

Minutes of the Meeting of the Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee held on 17 January 2022 (postponed meeting of 16 December 2021) at 7.00 pm

Present:	Councillors Gary Collins (Chair), Alex Anderson (Vice-Chair), Bukky Okunade, Shane Ralph and Elizabeth Rigby
Apologies:	Councillor Qaisar Abbas
In attendance:	Michelle Cunningham, Thurrock Community Safety Partnership Manager Luke Froment, Children's Social Care Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help Cheryl Wells, Emergency Planning and Resilience Manager Rebekeh Brant, SERICC Representative Sheila Coates, SERICC Representative Grace Le, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the video recording to be made available on the Council's Youtube channel.

9. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2021 (postponed meeting of 21 October 2021) were approved as a true and correct record.

10. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

11. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

12. Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Introductory Report (continued from 2 November 2021 meeting)

The report was presented by Luke Froment.

The Chair applauded the hard work that the service undertook. Noting the interviews that took place with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), he asked if they were questioned on why the UK was their chosen destination. Luke Froment explained that UASC tended to leave their country of origin for a number of reasons that included safety. He said that many UASC came to the UK to feel safer and that some experienced long journeys

to get to the UK. On those long journeys, there were risks of abuse and exploitation and it was not usual practice for the service to question why UASC chose the UK as their destination. They did not always have a choice and their focus would be more on survival rather than choice.

Councillor Ralph asked whether UK agencies checked up on UASC and what their situations were during their stay in the UK. Luke Froment explained that the Local Authority's (LA) role was to ensure the safety of UASC. The LA had been involved in some cases where UASC had gone missing for long periods of time and became known to the LA again as part of a police investigation.

Noting the number of accepted return home interviews for missing UASC, Councillor Okunade asked what reasons were given for UASC going missing. She said that future reports needed to give more detail to explain why UASC went missing instead of showing 7 accepted the return home interviews. She also asked if the budget for UASC was funded by government. Luke Froment answered that there were a number of reasons why UASC went missing and the length of time they went missing for varied. He explained that the reasons were individualised. In regards to the budget for UASC, he said that the LA received grants from the government towards holding UASC in the borough but this funding was not enough to fully cover the work that the service undertook. Janet Simon added that the large majority of UASC did not go missing. She explained that some reasons for going missing was because the older teens may wish to go out to socialise with friends and come back later than expected. She said that the vast majority of UASC stayed in their placements and did well.

Referring to the UASC missing episodes, the Vice-Chair queried whether the service had noticed any patterns and if these were looked into in detail. Luke Froment replied that patterns were noticed when UASC in particular parts of the world went missing. When UASC went missing, the service had robust procedures that were followed and worked with the police and other agencies to try to locate missing UASC quickly. They were also checked against Home Office records to see if missing UASC had also presented as missing in other local authorities. If a UASC was located, the service would work with them to support them in Thurrock.

The Vice-Chair sought clarification on the procedure that was undertaken if a missing young person passed the age of 19 years old during their missing episode. Luke Froment explained that cases of missing UASC at 18 years old were allocated to the aftercare service who also attended meetings to locate missing UASC. The process would be to offer them support if they were located.

Councillor Ralph asked why return home interviews were offered and not required. Luke Froment answered that return home interviews were conducted by an independent and separate organisation to the service. Children did not know the organisation so may not be willing to undertake the interview. Where a child did not want to take the interview, other methods

used included the child's social worker having a conversation with them instead.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Members of the Committee noted the work of officers in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children presenting to Thurrock.**
- 2. Members are aware Corporate Parenting Responsibilities extend to UASC.**

13. Essex Police: Verbal Update

Essex Police were unable to attend to provide an update. The Chair requested that another meeting be arranged so that the police could attend to provide an update. This item was deferred until then.

14. Violence Against Women and Girls/Men and Boys Verbal Discussion with SERICC

The SERICC Representatives gave a presentation which can be found [here](#).

Councillor Ralph said that the data and information presented was shocking to hear. He questioned whether the figures were increasing or decreasing in comparison to previous years. Rebekeh Brant replied that the figures had remained the same due to the lockdowns during Covid-19. However, there had been an increase of sexual violence or abuse in the home. Since 2016, there had been a steady rise in sexual offences as some people took years to come forward. The service received referrals from the police and other agencies and worked with them to support victims. The biggest source of referrals were self-referrals. Sheila Coates added that working with survivors had different outcomes and the service supported anyone who came to them for support. She explained that each survivor dealt with the impact of sexual offences differently which made it difficult for them to come forward.

Councillor Ralph noted that the number of people coming forward were increasing and asked whether Thurrock was encouraging more people to come forward for support. Sheila Coates answered that the numbers were increasing on a national level. The service encouraged more people to come forward as it was important that they were supported and would look to the media to advertise their services.

The Vice-Chair questioned whether rape and sexual violence included female genital mutilation. He also asked if there was data on other characteristics such as whether perpetrators operated alone or in groups such as grooming gangs. Sheila Coates replied that this was classed as domestic abuse although the service felt it fell under sexual violence. The service did not have stats for this. Referring to slide 4 of the presentation, Rebekeh Brant explained that the data showed the number of incidents carried out by a group

of perpetrators which included family group or a gang. Sheila Coates added that the data would not show if it was a grooming gang but if a pattern was seen within the data, then this would be looked into. She said that SERICC could come back to the Committee in 6 months' time with more data and to discuss the issue of violence on men and boys.

Members agreed for SERICC to come back to the Committee in 6 months' time. They highlighted their concerns that men and boys had been overlooked in the strategy for women and girls as there had been a footnote on men and boys within that strategy. They were aware that the statistics showed that women and girls were at higher risk but felt that men and boys needed to be considered too. Sheila Coates explained that there was a national debate on a strategy on men and boys and was waiting for government to bring one forward. She said that in Thurrock, there was little data on sexual violence against men and boys but those who came forward to the service were supported as well. She went on to say that the service not only supported victims but also family members which included men and boys.

Councillor Okunade praised the service for their hard work and support to survivors. She said that she was shocked to hear that the youngest victim was a 4 year old child. SERICC mentioned that there were incidents that had occurred with children younger than 4 years old. The service was working with the police to send messages out to perpetrators as well to stop their abuse.

The Chair asked if there were figures for the number of incidents caused by health professionals in Thurrock and nationally. Referring to slide 8, Rebekeh Brant said that there were a number of people in a position of trust shown in the data. This data related to Thurrock and she would look into the national data. Sheila Coates added that a pattern was recognised if the person in a position of trust was coming up more than once but there was currently no pattern in Thurrock. She said that there was a larger volume of abuse within the home and mentioned that the sexual murder of Sarah Everard had seen over 83,000 people contact the Home Office with their concerns. She went on to say that services needed to work together to tackle sexual violence.

Members thanked SERICC for their update and for supporting survivors and their families.

15. Work Programme

The work programme was updated as:

- SERICC Data Update – 6 months' time.
- Violence Against Men and Boys Report – allocated to SERICC and to come to Committee in 6 months' time.
- UASC report – to be removed from 17 February as a report had already been heard tonight.
- Modern Day Slavery report – to be pushed back as the report would not be ready for 17 February 2022 as the strategy needed to go

through the Community Safety Partnership meeting which would be in March.

Members would discuss report options outside of Committee and the Chair would inform Officers.

The meeting finished at 8.40 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**