

The Children and Social Work Act

The role of voluntary sector CSE services in new safeguarding arrangements



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Policy Briefing

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This briefing considers the policy and practice implications of a three-year evaluation of the 'Hub and Spoke' model of child sexual exploitation (CSE) service development. Over 2018/19 new local safeguarding arrangements will be agreed, published and implemented, as the local authority (LA), local police chief and clinical commissioning group take joint responsibility for safeguarding in place of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs). Safeguarding partners will have responsibility to identify 'relevant agencies' and publish plans that outline how they will work with those agencies to safeguard and promote children's welfare. This briefing will therefore be of particular interest to independent chairs of LSCBs, new safeguarding partners and local agencies with responsibility for responding to CSE.

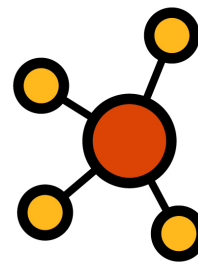
Key messages

- Evidence of the distinct contribution of voluntary sector CSE services to local safeguarding suggests they should be identified as a 'relevant agency' in the published arrangements.
- The requirement for published safeguarding plans could support the effective inclusion of voluntary sector CSE services in multi-agency plans, processes and structures – particularly where they help safeguarding partners to consider the value of these services' independence and distinct approach.
- As integrated and co-located services are promoted in policy, the Alexi Project provides evidence to support partnership working that protects the distinct functions and contributions of particular agencies.
- The new arrangements present a potential opportunity to develop more strategic, long-term and sustainable approaches to the funding and commissioning of specialist CSE services, insofar as safeguarding arrangements will be publically available and approaches to funding are scrutinised.
- The publication of safeguarding reports could be a mechanism to ensure voluntary sector services are valued and included in multi-agency responses to CSE, and used to promote the participation of children and young people in local safeguarding policy and practice.
- Safeguarding partners need to be aware of some of the challenges facing CSE services when evidencing their impact, and take this into account when drawing on outcomes data in their annual safeguarding report.

1. The Alexi Project

The Alexi Project was an £8m service development programme, funded by the Child Sexual Exploitation Funders' Alliance (CSEFA). A key part of the project was the implementation of a 'Hub and Spoke' model, designed to rapidly increase the capacity and coverage of specialist, voluntary sector child sexual exploitation (CSE) services within England. Sixteen CSE services were funded for three years each, over a five-year period, with the aims of:

1. Making specialist support available to children and young people in a series of new locations; and
2. Improving the co-ordination, delivery and practice of local services responding to CSE – including police, children's services and other partner agencies.



The Alexi Project

Evaluating a new model of tackling CSE across England

During the evaluation period, these 16 hub services placed 53 spoke workers into 35 new local authorities. The spoke workers provided one-to-one support, group-work and awareness-raising sessions to children and young people, and offered consultancy, training and awareness-raising to practitioners as well.

2. The evaluation

The Hub and Spoke programme was evaluated by a team at 'The International Centre: Researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking' at the University of Bedfordshire. The team conducted 276 interviews with a range of stakeholders across the 16 sites, as well as collecting 30 case studies from spoke workers, and a range of quantitative data relating to the activities of the hub and spoke services. This briefing is based on the final report 'Harris et al. (2017) Evaluation of the Alexi Project 'Hub and Spoke' programme of CSE service development' which can be read at the Alexi Project website.

3. The Children and Social Work Act

In 2016, the Government commissioned Alan Wood to undertake a review of Local Safeguarding Children Boards, Serious Case Reviews and Child Death Overview Panel arrangements. The Wood Review reported in March 2016 and a number of its recommendations were incorporated into the Children and Social Work Act, which received Royal Assent on April 27th 2017. The Act abolished LSCBs and placed responsibility for 'local arrangements' with the safeguarding partners for an LA, which are the LA, the local clinical commissioning group and the chief officer of police for the relevant area. The Act directs safeguarding partners to identify specific agencies which they believe to be relevant to the work of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in their area, and to make arrangements for the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies 'to work together to identify and respond to the needs of children in the area' (Children and Social Work Act, 2017, 16E: 2).

Safeguarding partners have up to 12 months following the commencement of provisions in the Act to agree the arrangements for themselves and any relevant agencies they consider appropriate. The arrangements have to be subject to independent scrutiny, and be published by the end of the 12 month period. After publication,

safeguarding partners will have up to three months to implement the arrangements and at this point the LSCB for the local area will cease to exist.

This 12 month period is therefore an opportunity for presenting evidence to support the development of new safeguarding arrangements. The rest of this briefing considers the implications of evidence from the Hub and Spoke evaluation for safeguarding policy in both the Children and Social Work Act (2017) and the draft of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children - April 2018' (hereafter 'Working Together').

4. Voluntary sector CSE services as 'relevant agencies'

Safeguarding partners will have responsibility to identify local agencies they believe to be relevant to the work of safeguarding, and to make arrangements to work alongside these relevant agencies to identify and respond to the needs of children in the area. The 'Local Safeguarding Partner (Relevant Agencies) (England) Regulations' details the specific agencies which safeguarding partners can choose from, and includes 'Charities'.

In relation to CSE, the voluntary sector has been at the forefront of developing and providing specialist services for victims for over 20 years. Evidence from the Hub and Spoke evaluation has shown that children and young people affected by sexual exploitation are often mistrustful of statutory services, and voluntary sector CSE services are successful at engaging vulnerable children and young people that other services struggle to reach. Services achieve this engagement by offering children and young people meaningful choices, empowering them and being persistent in building relationships over the long-term. Having a voluntary sector worker as part of a multi-agency CSE team also improves children and young people's engagement in these wider services. The evaluation showed that shared standards of practice can develop when voluntary sector workers model their approach to case work, and deliver training that improves responses to vulnerable children and young people.

The draft text of Working Together (2018: 75) highlights that staff in voluntary organisations that deliver services to children "need to be aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding". However, in the case of CSE, specialist services are working to engage and support some of the most vulnerable and disengaged children and young people, in order to reduce the risk of significant harm and/or support their recovery. This is core safeguarding and child protection work, which is not reflected by the current version of this text.

In light of the work that CSE services do, the evidence is clear that they should be identified as a relevant agency in the published arrangements.

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5. Publishing plans for safeguarding partnerships

The draft text of Working Together (2018: 80) states that published safeguarding arrangements must include "...the relevant agencies the safeguarding partners will work with, why these agencies are relevant and how they will work together to improve outcomes for children and families". This has the potential to be a useful tool for improving multi-agency safeguarding. The Hub and Spoke evaluation highlighted the importance of these kinds of plans for maximising the effectiveness of specialist CSE services. Important elements include arrangements and protocols for effective communication and information sharing and the negotiation of clear roles and boundaries in the context of co-located services.

However, the evaluation also identified the significance of stable relationships at strategic levels: taking time to build trust, and developing a shared understanding of and respect for each organisation's role, needs and priorities. It is positive that the draft of Working Together directs safeguarding partners to "consult with relevant agencies in developing the safeguarding arrangements to make sure the expectations take account of an agency's structure and statutory obligations" (2018: 80). The evaluation would suggest the need to go further in also taking account of an agency's role, function and distinct contribution.

For example, the evaluation concluded that commissioners could get the best out of voluntary sector services by protecting their independence in contractual arrangements. This allows services to advocate for children and young people and challenge poor practice if necessary. It also builds trust with children and young people who may be mistrustful of statutory services. If CSE workers are based in multi-agency teams, they will need to maintain regular contact with their hub service to retain a clear voluntary sector identity. This level of detail may not be necessary in a local safeguarding plan, but explicit references to the value of service independence can help to create shared expectations and improve partnership working.

6. Commissioning

The draft of Working Together (2018: 77) states that local processes should be developed that promote both "...the commissioning of services in a co-ordinated way" and "co-operation and integration between universal services such as schools, GP practices, adult services, early years settings, youth services and colleges, voluntary and community and specialist support services".

The Hub and Spoke evaluation affirmed the value of partnerships between the statutory and voluntary sectors, including models of co-location through which the distinct ethos and approach of the voluntary sector in engaging children and young people can be diffused among other agencies. As multi-agency and co-located teams are increasingly used as part of local safeguarding arrangements e.g. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs, it is in the interest

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of local safeguarding partners to understand how to commission partnership working that protects the distinct functions and contributions of particular agencies. The evaluation provided evidence that will support service design and decision-making around multi-agency CSE responses - including how to create the conditions that will enable the voluntary sector to be at its most effective. A range of specific recommendations for commissioners are available in the final evaluation report.

The Hub and Spoke model was also found to strengthen regional responses to CSE by providing an overview of CSE patterns and services across local authority areas. It facilitated improved awareness of children and young people's movements across LA boundaries, and supported multi-agency strategy development in combatting CSE. The draft of *Working Together* (2018) affords safeguarding partners in different LAs the freedom to collaborate across geographical areas, which could lead to more regional commissioning. In these cases, partners should consider the use of Hub and Spoke models, for expanding services and promoting regional strategies.

7. Funding

Funding to support these new safeguarding arrangements will have to be agreed by safeguarding partners, according to the draft of *Working Together*. Contributions from each partner and relevant agency must be equitable and proportionate to meet local needs, but will ultimately be locally determined. The text states: "For local arrangements to be effective, they should reflect the local needs assessment" (2018: 80) and later, that funding should be "sufficient to cover all elements of the arrangements" (2018: 82). It is unarguable that needs assessments should drive safeguarding arrangements (including funding), but highly likely that funding levels will be equally influenced by the quality of the safeguarding partnership and partners' own funding constraints.

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New safeguarding arrangements therefore have the potential to improve or worsen the effectiveness of voluntary sector CSE services. The Hub and Spoke evaluation found that short-term contracts and funding arrangements can undermine the methods used by these services to support children and young people effectively. This includes longer intervention times based on relational practice. The report concluded that funding for these services was not sustainable, and that adequate funding was necessary to enable services to continue to provide independent support and advocacy for highly vulnerable children. It recommended that longer term and co-commissioned funding streams should be developed, drawing on both statutory and voluntary funding in recognition of the important role of the voluntary sector in safeguarding and child protection practice.

Having three safeguarding partners presents a potential opportunity to develop more strategic, long-term and sustainable approaches to the funding and commissioning of services, insofar as safeguarding arrangements will be publically available and approaches to funding are scrutinised. However, representatives need to be in a position to determine the funding commitment from their partner agency and to ensure that this contribution reflects local need.

8. Reporting

Under the new arrangements, safeguarding partners have to publish a report at least once every 12 months, detailing what they (and their relevant agencies) have done and how effective the arrangements have been. Building on the previous requirement for LSCBs to produce an annual report, this could stimulate scrutiny, promote children's participation and sensitise safeguarding partners to the challenges of outcomes measurement for CSE services.

8.1 Scrutiny

Safeguarding reports are intended to be a key element of local accountability and self-assessment, and could support local scrutiny, to ensure that arrangements are robust, and no relevant agency is excluded from safeguarding arrangements. This accountability could be particularly valuable in areas where there are not strong existing relationships between statutory and voluntary sector agencies responding to CSE. The Hub and Spoke evaluation found that, where relationships had developed well over time, local authorities were able to tolerate a high level of challenge around working practices and approaches to CSE, and welcomed the independent perspective that the voluntary sector could offer. However, without those relationships, there is a risk that voluntary sector agencies that advocate for children and young people by challenging poor practice could be side-lined, rather than included in strategic multi-agency plans and structures.

8.2 Children's participation

The draft of Working Together (2018: 83) states that the report should also cover the "ways in which the partners have sought and utilised feedback from children, young people and families to inform their work and influence service provision".

This is welcome in light of research evidence that shows that children and young people affected by CSE have routinely not been listened to by professionals and left unprotected as a result. Research shows that the participation and inclusion of children affected by CSE in decision making is a crucial part of safeguarding and service improvement, as well as their right (Warrington, 2015; Brodie et al., 2016). There can be particular challenges to overcome when seeking to include and listen to children and young people affected by sexual exploitation, so it is important that safeguarding partners communicate a clear expectation to all relevant agencies that these barriers are not insurmountable. For more information and resources on promoting the participation of children and CSE, see the participation area of the Alexi Project website.

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8.3 Outcomes

Finally, the Working Together draft (2018: 83) states that the annual report should include “evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies on outcomes for children and families”. The Hub and Spoke evaluation identified that one of the most significant challenges facing voluntary sector CSE services lies in successfully demonstrating the impact of their work. This is due to a complex combination of factors which include: the challenge of establishing baselines using risk assessments; the inappropriateness of many standardised measures for evaluating progress and ascertaining attribution, and the subjectivity of current ‘distance travelled’ tools.

While some commissioners are sensitive to these challenges, others express scepticism and disappointment at services’ lack of quantitative evidence, which can ultimately undermine confidence in the service and impact upon their longer-term sustainability. It is therefore important that safeguarding partners are aware of the challenges facing CSE services in evidencing their impact, and of the need for further work to understand how approaches to impact measurement might reflect the value and benefit of this work more appropriately. For more information, see ‘The challenge of outcomes measurement in CSE services’ (Shuker, 2018).

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9. Conclusion

The Alexi Project Hub and Spoke evaluation highlighted the value of voluntary sector CSE services to local safeguarding, and the inclusion of these services in multi-agency structures, plans and processes. The imminent reorganisation of local safeguarding presents a risk that these services will lose their ‘seat at the table’, as well as an opportunity that their contribution is more formally recognised. The data gathered through the evaluation can support safeguarding partners, commissioners and managers in maximising the contribution of voluntary sector CSE services to effective local safeguarding partnerships.

To view the other briefings in this series, please visit <https://www.alexiproject.org.uk/publications>. For more information about the evaluation please contact Dr Julie Harris, Principal Research Fellow, The International Centre: Researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking Julie.harris@beds.ac.uk

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