to plan for targeted prevention and disruption activity where the incidence of Child Exploitation is high (for example, in relation to pupils attending a certain school or socialising in a certain geographical area). This will be done through agreeing any multi-agency responses to promoting a clear focus on ensuring there are "safe space" for children across Staffordshire.

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### **Expectations of Panel Attendee:**

All professionals invited to the MACE panel will be required to sign a confidentiality form at the start of each meeting and comply with the information sharing protocol.

There is an expectation that MACE panel members and attendees, as representatives of their agency, will attend prepared to share information about children, their families, associations and any people, locations or trends of concern. All information discussed, and documents shared at the Child Exploitation Panel are strictly confidential and matters discussed should only be disclosed to professional colleagues in accordance with existing arrangements for safeguarding children consistent with the Children Act 2004 and Working Together Feb 2018.

All partner agencies contributing to the Child Exploitation Panel process are required to ensure that their own procedures for information sharing and confidentiality support the ethos of Working Together 2018 and Staffordshire Safeguarding Board's commitment to that.

All agencies in attendance at the Panels are responsible for securely filing documentation received.

### **Proposed Core Panel Membership and Virtual Panel Members**

MACE Panels will be held virtually through Microsoft Teams.

**Core Panel Membership:** Identified District Operational Lead (Chair), Staffordshire Police CPET Team, Staffordshire Police Violence Reduction Unit (North staffs only), Staffordshire Police Harm Reduction Hubs, Police Missing coordinator, Health Representatives (Named Nurse), Education Representatives as required, District Council Safeguarding Lead, representative from Youth Offending Service, Substance Misuse services, specialist CE services (including commissioned CE and Missing service and Locally Commissioned Youth Workers), Domestic Violence Services, Care homes as appropriate, Futures Matters Intensive support workers, Effective Practice Development Officer (EPDO), Housing Providers, allocated Social workers and Family Practitioners .

**Secondary Panel Membership: As identified as relevant to individual cases individual cases or to allow oversight and feedback where appropriate,** for example, Accommodation providers, Probation, MAPPA Representative, Sexual Health Service Providers, Young Carers Hub, Children Missing Education Officer, Representatives for children in the care of other Local Authorities.

### **Locations of Panels**

35. The number and locations of panels has been amended in line with the Children Service Transformation and District panels are set out below:

- Newcastle- Under-Lyme
- Moorlands
- Tamworth,
- Lichfield

- East Staffordshire
- Stafford
- Cannock
- South Staffordshire

### **Frequency of Panels**

To accommodate the volume of children being discussed and to allow for movement within a risk level, panels are held bi-monthly in each area. Should changes be required they will propose within the recommendations of the review report and presented via consultation with partners under the Board.

### **Referral Pathway & Pre-MACE Thresholding**

All children to be discussed at panel must have a completed MACE Risk Factor Matrix (RFM) identifying risk as medium or high. Completed RFM's should be submitted to the Futures Matters CE Coordinator's email inbox [CSE@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:CSE@staffordshire.gov.uk)

### **Thresholding for Staffordshire MACE**

Prior to each MACE meeting, the MACE panel administrator will collate lateral checks from Education, EHCP/CME, YOS, Catch22, New Era, T3, Local Police Harm Reduction Hubs, Alternative Provision Panel and the Missing Data officer. The CE coordinators then access social care systems to complete file checks and once this information is collated and read alongside reviewed RFM's, a pre-MACE thresholding meeting is held with the Local Police Harm Reduction Hub to formulate the MACE agenda. This enables a full picture of interventions and support to be understood to review children via MACE.

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The agenda is then compiled within 4 main categories:

**1 – Children to be discussed at MACE**, Where there is an individual or a number of vulnerable children mapped together as a group, these children will be discussed within one time slot clearly identified on the agenda to enable each practitioner working with them to understand the risk and concern for all involved. Locations will also be discussed within the main Agenda even if no specific child has been identified.

**2 – Children where there is insufficient information shared.** This will trigger a discussion with the Panel chair and lead professional to ensure updated RFM's and information is received. This also allows agencies to share information on these children to make effective threshold decisions within the MACE.

**3 – Children who will remain considered for MACE.** For these children, there is no requirement for full discussion as they already have appropriate interventions and support in place, have updated safety plans and there is no further disruption that can be offered through MACE.

**4 – Children are removed from MACE –** this is where concerns have been reduced, children have moved out of the area or interventions are having a positive impact and children are now felt to be at low risk of CE, Where children move out of area, but there are continuing concerns, the MACE will request a transfer of information to the host authority and request a child is included in their equivalent MACE.

For those who are not fully discussed at MACE, Key decisions will be added to each child's file to record rationale for this.

42. Panels are not an avenue for professionals to make new referrals to Staffordshire Childrens Social Care or partner agencies. Referrals should be made to First Response at the point of identification of need or harm

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