HSCP

Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership

HOUNSLOW SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

Hounslow Safeguarding Adolescents Strategy

2021-23

Contents

1. Introduction

Hounslow Adolescent Safeguarding Strategy as part of a wider vision for children and young people in the borough.

Parents can expect to call on the support of high-quality universal services in order to help their children get a good start in life. Adolescents should have access to good schools and colleges, health provision and leisure services in order to provide a secure base from which to make the transition to further education or training and employment.

A wider strategy which enables children to 'learn and explore', achieve the best educational outcomes and secure the best base for the transition to adulthood will be prepared by Hounslow Council, with the support of its partners in the NHS and other agencies. The local authority is leading this work.

Some children and young people need additional, targeted services to address areas of need and risk in their lives. A smaller number will need the assistance of one or more specialist safeguarding services. The Hounslow Adolescent Safeguarding Strategy addresses the needs of this group of children.

The strategy establishes the vision and aspirations for the adolescent safeguarding service provision in Hounslow. It will focus on the most common risks and vulnerabilities which, if not addressed, are likely to prevent adolescents from benefitting from universal health and educational services and making a positive transition to adulthood.

As with universal services the strategy reflects a whole system approach to adolescent safeguarding in which the local authority and its partners develop a shared vision and strategy. The strategy is not a one-off document. It begins with this statement of intent, scope and principle and will be the subject of regular review.

This document also provides details of the Adolescent Safeguarding Oversight and Monitoring Group which will oversee the implementation of the strategy and its first priority areas of activity.
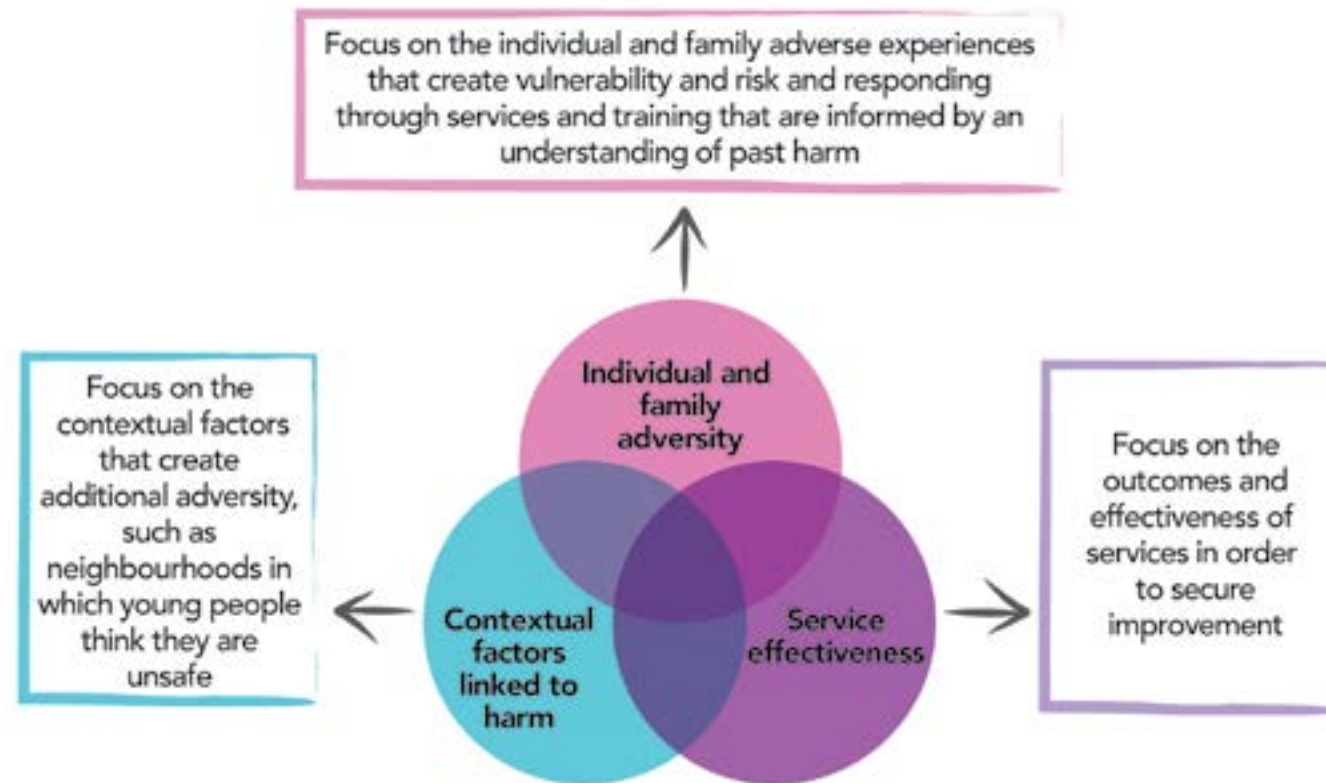
2. Adolescent safeguarding risks

Areas of adolescent safeguarding risk need and service delivery

1. Sexual abuse and harm which is taken to include:
   a. Child Sexual Exploitation
   b. Sexual abuse by other adolescents (Harmful Sexual Behaviours)
   c. Child sexual abuse within the family network
   d. Online sexual abuse

2. Serious youth violence and criminal exploitation i.e. children and adolescents exposed to risk through gang involvement and serious youth violence, including county lines and trafficking. Sexual exploitation that occurs in the context of youth violence.
3. Children missing from home and care.
4. Adolescent Neglect – where deficits in parental behaviour may lead to the neglect of a young person or make the young person more prone to extra-familial risks.
5. Domestic violence and abuse of young women that falls outside adult definitions of domestic abuse.
6. Substance Misuse

7. Adolescent mental illness, emotional and behavioural difficulties
   a. Mental illness (including for example eating disorders) and less serious concerns about mental health
   b. Self-harm and attempted suicide

8. Radicalisation

9. Poor educational outcomes which may affect other aspects of risk
   a. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
   b. Exclusion and involuntary school moves (managed moves)
   c. Admission to PRU, progress at the PRU and outcomes

10. Family breakdown
   a. Homelessness
   b. Need for substitute care as a result of family breakdown

3. Work with adolescents - philosophy and values

Adolescent safeguarding risks arise from a combination of individual and family adverse experiences; contextual risk factors; and gaps or shortcomings in previous services.

This document also provides details of the Adolescent Safeguarding Oversight and Monitoring Group which will oversee the implementation of the strategy and its first priority areas of activity.

3.1 Adolescence as a distinctive stage in life
Hounslow's Adolescent Safeguarding Strategy will focus on the needs of children and young people in the age range 12-17, though the strategy should also take account of transitions at the beginning of adolescence and into adulthood.

Adolescence is a unique period in life – neither childhood nor adulthood but marked by the tensions between the two. Services for adolescents must be attuned to this; they must 'go with the grain' of the ways in which adolescents think and act.

3.2 Adolescent choices are constrained, and adolescent agency is important
Sometimes adolescent choices and behaviour play a part in the risks that adolescents are experiencing. But usually those choices are not fully 'informed'. We should think of adolescents as having choices that are 'constrained', by their past experience, their developmental stage and their lack of experience.

At the same time it is wrong to minimise or ignore the decisions and actions of adolescents and the part they are playing. Unless we recognise and work with adolescent agency and choice, it will remain a potent force that may be directed in a negative way.

Reducing risk involves working with young people (and key people in their worlds) to help them to channel their skills and developmental drives (such as risk-taking, developing independence) towards acting in line with their aspirations and best interests.

3.3 Relationships, engagement and the responsibility to use authority
Relationships between adults (professionals, volunteers, mentors) and young people are critical. Through relationships, adults put into practice their responsibility to help form young people into adults. Relationships are about engaging with adolescents, listening and understanding their perspectives, and encouraging their aspirations. But they are also about the use of authority. Adult experience and knowledge are crucial tools to help adolescents make sense of the world. Boundaries are real and actions have consequences, sometimes positive and sometimes negative.

3.4 Responding to the whole person in the places where adolescents are already engaged
Some young people experience a number of difficulties - bringing them into contact with more than one service. Common underlying risks, such as the experience of exploitation, can present in a variety of ways. Statutory frameworks can pull young people and practitioners in many directions, with split or multiple responses to the same young person.

We need to avoid this. Attention must be given to the way in which services dealing with different aspects of risk connect with one another. Services need to do this by finding out who else is working with the young person, sharing information, avoiding duplication and signposting young people to the right place.

We know that adolescents often find it hard to trust professionals, making it more difficult for professionals to successfully engage them in work. If services are poorly coordinated, young people and their families will have to tell their story several times to find the right service. If services open and close their work or case transfers between services are common, the difficult task of engaging some young people will be made even harder.

We should maximise opportunities to provide services in the venues where young people are already present and engaged, including schools, colleges, alternative educational provision, and the Youth Offending Service - rather than referring the young person onto a new service.

Extra-familial harm does not respect borough boundaries, so collaboration with services based in neighbouring authorities is vital.

3.5 Disparities in experience and service outcomes between different communities
Children from different communities in the borough are known to be achieving different outcomes. The strategy will need to understand this better and determine whether children from some communities need to benefit from access to different kinds of specialist support. Practice must be culturally competent and address discrimination, where it is found to exist.

3.6 Transitions to adult services
If we understand adolescent need and risk we will be better placed to ensure that there is a better continuity of services for young adults.

4. Adolescent safeguarding in Hounslow

The main current areas of safeguarding risk in Hounslow are Child Criminal Exploitation (serious youth violence, including knife crime and associated offending) and Sexual Harm (sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation). These are our priority.

The main areas in which children experience poor outcomes that contribute to adolescent safeguarding risks are:
- Disrupted educational journeys (poor school or college attendance, managed moves, internal, fixed term and permanent exclusions, achievement below potential special needs due to behavioural difficulties)
- Adverse childhood experiences – abuse and neglect
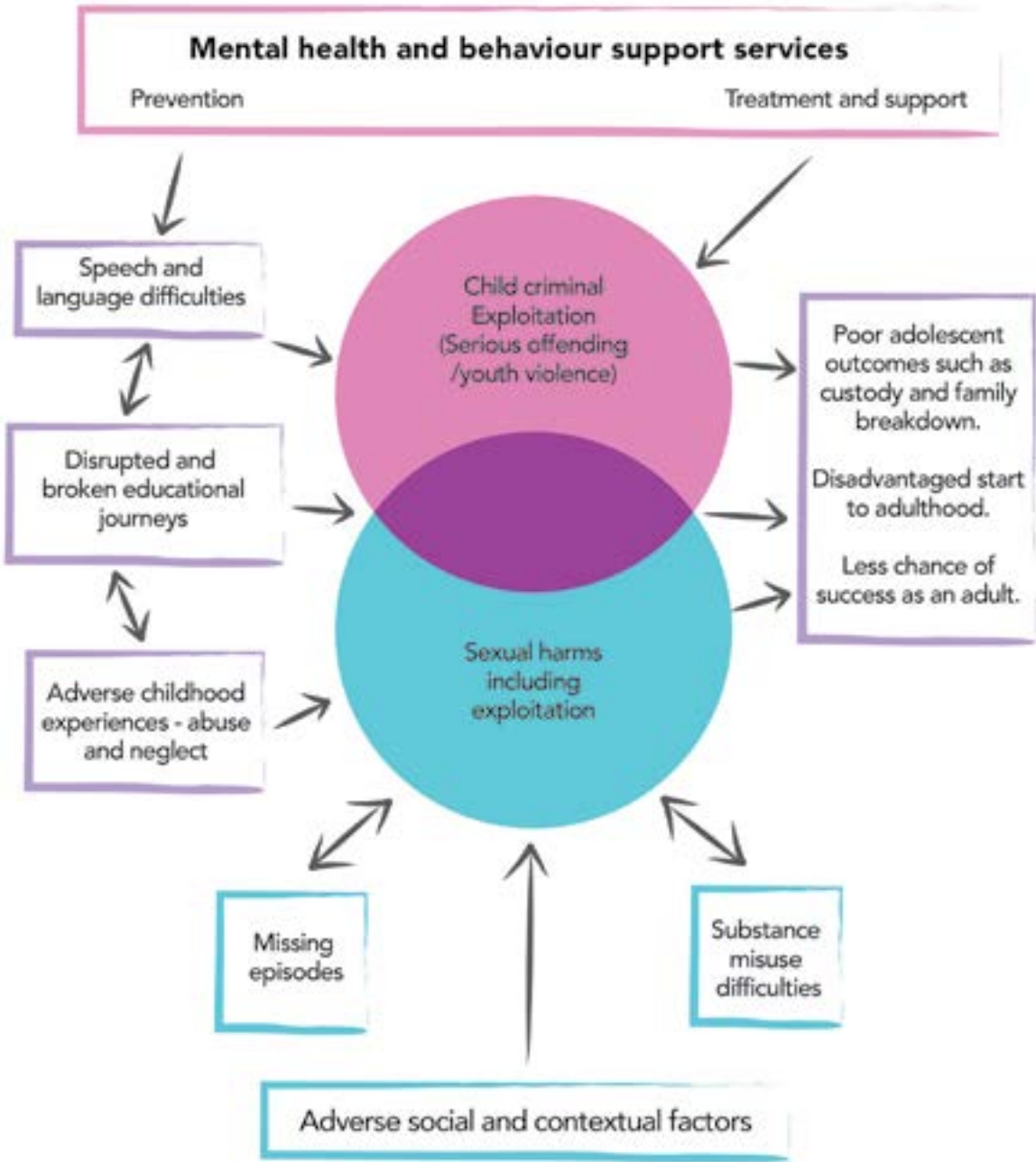- Speech, language and communication difficulties

If we want to safeguard adolescents and promote their health and wellbeing, we have to address these areas in our prevention work.

The partnership cannot quantify the extent of need because case numbers and estimates of need are fragmented and duplicated across a variety of services and forums.

Planning of priorities needs to be supported by a coherent needs assessment and understanding of outcomes.

Developing a collaborative response to children and young people's behavioural difficulties and mental health needs is key. Responses to the partnership's survey highlighted the following:
- Services are funded by both the council and the NHS
- There are a variety of teams delivering mental health services with different focus and thresholds, so it is not possible to be certain which adolescents are well served and which are not
- Much positive mental health and speech and language provision is made through the Youth Offending Service
- The main concern in relation to adolescent safeguarding is that there is currently no service focused on behaviour problems. This means that only a limited contribution is being made to the main signs of poor behaviour and school exclusion.

5. Adolescent safeguarding – risks and needs in Hounslow

6. Adolescent safeguarding strategy

Purpose and scope of the Hounslow Adolescent Safeguarding Strategy

1. Provide an improved understanding of risk and vulnerability (e.g. type of need, numbers of young people, relative need in comparison to other localities so that Hounslow can see its position in a wider perspective)

2. Outline the current picture of service provision to include:
   • capacity of services to meet the key areas of need and vulnerability
   • strengths in services and opportunities for improvement

3. Provide a framework for discussing and agreeing priorities for service development. These are likely to include the following:
   • Agreed priorities / areas of need and vulnerability
   • Areas where there is a recognised need for improvement in service provision and practice

4. Provide a framework for the monitoring of progress against agreed objectives and measures of performance (both within individual agencies and across the partnership as a whole)

5. Provide opportunities for improvement, which are likely to include:
   • Better ways of understanding adolescent behaviour, need and risk
   • Developing a better understanding of extra-familial risk and ways of responding
   • Improved ways of working based on good practice and research
   • Better coordination and planning of services, eliminating duplication
   • Better pathways between services to improve access
   • Better use of key locations for service delivery such as schools and colleges
   • Better liaison with community safety services

6. Enable better service user involvement of young people and their families in planning and delivery of services

7. Promote ways of working that we know can be successful and experiment with new ways of working that seem to meet the needs of young people

7. Hounslow Adolescent Safeguarding Oversight and Monitoring Group

The Adolescent Safeguarding Oversight and Monitoring Group will hold the responsibility of ensuring robust oversight, challenge, and scrutiny of the implementation of the strategy in addition to monitoring the effectiveness of the multi-agency system responding to adolescents at risk on behalf of the HSCP.

The work of the group will be accountable for;
- Producing and reviewing the Hounslow Adolescent Safeguarding Strategy
- Promoting the development of safeguarding services in line with the strategy
- Develop and update an understanding of local need, risk and service outcomes for adolescent safeguarding
- Be responsible for the continuing monitoring and improvement of safeguarding arrangements and services for adolescents
- Be the accountable body for the MACE and other multi-agency operational safeguarding groups who respond to safeguarding adolescents
- Provide a forum for liaison and coordination with other strategic groups (such as Community Safety Partnership)

7.1 Priorities
The immediate priority is to secure better oversight of the extent and nature of;
1. Disrupted and broken educational journeys
2. Criminal exploitation (serious youth violence, knife crime, disruption of organised criminal activity which promotes exploitation and missing)
3. Sexual abuse (CSE and intra-familial abuse)
4. Mental health services offering behaviour support
5. Violence against girls and young women

By understanding these areas in more detail a coherent picture of need and service outcome will be developed and support an improved understanding of the cohorts of young people, which agencies they are in touch with and their journey and how they can be better helped now.

HOUNSLOW SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP