

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Committee:	Children & Families Advisory Panel
Date:	13 June 2017
Title:	Willow - Specialist Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Team
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. A report detailing the creation and progress of the 'Willow Team' which is Hampshire Children Services specialist Missing, Exploited and Trafficked team.

2. Contextual Information

2.1. In March 2015 Hampshire County Council were successfully awarded funding from the Department for Education Social Work Innovation scheme. The innovation scheme invited Local Authorities to introduce a series of measures that challenge the traditional ways of working in children's social care, reducing bureaucracy while improving outcomes for children in need of care and protection, alongside seeking to reduce the demand for children's social services in the longer term.

2.2. Among the initiatives, Hampshire Children Services created the 'Willow Team' a multi-agency team to specifically address the needs of children and young people who repeatedly go missing, or are at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking.

2.3. Hampshire, like every other area of the country, is faced with the challenge of tackling the issue of children going missing, being abused through child exploitation and/or being trafficked (MET).

2.4. Whilst we are clear that there is no evidence of any organised abuse within Hampshire such as those found in Rotherham or Oxford, tackling the issue of MET has been identified as one of the most important challenges for the Hampshire Safeguarding Children Board and it is clear that the collaboration of all partners is required to ensure that exploitation of children is eradicated.

3. Team Establishment

3.1. The Willow Team launched in October 2015 and was initially comprised of a social care Team Manager, 3 social workers, 1.5 specialist nurses, 1 Barnardos worker and links with the specialist Goldstone Police Team.

3.2. The team was set up to develop support for children at risk of MET through:

- Improved identification of young people at risk
- Improved support to victims of or young people at risk of CSE
- Better quality investigations
- Increased awareness of MET within the professional community

3.3. The team accepts referrals via the Hampshire Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) alongside referrals for children who are currently open to social care, such as children looked after, or subject to Child in Need or Child Protection Planning.

3.4. The team provides specialist work such as:

- Direct specialist MET work with the child
- Direct work with the parent/carers/ residential workers
- Mentoring to professionals – e.g. education, social workers, school nurses to support them to undertake direct work with the child/young person
- Consultation advice and support to professional groups, i.e. attending High Risk Strategy Meetings to offer support on how to progress a plan or a child
- Undertaking awareness raising – i.e. if a group of children raised within an specific geographical area, the team could undertake work within schools/ youth groups to raise awareness
- Disruption of perpetrators - the team may seek to undertake work on tackling the perpetrator rather than working directly with the child

3.5. In 2016, a 'Swanwick Lodge MET' worker position was also added to the team. Swanwick Lodge is a purpose built local authority secure children's home with mixed gender units, providing care for up to 16 children aged between 10 and 17 years from over the UK.

3.6. It was identified by management within Swanwick Lodge that an increasing number of children residing in the unit were presenting as being victims of exploitation or trafficking and that there was a requirement to provide specialist support for these children during their stay.

3.7. The Swanwick Lodge MET worker was created therefore to offer 1-1 sessions with children within Swanick, exploring risk taking behaviour, their 'push' & 'pull' factors, their understanding of grooming and exploitation to help children better understand their previous experiences and help promote change. The worker engages in regular communication to the Local Authority

where the child comes from and supports in the formulation of a discharge plan for children when they are due to leave Swanwick at the end of their secure order to ensure ongoing support is provided.

4. Willow Team Case Examples

4.1. Below are five case studies of cases that the Willow Team has worked on within the last 18 months, demonstrating how positive multi-agency work has safeguarded children within Hampshire.

4.2. Case Study 1:

R was 15 and moved from London with his family to escape a male who was grooming him. The male followed him to the local area and again made contact. R was offered gifts and groomed over a period of years, he was raped and then coerced into further sexual acts and repeated instances of abuse. The case highlighted many 'Push & Pull' factors including a parent who was unaware of the risks or what to do when R went missing. The case was referred to the Willow Team following R making a disclosure in a youth group. Initially R did not want to make a disclosure, however with support and engagement from the Willow worker R made a full disclosure. The police arrested the perpetrator and a support plan pulled together services to keep R safe and support recovery. The Willow Team worker has continued to work with R regarding appropriate relationships and keeping safe.

4.3. Case Study 2:

The team received a referral from a school in Hampshire. The Willow Team attended the school with Police and uncovered that an unknown male, pretending to be a teenage boy, had targeted a 11 year old girl's Instagram account, going on to then target all of her friends. The male sought to groom all of the girls, gaining their trust and friendship. This later progressed to him requesting explicit images from all of the children. The police specialist team identified that two girls had sent explicit images and many of them had engaged in conversations of a sexual nature believing him to be of a similar age child. The Willow Team met with all of the children and parents identified. None of the parents were aware of the fact that their children were being groomed via social media and there was little evidence of any safeguarding in place regarding internet use. The Willow Team gave advice to each parent and child and support was provided to the school to undertake additional keep-safe work. Sharing of the information has meant that this exploitation has ended and the children are all safer and more aware of online risks.

4.4. Case Study 3:

A 14 year old high risk female with a history of going missing, drug and alcohol misuse, associating with adult males and poor school attendance was referred to the Willow team. The case was allocated to one of the specialist nurses in the team. Interventions included education regarding drug and alcohol use, contraception and sexual health information which included sexual health screening advice, healthy relationships, keeping safe and online

safety and promotion of positive emotional health. The child engaged well with the nurse, sharing information about the 'push' & 'pull' factors which influenced her decision making. This positive relationship enabled the specialist nurse to tailor the interventions to specifically meet the needs of the child. Education was provided at a level which met the child's learning needs and support was offered to the parents to improve the relationships and communication at home. The aim was to reduce the 'push' factors at home and increase the child's knowledge of the dangers of exploitative relationships and manage her anxiety. The risk has now been successfully reduced to low risk.

4.5. *Case Study 4:*

A 17 year old male was referred to the team after concerns were raised that he was 'working' in a much older male's home as a 'live in' housekeeper. The Willow Team investigation established that an 'uncle' figure was used to find the work as a 'domestic worker'. The parents did not know the man who their child was living with and had no details of his address or any ability to contact their son. It was established that the child was asked to undertake tasks as domestic chores which were considered by the Willow Team to be slavery and exploitative. The Willow Team worked with the local police to talk to the parents and outline the risks identified. Following this it was agreed that the child should return home. He is now safe back with his family and was being supported to start college.

4.6. *Case Study 5:*

The team received a referral for an unaccompanied child located in a lorry on the A34 as part of a larger group. He was assessed to be 15 years old and was placed into foster care in Hampshire. A trafficking assessment was completed by the Willow Team and the child informed the worker that his father lived in the north of England and he was going to be living with him. Children's Services undertook checks around the adult male and managed contact under a safety plan. Children Services advised the male that we would be seeking a DNA test to evidence a family relationship. Several weeks later Police in the north contacted the social work team to make them aware they were investigating the male claiming to be the child's father and had reason to believe he was part of a larger system of immigration fraud. Subsequently the male refused to provide DNA to prove his link to the child. This in our view kept the child safe and by sharing information we uncovered a larger network.

5. **Willow Evaluation**

5.1. Since the Willow team was established, it has worked with over 400 children and has an average of 150 children open at any one time. The team have delivered approximately 73 presentations to over 2300 professionals within Hampshire in their work to increase awareness of MET. The Team has also produced a quarterly newsletter to all agencies giving updates on the team, as well as highlighting up to date research and resources that all professionals can use for their learning.

5.2. The multi-agency team approach has meant that there has been a significant improvement in the professional connections and communications across Hampshire for our most high risk children. This improved communication has also allowed for an improved intelligence picture across Hampshire and ensures that all agencies have a better understand the impact of perpetrators and hotspot areas so we appropriately react to reduce risk.

5.3. As part of the Innovation scheme, the Department for Education (DfE) undertook a formal evaluation of the Willow Team, which allowed for support in identifying our strengths and areas for improvement. For the full report please see [Social care innovations in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight](#)

5.4. The DfE found that the Willow Project outcomes were successful and many professionals have appreciated the work of the Willow Team in relation to young people at risk of sexual exploitation, in particular:

- The responsiveness of the service
- The specialist advice they've received from the team
- Specialist assessments and, in some cases, interventions
- Advice and consultation
- Improving the overall knowledge of Social Workers in this specialist area, particularly recognising the signs and risks for CSE
- Overall, 60% of respondents rated the Willow service as very good and 25% good - 85% overall
- 100% of respondents believed that the intervention had helped to reduce the risk (of the child going missing, being exploited or being trafficked)
- 100% of the respondents believed that the outcomes had been positive overall for the young person involved
- The development of a specialist multi-disciplinary team is seen as very valuable.
- The duty phone line is highly valued.
- All agencies see the team as responsive, with good communication and giving good feedback from the work that they undertake.
- The Willow Team is seen as having made a very significant difference to the response and understanding of CSE/MET issues in Hampshire. This includes achieving greater consistency and clarity on the response. The issue is now seen as firmly established on the multi-agency agenda.

5.5. This evaluation also sought feedback from children and their families working with the Willow Team. Some of the feedback gathered is as follows;

- *“She is much better at school now, has passed her first exam!”*
- *“As a family, we are more aware – we’ve kept all the things in place such as turning off the internet at a certain time at night”*

- *“She showed me videos about exploitation and grooming. She watched them with me. I had to explain what it was about afterwards. I’m growing up a bit more now and I know not to go out with the wrong people, I hang out with my friends now. I’m changing – have learned my lesson”*
- *“She was really helpful. She helped me at school (I was being bullied). I’ve been well behaved, respecting my Mum, and also at school. Everything has changed, I am safe”*
- *“She came to meet my daughter, and offered advice to me as well. She reassured us that we were doing the right things. We are through it now. She is calmer, more measured, a lot happier. It’s nice to know the worker is still available”*

6. Future Priorities

6.1. From our own self-assessment and reviewing the learning from the DfE evaluation, we have identified a number of areas that we will continue to work on. These are;

- a. Ongoing promotion of intelligence sharing by all agencies to further improve disruption of perpetrators within Hampshire
- b. Supporting other services to develop their skills in delivery of preventative/ educational work regarding MET; which in turn will allow for;
- c. The Willow Team to increase support and intervention to higher risk cases
- d. Improve awareness of the emerging themes of other forms of exploitation i.e. exploitation via gang culture- drug running, exploitation via modern slavery

6.2. In November 2016 Hampshire Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) awarded 18 months funding for the 2 full time nurse positions within the Willow Team and in June 2017 Hampshire Children Services also committed to a further 1 year funding, evidencing the strong commitment to the MET agenda.

6.3. The Willow Team has also been chosen to host the new ‘Frankie Workers’ project starting in June 2017. This is a joint funded project by Police and Crime Commissioner and Hampshire CCGs, in which counsellors will offer trauma counselling to children who have experienced sexual abuse or sexual exploitation. The aim of the project is to provide early intervention, reducing the requirement for access to mental health services later on in life.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Since its creation in 2015, The Willow Team has consistently strived to improve the lives of children at risk of MET in Hampshire. The staff within the team are dedicated to safeguarding children and have worked hard to foster

positive relationships with children, families and other professionals and promote the MET agenda.

7.2. As detailed above we believe that the team has been successful in identifying and safeguarding a number of children within Hampshire and we are keen to promote and develop our multi-agency working to ensure more innovative ways of improving the outcome's for children at risk of harm and disrupting those that wish to harm children in our county.

8. Recommendations

8.1. That CFAP recognise the work undertaken by The Willow Team

8.2. That the Willow Newsletter be distributed to CFAP members for future information

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	Yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	Yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	Yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
OR	
This proposal does not link to the Corporate Strategy but, nevertheless, requires a decision because:	
<i>NB: Only complete this section if you have not completed any of the Corporate Strategy tick boxes above. If it is not applicable, please delete.</i>	

NB: If the 'Other significant links' section below is not applicable, please delete it.

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Date</u>
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equality Duty

1.1. The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- a) The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- b) Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- c) Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

1.2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

See guidance at <http://intranet.hants.gov.uk/equality/equality-assessments.htm>

*Inset in full your **Equality Statement** which will either state*

- (a) why you consider that the project/proposal will have a low or no impact on groups with protected characteristics or*
- (b) will give details of the identified impacts and potential mitigating actions.*

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. N/A

3. Climate Change:

- a) How what does is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

N/A

- b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

N/A