



COMPLEX SAFEGUARDING

Hosted by Wigan and Rochdale Councils in collaboration with Spring Consortium

20th January 2017, Manchester

In January 2017, Wigan and Rochdale Councils hosted a participatory workshop on complex safeguarding in collaboration with the Innovation Programme's Spring Consortium partners. A total of 37 representatives from local authorities across England attended to explore the diversity of approaches and practices to tackle this highly demanding challenge.

According to [guidance on complex child abuse investigation](#) from the Home Office, '*Complex abuse occurs both as part of a network of abuse across a family or community, and within institutions such as residential homes or schools*'. Such abuse is profoundly traumatic for the children and adolescents involved. Its investigation is time-consuming and requires specialist skills from a multitude of services that thoroughly plan and work together to ensure the welfare of child victims or adult survivors.

At the start of the day a working definition of complex safeguarding was offered, acknowledging that criminally associated behaviour with a safeguarding element outside the home is particularly challenging to system and partnership working arrangements.

We began by hearing presentations from projects both within the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme and outside. We later moved into focused workshops with presenters to explore in more depth some of the key issues in which participants were interested.

[Wigan and Rochdale Councils](#) opened the workshop with a presentation on [Achieving Change Together](#) (ACT), a new approach to supporting young people who have experienced, or those at risk of, sexual exploitation, which offers an alternative to out-of-borough secure residential placements. The project is grounded in extensive research exploring the experiences and views of those who have experienced CSE, and who were involved in co-designing and testing the CSE pathway. The six principles underpinning this new way of working stood out as critical for constructive engagement with this vulnerable group of young people:

1. The young person must be at the centre
2. CSE is complex; therefore the response must not be linear or simple
3. No agency can address CSE in isolation; collaboration is essential
4. Knowledge and understanding of CSE is critical
5. Communities and families are valuable assets and may also need support
6. Effective services require resilient practitioners

In breakout sessions, [Pause](#), [Hertfordshire Council](#), [Doncaster Children's Services Trust](#), [The National FGM Centre](#) and the [Programme Challenger](#) also presented their new approaches to supporting children and young people at risk of complex abuse.



- [Pause](#), which works with mothers who have experienced repeat removals of their children, highlighted the key skills of social workers to develop strong and constructive relationships with clients.
- [Hertfordshire County Council's](#) family safeguarding teams (FST) aim to address the 'toxic trio' of substance misuse, domestic abuse and mental health issues in families, recognising that families with complex needs require holistic support.
- [Doncaster's Growing Futures programme](#) takes a whole family approach to domestic violence, focusing on strengths to minimise risk and vulnerability and delivering evidence-based therapeutic practice to all family members, including perpetrators.
- The [National FGM Centre](#), run in partnership by Barnardo's and the LGA, provides a national resource for knowledge around FGM, addressing the key issue of a lack of understanding and resources available to practitioners and policy-makers alike.
- [Programme Challenger](#) unites Greater Manchester Police with local authorities, probation services, emergency services and other partners to safeguard those at risk of becoming involved in organised crime.
- Sara Scott from [DMSS Research](#) shared early findings from the independent evaluations of the Wave 1 Innovation Programme CSE projects.

The afternoon session was structured around themed workshops in which participants were able to network and exchange knowledge around their complex safeguarding practices and approaches. Key themes that emerged from these workshops are highlighted below:

Importance of a multi-disciplinary team approach. Across all the projects, multi-disciplinary teams were a key enabler for working effectively with children, young people and their families. Being co-located and working with a coherent approach enabled the teams to address issues timely and effectively.

Empowering social workers. Many of the models that were presented on the day required an assertive social worker who '*does the right thing, rather than doing things in the right way*'. Participants acknowledged the need to build social workers' confidence and relationship-building skills to work more proactively and intensively with children and families.

Transferability of key principles of social work practice across the organisation and elsewhere. All projects highlighted key principles of good social work practice such as tenacity, creativity, flexibility, ability to listen, and working *with* the client, which can be transferred from social workers to other practitioners, including police officers, mental health workers and key support workers. Another key theme was the importance of building trusting relationships between practitioners and children and families, however, not for its own sake. These relationships need to be in service of outcome-oriented interventions.

A need for better understanding of FGM. Participants' understanding of FGM and its effects were limited. They welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the topic through the National FGM Centre and asked for further awareness-raising events in addition to information about practical effective interventions.

The role of the Innovation Programme. Presenters acknowledged the space that the



Innovation Programme created for staff to enable them to test new ways of working while also doing their day-to-day jobs. The Innovation Programme also provided the innovation rationale or mandate that enabled leadership to support the testing of new ways of working within this sensitive and risky area of social work practice. External evaluations of the programmes were also highly valued as they created a more evidence-based culture across children's social care.

Many participants made connections with presenters and other Local Authorities in order to continue these learning and knowledge exchange conversations around complex safeguarding beyond the event.

See below for more resources from the event:

- [Wigan and Rochdale Council – Achieving Change Together](#)
- [Doncaster – Growing Futures](#)
- [Programme Challenger – Tackling organised crime together](#)

Spring Consortium