

Learning Review

6 Step Briefing

Gangs

The Background

Child Ar was involved in an altercation with the alleged perpetrator earlier in 2017 and was fatally injured. The child became known to local services, along with two siblings in 2016, after mother sustained significant injuries following an assault. An Early Help Assessment was undertaken to look at support for mother (who spent some time recovering in hospital) who was struggling to bring up three children. Agencies had some concerns Child Ar may have associations with gangs observed through his poor behaviour. Child Ar's behaviours deteriorated in 2016 when he wrecked some rooms within the family home. At school, his behaviour was disruptive, he was swearing, not doing homework. Child Ar had previously stated 'he loved guns'.

The alleged perpetrator did not become known to services until 2016. They were noted to be at risk of being embroiled in gang culture. It was known he had previously been attacked by four youths and required hospital treatment. He had previously been found in possession of a knife and was sporadically attending a referral unit having been permanently excluded from mainstream school.

The Review

The case of Ar was referred to the SCR Sub Group for consideration of a Serious Case Review. It was felt that there was learning from this incident and that this could best be identified by undertaking a Case Mapping Exercise. The review was facilitated by the Chair of the Child Exploitation Sub Group of the NSCB and took the format of a Learning Review looking at the evident theme of gang activity to incorporate a wider analysis and give a view of gang activity in the county.

It was agreed the Learning Review would not look at the specifics of Child Ar but this case would be used as the trigger for the wider review looking at the specific questions what we know about gang activity in the county? And what are we doing about it?

Agencies fully engaged in the process and the workshop was very well attended, particularly by education colleagues and across the partnership.

The Findings

There is a significant gang issue in Northamptonshire affecting a number of children and young people

- Both acute trusts are seeing a rise in young people presenting with knife and gun injuries.
- The Youth Offending Service is dealing with young people who are witnesses and offenders who have been charged for possession of weapons and knives and possession of intent to supply drugs through gangs and county lines.
- Parents are approaching schools worried for their children in particular areas of Northampton whilst schools are seeing an increase in students attending schools carrying weapons.
- There are 'hot spots' within Northamptonshire where gang activity is more prevalent and if a vulnerable family are moved into the area they could be at additional risk.
- There is no protocol to say that a family at risk of gangs should be moved to a safer geographic area and no pathway to protect a family.
- This significant issue does not appear to be owned by any group within the county and requires an in-depth, co-ordinated, multi-agency piece of work to establish what services and resources are available.

The Findings continued

Professionals are not clear on what services and resources are available in Northamptonshire in terms of supporting families involved with gangs

- Health colleagues gave an example – if a young person attended A&E with a knife injury and the family asked them who they could approach for support, there is no information or literature available.

Northamptonshire versus the national picture

- Local and national investment by Government has been through the Youth Offending Services that is highly successful and well managed in Northamptonshire.
- Taking into account of the population size of Northamptonshire, there are 250 more children and young people in care than would be expected for the size of the county. There is a noticeable increase in the number of under 2s and 15-17 year olds.
- Northamptonshire is within the top ten counties in the country with identified county lines practices.

Indicators/signs of young people being involved in gangs?

- From an education perspective, indicators could be under-achievers, students with poor attendance, disruptive family lives and those who are excluded.
- Students will be permanently excluded for one incident of carrying a weapon even if there have been no prior concerns. Whilst every effort is made to find an alternate school placement, this can leave the student at increased vulnerability and risk until a new placement is found.
- As part of the Early Help Assessment for Child Ar, plans were in place for him to attend college and he was on a reduced core subject timetable to support his learning. However, a reduced timetable meant he spent time out of school and his whereabouts and activities were not known to professionals.

Information sharing

- Many agencies and services rely on information being shared with them. Sometimes it is not possible to share information without the consent of parents.
- When services rely on information being shared there is an inconsistency in the quality of information provided.
- There is also a degree of relying on the honesty of the information being shared by parents.

Early intervention and support

- The young people involved in gang activities have often been known to services for a long period of time.
- Services are being cut back and numbers are increasing leading to a potentially overwhelming situation.
- The issues are two fold in that whilst advice and support needs to be put in place for the young person concerned, advice and support also needs to be available to their family.

Engaging young people who do not want intervention or support

- The HomeStart representative explained how their colleagues build a rapport with the young people rather than intervene and the workers are openly encouraged to play football and on an x-box with them.

Recommendations

1. Through the CE Sub Group, a mapping exercise needs to be undertaken to understand what services and resources are available in Northamptonshire in terms of supporting children and young people and their families who are associated with gang related activities. There are many pieces of very positive work being undertaken across the county but they need to be joined up and owned to move forward and successful.
2. The NSCB should undertake a co-ordinated intrusive training package to raise awareness of the signs of gang related activity and provide information on services and resources available, managed by the CE and L&D Sub Groups of the NSCB. The training should be aimed at not only professionals, but also children (from Year 6 upwards), young people and parents through the schools networks.
3. The NSCB, through the co-ordinated work of the CE Sub Group, should consider a publicity campaign to increase awareness of the sign of gang related activity whereby posters and leaflets are produced and made available across the partnership.
4. Approach Locality Connectors, through the CE Sub Group, to gain a holistic understanding of the voluntary offer currently available in the communities of Northamptonshire and identify the gaps.

Good Practice and Evidence as a result of this Review

The Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) has been introduced to Northamptonshire and is a multi-agency project designed to reduce gang violence, by working with individuals to show them the consequences of the life they are choosing to lead and showing them an alternative pathway through mentoring, support, job opportunities and other change programmes. Further information can be found using this link: <https://beta.northants.police.uk/police-forces/northamptonshire-police/areas/northamptonshire-force-content/c/campaigns/2019/community-initiative-to-reduce-violence/>

Police Community Support Officers work closely with schools, visiting them in the towns on a regular basis and speaking to children, including raising awareness of being part of a gang and the risks they pose. These community officers are also available should a school professional be seeking advice.

The Clinical Commissioning Groups have developed a comprehensive gangs and serious organised crime training package which is being rolled out across the partnership. All agreed this is a very positive pro-active programme but suggested there is a gap in rolling this training out to parents.

The OPCC now operates a countywide Community Safety Partnership and is looking at engaging youth workers to give a clear picture of what is happening in Northamptonshire and engaging with young people.

Youth Offending Team Worker has been commissioned and funded by Northampton Borough Council to visit secondary schools in Northampton and facilitate training around gangs to staff and 14-16 years olds.

HomeStart workers recently received training on gun initiatives but the facilitator also explained the language used by young people, which has really helped workers understand what young people are saying and engage them using the same language. The Health model also includes some examples of the language used by young people.

Time To Talk is a charity based in Daventry and works with young people – see their work by clicking on the following link: <http://www.time2talk.org.uk/>