

Committee: Safeguarding Sub Committee	Dated: 02/07/2024
Subject: Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Panel	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1. 2.
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Judith Finlay, Executive Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Rachel Talmage, Head of Service, Children's Social Care and Early Help, People Department, Department of Community and Children's Services	

Summary

This report outlines the work of the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) panel over 2023/24. The panel is a strategic forum to prevent and respond to child exploitation, and is well attended by colleagues from police, health, alcohol and substance misuse and education services.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

What is MACE?

1. Tackling child exploitation is a complex task that requires a proactive, multi-agency, holistic approach. Understanding exploitation drivers, themes, risks and locations of concern will provide key prevention opportunities to stop children becoming victims of exploitation. The management, disruption and prosecution of perpetrators is a key success driver in tackling exploitation. (*The London Child Exploitation Operating Protocol 2021*).¹
2. The broad term 'child exploitation' is used as children may have warning indicators of multiple types of exploitation:
 - * Child sexual exploitation
 - * Harmful sexual behaviour
 - * County lines
 - * Organised begging
 - * Child criminal exploitation
 - * Radicalisation
 - * Online child exploitation
 - * Peer on peer exploitation
 - * Child trafficking
 - * Youth-produced sexual imagery identified in schools
3. The purpose of MACE is to provide strategic oversight of exploitation, information, intelligence and activity across the City. This includes resident children and those passing in and through the City. Data and intelligence is shared to identify victims, perpetrators/persons of concern, location and any common themes. Good practice, local and national research are shared. Areas are explored for shared learning and practice development, disruption and enforcement tactics, and support for the reduction of risk and impact of exploitation on children.
4. MACE looks at the emergence, conflicts and/or disruption of gangs/groups – taking into account our neighbouring contexts and locations of concern.
5. MACE is co-chaired by the City of London Police and Children's Social Care, who are part of the Pan-London MACE Chairs Network.
6. The report has been shared with the City of London Police.

Current Position

7. MACE has collectively considered the following areas of practice over the last year:

Pan-London adolescent safeguarding

8. Partners joined the relaunch of the *Adolescent Safeguarding London Handbook* in September 2023, and used case studies in practice.²

Child trafficking – Operation Innerste

¹ [The London Child Exploitation Operating Protocol 2021](#)

² [Adolescent Safeguarding Handbook](#)

9. Operation Innerste is the national safeguarding operation that aims to prevent onward trafficking of children by taking their fingerprints – not for criminal reasons but for welfare reasons. In the City, this operation continues: it is viable to do so; and the ink pads and training are in place. Children’s Social Care double check that every unaccompanied asylum-seeking child has had their welfare ink pad prints taken. The purpose is to make children less appealing for onward trafficking in the UK for illegal purposes, as they would be identifiable if stopped by police.
10. The forum ensured that partners are updated on the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service, and on the updated guidance published in May 2024.³
11. The City of London Police (CoLP) are doing exploratory work around human trafficking across the City, including child exploitation. As the City is a unique landscape of one square mile, the CoLP are looking at transit and migration through the City, in the context of our neighbouring boroughs, with the main focus being labour exploitation. A profile should be ready in the next quarter.

Phone theft – Operation Niven

12. Operation Niven is a CoLP phone snatch operation targeting hot spots and repeat suspects in the City. To date, children stopped for phone theft have been supported as children first and social care have liaised with their resident local authorities (none were resident in the City in this reporting year). Grooming and organised crime has been considered in respect of safety planning for those children.

Minoritised children – adultification & Child Q

13. MACE panel members and colleagues have undertaken adultification training provided by the City and Hackney Safeguarding Partnership.⁴ Adultification is when notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children. When this happens outside the home, it is always grounded in bias and discrimination. Children need to be seen as and responded to as children. MACE has kept Child Q recommendations, and its update report (June 2023) under review, and responds to children with a safeguarding first position.⁵ This includes ensuring the presence of an appropriate adult for any strip searches required.

Alcohol and substance misuse

14. A representative of Hackney Substance Misuse Service is co-located in person with Children’s Social Care and Early Help services in the City on a monthly basis. This strategy arose from discussion at MACE and health response in the Square Mile and is proportionate to the City’s size and need. This enables early identification of need, expert support and provision of locally available resources to young people. This service supports children from age 6 to 25 years, and includes children who have parents/carers who misuse alcohol or substances.

³ [Interim guidance for independent child trafficking guardians](#)

⁴ [London Borough of Hackney \(CHSCP\) - Learning Management System](#)

⁵ [Child Q Update Report: Why was it me?](#)

15. As a result of MACE discussions, this service provided information to our schools via the Safeguarding Education Forum, including advice on nitrous oxide (NOx) and vaping.

Anti-social behaviour

16. MACE reviewed low-level (non) safety concerns that had been reported to the CoLP and Children's Social Care, which took no further action due to the very low level safety concern. Children are meant to play outside: skateboarding is a core part of play and does not constitute anti-social behaviour. There are few places for children to play in the City, and it is important that they play freely outside. For wellbeing, children's play sometimes needs to be boisterous. This is not anti-social behaviour and does not meet the threshold for any intervention.
17. MACE enabled productive debate over the meaning of anti-social behaviour and what should or should not be referred to Children's Social Care. This also sits within the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to not record personal data without cause. Consequently, community safety representatives joined MACE, and six-monthly reviews between police and social care have been set up to look at best practice.

Children and sexually harmful behaviours

18. Please note that all under 18s are referred to as 'children' to ensure a welfare and safeguarding response. To ensure that the support around them is right and connected, two children have been considered at MACE in the last year for sexually harmful behaviours including sibling sexual abuse, and teen-teen sexual abuse.
19. To address the trend of boys at school filming themselves hitting and sexually harming girls, MACE ensured that the 'Don't Cross the Line' campaign was shared.⁶ MACE looked at profile raising, and members of the Community Safety team spoke to London schools at the Education Safeguarding Forum.
20. As a corporate parent, at MACE we reviewed the effectiveness of our work around consent, and capacity with our children in care and care leavers. Work is undertaken one-to-one, and the Refugee Council's guidance on consent is shared with our young people. MACE encouraged this to be supported by group work and this is included in the 2024/25 workplan.

Sex offenders residing in the City of London Corporation

21. At the MACE Chair's request, CoLP provided assurance that suitably trained police officers manage registered sex offenders. CoLP are satisfied that the registered sex offenders residing in the City are managed appropriately, with any breaches documented, and actions taken.

⁶ [Don't Cross the Line - Tackling Misogyny Campaign - City of London](#)

Children missing from care, home, and education

22. Children missing from care, home or education are at a higher risk of exploitation. There have been no resident children and no children in care missing from home from April 2023 to March 2024. One child is refusing to go to school, and this situation is managed closely by Education and Children's Social Care. Persistent absence at school is a risk factor in exploitation, and attendance under 90% is considered as a concern and is treated with a vulnerability and safeguarding response, with children reviewed at our Vulnerability Meeting (joint education/social care/virtual school).

Hotels in the City – Operation Makesafe

23. Operation Makesafe seeks to provide training to reception and hotel staff. It is an operation that runs at least yearly, and will be rolled out again shortly. It reports to MACE. The goal of the operation is to enable reception staff to stop an adult sexually harming a child. It trains them to be curious, to challenge the adult, and call the police if needed. This piece of work has led to police call-outs and safeguarding action.

Gang activity

24. The 'Easy Cash gang' and 'Cally (Caledonian) Road gang' operate in the City – and the arrests to date involve non-residents snatching phones. Operation Niven is diverting and responding to this. There was a decrease in this activity from 2022/23 and 2023/24, which suggests some success of Operation Niven. Support and expertise is available from the Rescue and Response County Lines Project.⁷

Racism and extremism

25. Last year, two children with white supremacist views and (fake) weapons in a private institution were dealt with. MACE partners have 'Prevent' training. With these incidences, support was provided to the institution throughout.

Suicide attempts

26. Children do come to the City to consider attempting suicide. The most frequent locations are London's bridges. The patterns and timings are reviewed. No child has completed suicide in 2023/24, and a welfare response is ensured linking the child to their resident local authority. Data comes to both MACE and the Suicide Prevention Group.

Key Data

27. Police data is considered at MACE – there has been a drop in phone snatches. There have been no incidences involving resident children with a knife or gun. One child is supported with the Youth Justice Service (for an inside-the-home offence). Social Care and Education data is also considered at MACE. One child is not attending school. No children have been missing from care. This provides evidence of effective early intervention and strong relationship-based practice and intervention.

⁷ [Rescue and Response County Lines Project - Year 4 Strategic Assessment 2022](#)

Corporate & Strategic Implications

28. MACE covers a broad range of child exploitation, which the Police, Social Care and Education Services are inspected on, and which represent reputational risk. The risk is managed well. Children would benefit from more outside play areas, including a skate park, and it would be good to see children of all ages able to play freely and loudly outside without fear of police being called.

Risk Implications

29. Child exploitation is wider than criminal or sexual exploitation. Children are at risk of harm in and through the City. Children do say that they come into the city as it offers a place of safety away from postcode difficulties (areas that are safe/not safe due to gang affiliation/membership) in neighbouring authorities. The night-time economy and wealth in the city attracts drug dealers for a profitable market. The welfare 'child first' response aims to mitigate risk and provide safety for children at the right time and in the right place by the right people. MACE offers a space for multi-disciplinary strategic oversight and response.

Equalities Implications

30. Children are responded to as children first, in order that a safeguarding and welfare response comes first. Child Q recommendations are being followed, and data will be requested and analysed on strip searching and appropriate adults. Adultification remains a challenge to ensure that Black and minoritised children are seen as children and a safeguarding first response to need is made.

Financial Implications

31. None

Resource Implications

32. MACE is a staff resource-intensive forum, and it meets bi-monthly to be proportionate in respect of need and risk.

Legal Implications

33. GDPR is considered to ensure that play is not treated as anti-social behaviour and that police/social care records are only made when there is the threshold to do so.

Climate Implications

34. N/A

Security Implications

35. MACE aims to improve security. One young person came to London to deal wraps of cocaine and was found holding a large amount of cash. City of London Police and Children's Social Care workers in the city connected with the resident's local authority worked with MACE to create a safety plan and ensure that the child's welfare needs were met.

Conclusion

36. MACE offers a multi-disciplinary strategic oversight forum to identify trends in respect of crime, exploitation and harm in the City. MACE offers mitigation, distraction and strengthens opportunities for children resident or travelling through the Square Mile.

Appendices

- none

Rachel Talmage

Head of Service

Children's Social Care and Early Help

People Department, Department of Community and Children's Services

T: 020 7332 3621

E: Rachel.Talmage@cityoflondon.gov.uk