

Spotlight Review

Sexual Harassment in Schools

Report
January 2022

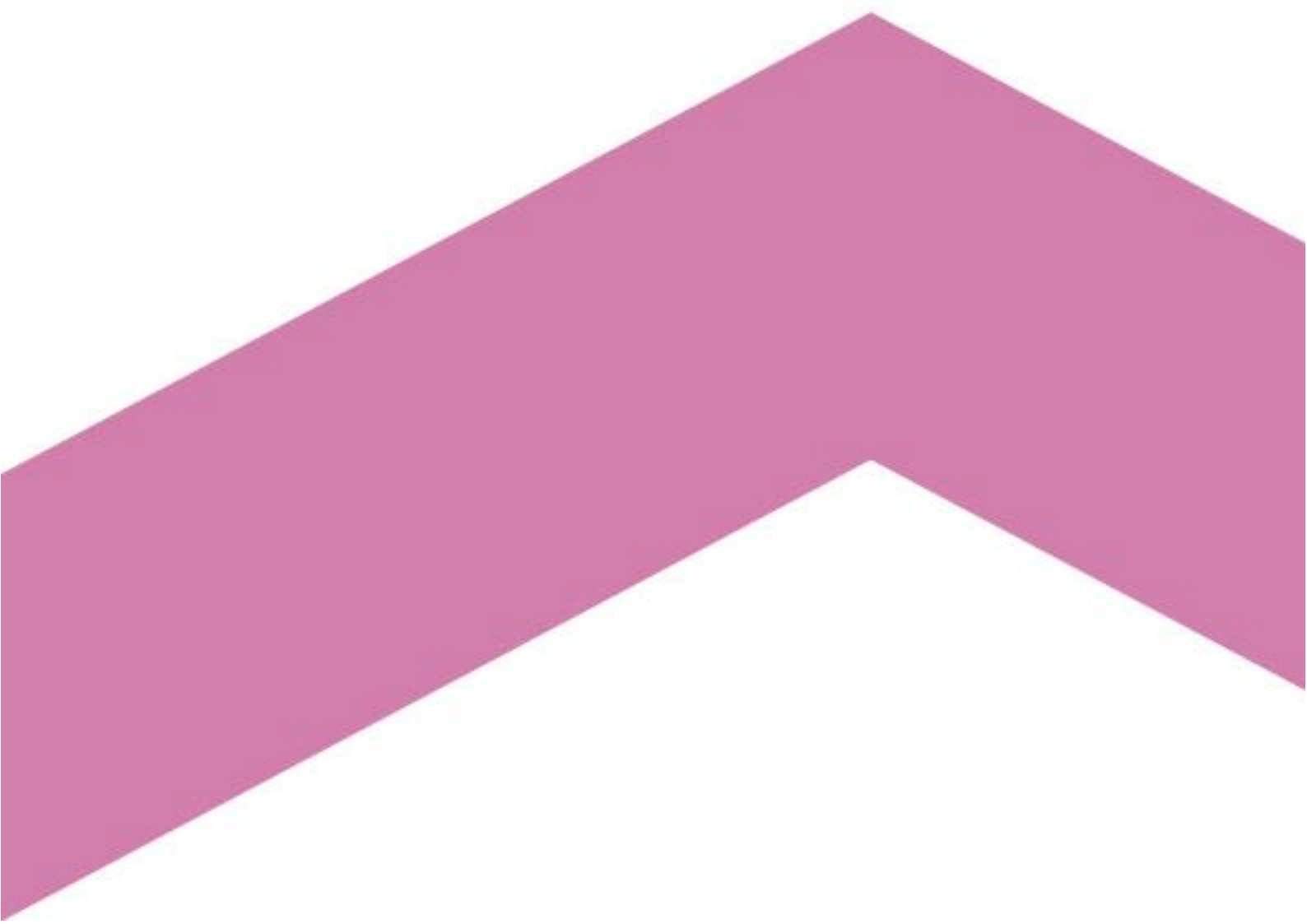


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Chairman's Foreword

Are our children safe? Are the pupils in our schools in Staffordshire safe, particularly in relation to pupil-on-pupil (peer-on-peer) sexual harassment and abuse? These are perhaps unwelcome and uncomfortable questions. Nevertheless, during the last year public awareness of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and abuse among children and young people has grown rapidly across the country, together with a deepening sense of urgency towards addressing the issues involved.

This Report gives an account of the initiative of Staffordshire County Council's Scrutiny Committees in setting up a "Spotlight Review" to examine the situation within the County. Three of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees each nominated a representative to take the Review forward. We have sought to gauge the extent of the problem, to listen to those involved in safeguarding children in schools and other contexts, to evaluate how far and how well schools and safeguarding agencies are taking the issue on board, and to ensure that there is a high level of liaison, coordination and mutual awareness between the various bodies and individuals engaged in safeguarding our children.

Councillor Kath Perry, Councillor Ann Edgeller and I wish to place on record our thanks and appreciation for the informative contributions offered by all those who attended the meeting on January 14th, or who otherwise submitted evidence. We are to a great extent reassured and encouraged by what we have learnt, and warmly affirm the alertness and robustness with which schools and safeguarding teams are already reviewing and updating their policies, their guidance and documentation, and the practical support which is available.

We are in addition very grateful for the invaluable assistance given to the Spotlight Review by Mrs. Helen Phillips, Scrutiny and Support Officer, who both ably facilitated the Review, and who has also drawn up this comprehensive Report of the Review's findings and recommendations.

The 2021 Ofsted work cited in our Report found that as many as 90% of all girls may have experienced some form of peer-on-peer sexual harassment or abuse during their school years or will know someone who has. A smaller but substantial percentage of boys, and of those who do not identify with conventional binary/heterosexual stereotypes, will also be victims of such abuse, or will know someone who is. Such harassment and abuse is so pervasive, and apparently so normalised, that every school should assume it is happening among its pupils.

Older people may well be able to recall instances of abusive name-calling, sexist “banter” and unwanted “laddish” behaviour in their own childhood and adolescence. This is sadly not new. What is new is the greatly increased vulnerability of children to peer-on-peer sexual harassment and abuse through unprotected and unmonitored social media, as well as the prevalence and extent of such abusive behaviour, and the impact on children from an early age of a much more overtly sexualised adult world.

We recognise that we have been engaging with a situation which calls for a major cultural shift in our society, and for the issues to be addressed at all levels and contexts, not just in schools. We recognise equally that much peer-on-peer abuse takes place away from school or beyond the supervision of responsible adults. However, abusers and victims are frequently fellow pupils at the same school, and victims often suffer impairment to their educational performance as well as to their mental health and general wellbeing. The safeguarding duty of schools and other related bodies must surely now include full alertness to the reality of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and abuse, and all that that will entail.

I commend this Report and its Recommendations to the members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees for their consideration and, if desired, their agreement to its submission to the Cabinet Members for action.

Rev. Prebendary Michael Metcalf,
Spotlight Review Chairman



1. Conclusions and Recommendations

The starting point for this Spotlight Review has been the phenomenon of the Everyone's Invited on-line platform, which has hugely raised the profile of peer-on-peer sexual abuse in educational settings over the last year or so. Much of this abuse happens underneath the official radar and is unreported; it has therefore been difficult to establish an accurate picture of what is happening here in Staffordshire. Nevertheless, we are obliged to acknowledge that such abuse is present extensively across our County, whether this is directly within the school setting or impacting on it.

Referrals to the Education Safeguarding Advice Service (ESAS) and the Staffordshire Youth Offending Service give some indication of the extent of known serious incidents. However, harassment and abuse will be much more extensive than these referrals indicate and will span a breadth of levels and types. The 2021 Ofsted Review concludes that peer-on-peer sexual harassment and abuse is so widespread that all settings should assume it is happening in their school.

One key aspect concerns the establishing of a common understanding of what the term sexual harassment means and communicating this effectively. The DfE document "Sexual Violence & Sexual Harassment between children in schools and colleges" defines this as 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' that can occur online and offline and both inside and outside of school/college. One of the recommendations from the Ofsted Review is for Central Government to review and update the definitions of sexual abuse, including peer-on-peer, to better reflect the experiences of children and young people. We support this need for a clearer definition, but there is also a need for children and young people to be aware of, and understand, how to recognise these harmful behaviours.

Schools and partner organisations had been actively developing and updating their safeguarding policies and practices long before the new issue of peer-on-peer sexual abuse emerged, and it is clear that much work has already been taking place to address this new challenge, although the specific approaches vary between settings. From the schools' representatives we spoke to it is evident that the support they receive from the ESAS is invaluable and hugely appreciated. Many examples of great work were shared with us, both within school settings and from partner organisations. We do not underestimate the difficulties in tackling this issue. We also recognize the context within which schools and colleges have been working, particularly over the past two years, that have added pressure and complexity to their safeguarding roles.

Clearly sexual harassment and abuse is a wider societal issue and cannot be addressed by schools in isolation. Of particular concern is abuse through social media as well as inappropriate access to the internet and the affect this has on young people. These issues have a significant impact on schools and their safeguarding roles. Much work is in place to address these issues through on-line safety campaigns, PSHE curriculums, awareness raising via assemblies and others. However, this is clearly an issue that needs addressing more broadly with social media platform providers. The Ofsted Review recommended that Central Government develops the Online Safety Bill, so it can strengthen safeguarding controls for children and young people to protect them from viewing online explicit material and engaging in harmful sexual behaviour using social media platforms. This is something we wholeheartedly support. Conversations around this issue have been happening for some time although very little seems to have changed to date. We therefore **RECOMMEND:** that the Cabinet Members for Education (and SEND) and for Children & Young People join with the three Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen in writing to Central Government, welcoming the valuable work which is taking place to make fit for purpose and to bring into law the Online Safety Bill, and calling on the Government as a matter of urgency to consider what further action should be taken to protect children from online peer-on-peer sexual harassment and abuse.

One of the key issues identified is how to enable children and young people to feel safe in sharing their concerns. There is a need for them to be clear about what should or could happen if they raise concerns, and a reassurance that they will get the right support. Key to this is the culture within a setting and the levels of trust built between students and staff. Whilst there is a wider community/societal aspect to this issue, supporting a change in perceptions, culture and respect when young will help support broader societal change. A culture that is seen as accepting inappropriate behaviour allows these behaviours to become normalized. This includes basic levels of respect and use of banter, through to more overt types of harassment and abuse. Healthy relationship teaching and learning is a positive way to reinforce and recognise good behaviours. This work is already present in schools; however, schools are often developing this in isolation and creating a more consistent approach which reflects what "good" looks like would help build a more cohesive curriculum. We were delighted to note the introduction of the new PSHE coordinator for Staffordshire (funded by the Staffordshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's (the Commissioner) Office). Part of this new role will be to map current PSHE provision and develop a suite of quality assured resources and set of guiding principles for use by schools when delivering PSHE. This will help to enable a consistency around provision and we welcome an opportunity to see how this develops. Whilst this is a very new role in Staffordshire the remit of the post suggests this will address

concerns raised by many we spoke to during the review, supporting a cohesive and coordinated curriculum, identifying best practice and providing a bank of good quality resources that are easily accessible for schools. We **RECOMMEND** that progress with this new initiative is monitored and the impact on schools be assessed in 12 months' time.

Currently there are challenges for schools around awareness of, and easy access to, appropriate and sector specific resources, training and support. The role of the PSHE coordinator in developing a suite of quality assured resources should help with this. From our investigations it is clear that a wide variety of resources, support and training opportunities currently exist, however, not all schools are aware of them. Schools are extremely busy places, and time is of an essence, so searching through web sites and data for specific resources can be an impossible task. Creating an easily accessible bank of specific resources, training and accessible support organisations in one directory, which reflects a differentiation between sectors/age/ability levels, would be hugely beneficial. Whilst this work has been done in pockets (for example a mapping of sexual assault and abuse directory produced by Staffordshire Women's Aid and available on the Commissioners' web pages) we are not aware that any central one stop shop resource and support bank is currently available. We therefore **RECOMMEND:** that a one stop shop resource bank, which includes details of support organisations, training, and teaching resources, be developed.

The nature of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and abuse can vary greatly and responding appropriately can be very difficult. A bank of good practice case studies to help in identifying approaches to specific issues would help headteachers, senior management and Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) in assessing appropriate responses to specific incidents and clearly identifying best practice. We therefore **RECOMMEND:** that a bank of case study good practice examples of how differing specific peer on peer abuse and harassment was dealt with be developed as a resource tool for headteachers, senior management and DSLs. There is also a need to consider the role of Governors and/or School Directors in this, as ultimately school policies are owned by them. Appropriate training is essential to ensure they are able to effectively challenge around policy implementation and the creation of a case study good practice resource bank would help with this.

The opportunity for schools to discuss approaches and responses to safeguarding incidents, and specifically peer-on-peer abuse, sharing experience and best practice, would be beneficial. This approach currently exists within some multi academy trusts. Similar successful initiatives can also be seen with the District Inclusions Boards, where local schools work together around reducing permanent exclusions. A comparable approach

for safeguarding was suggested to us as a way of enabling small groups of headteacher and/or DSLs to support each other in addressing safeguarding incidents, sharing experience and good practice. The ESAS told us that a form of pyramid localized DSL meetings was being considered. These would be an opportunity for schools to be empowered to help each other, sharing good practice and helping to address concerns. We therefore **RECOMMEND:** that the Cabinet Members for Education (and SEND) and for Children & Young People consider the introduction of local DSL meetings as a way of sharing best practice, experience and addressing concerns amongst groups of schools. The development of this approach would also give an opportunity for schools to discuss new regulations, guidance and policies, establishing the changes necessary specific for differing settings and helping appropriate sector specific implementation.

The Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (SSCB) has a role in disseminating the support and training on offer. We are aware that the Board have met with partners to consider how they will respond to the Ofsted report. The Board is considering what "good" looks like for children in Staffordshire, looking at the issue from a good practice perspective to enable them to identify what works well and use this to help address those areas that need improvement. In particular they are looking to identify any gaps in commissioning or services. SSCB has a statutory responsibility to demonstrate that children are safe with the arrangements that exist across all agencies, not just in schools. The Board produces their Annual Report which is scrutinized by the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee each year. As part of that scrutiny process, and to help highlight the changes made as a result of the Ofsted Report, we **RECOMMEND:** that a representative from the Health & Care and the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee be invited to attend and take an active part in the scrutiny of the Annual report for 2022.

We recognise the challenge for schools and partners in responding to the issues of peer-on-peer sexual abuse and harassment. We are also aware of the initiatives already in place to help address these and we hope the recommendations outline above will also help in tackling the identified concerns. To enable us to assess the impact of changes and/or developments we **RECOMMEND:** that the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees consider progress made from these initiatives and the impact for schools in 12 months' time, with consideration that this could be undertaken by the current spotlight review members.

2. Setting the Scene

In June 2020 the Everyone's Invited anti-rape movement created an on-line forum which provided a safe place for survivors of sexual harassment and abuse to share their stories anonymously. It focused on exposing this abusive culture through "conversation, education and support". This forum raised issues of harassment and abuse nationally. Among the multitude of "testimonies" from survivors of sexual harassment and abuse were thousands from children and teenagers. These often cited the name of the school they attended. In many cases the perpetrators attended the same school.

All schools in England are required to have a child protection policy in place, which includes protection against sexual harassment. Regulation and initiatives already exist in Education to safeguard children and young people. These include:

- "Keeping Children Safe in Education", which is the statutory guidance to which all schools and colleges in England must have regard when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The most recent version of this came into force in September 2019.
- Department for Education "Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges" which sets out advice on how to deal with incidents and allegations.
- Statutory Relationships Education at primary school, and Relationships and Sex Education at secondary level, which became compulsory in all English schools from September 2020.

In March 2021 the Government asked Ofsted to undertake a rapid review of safeguarding policies and of incidents of sexual abuse in schools and colleges with relation to sexual harassment and abuse. The review was published in June 2021, evidencing widespread peer on peer sexual harassment in schools or linked to the school context, and made recommendations for action to schools, government, and Ofsted to combat the problem.

At the beginning of the new municipal year each of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees raised sexual harassment in schools as an item of concern and something that needed further scrutiny. Each separate Committee included this issue on their work programme. To avoid duplication the Committees agreed a joint piece of work to spotlight the issues and report findings back to their respective parent committees.

Sexual harassment in school is an issue of concern nationally. The “Everyone’s Invited” website gave an indication of the level of the issue and the Ofsted review considered the extent of any problems and gave recommendations for addressing these.

This spotlight review considered the issues highlighted nationally and scrutinised whether they were reflected in Staffordshire Schools, to what extent, and how/whether these were being addressed.

3. Scope of the Work / Terms of Reference

The purpose of this scrutiny review was for Members to:

- investigate the current issue of sexual harassment in schools, considering the national context and recent Ofsted report and recommendations;
- establish the extent of any of these issues within Staffordshire;
- consider what work is already in place to address these, and how successful and well-coordinated this is,
- consider the remit of designated safeguarding leads in schools and how/if they are identifying and addressing sexual harassment;
- identify whether there are any concerns not currently being addressed; and,
- consider the longer-term impact of sexual harassment and what, if any, support is in place for both victims and perpetrators.

4. Membership

It was agreed that one representative from each committee should undertake this work, with agreed membership being:

- Rev Preb Michael Metcalf, Prosperous Staffordshire Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Chairman of this spotlight review)
- Cllr Ann Edgeller, Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Cllr Kath Perry MBE, Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5. Methods of Investigation

Members held a spotlight review on 14 January 2022 to establish how partners across Staffordshire were responding to the Ofsted Review, its key findings and recommendations. They also considered what work was already in place to address areas of concern, how effective this was and how this was evidenced.

Invitees attending the 14 January Spotlight Review to share their expertise were:

- Tim Moss, Assistant Director for Education, Strategy & Improvement
- Viki Hulme, Education Safeguarding Lead
- Simon Scott, Youth Offending Lead (*virtual*)
- Rachel Munday-Crates, The Voice Project
- Sue Barnsley, Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Independent Chair
- Lynne Milligan, Children & Families Partnership Boards Manager
- Cristian Marcucci, SCC Head of Communications (*virtual*)
- DCI Victoria Downing, Head of Child safeguarding, Staffordshire Police
- Steve Bell, CEO Painsley MAC
- Darren Bullock, Painsley Catholic College Designated Safeguarding Officer
- Emily Proffitt, Head Teacher Cooper Perry Primary School
- Clare Evans, Chair of Staffordshire's Primary Heads Forum
- Lesley Morrey, Newcastle & Stafford College Group

Evidence was also gathered from:

- Lesley Beck, Chair of Staffordshire's Secondary Heads Forum
- Natalie McGrath, Staffordshire PHSE Coordinator
- Phil Pusey, Chief Executive, Staffordshire SCVYS
- Sarah Buckley, Service Team Leader, Education and Prevention, the Glow, Newcastle
- Sharon Nahal, Commissioning Officer, Staffs PFCC
- Nicky Jolley, Staffs PFCC lead for victims and witnesses, Manager of the Survive Sexual Abuse Service contract

6. Findings

The "Everyone's Invited" on-line platform has had thousands of contributions, including some 2500 testimonials where individual schools were named, and Staffordshire Schools were amongst these, both primary and secondary. The Ofsted report states that the problem is so widespread and so apparently normalized that an assumption should be made that it is present in every school.

Whilst the Report is welcomed from an educational point of view, with an acknowledgment that there is an issue to address, it should be noted that primary and secondary sectors will have different experiences of this, with some challenges naturally affecting one sector more than another.

There is also some frustration that, whilst the experiences shared on the site are understandably anonymous, schools are unable to gain information on specific issues and are therefore unable to investigate reported incidents and take appropriate action. Schools also have no means of responding to what appears to be an automatic assumption of guilt, which is frankly unjust. Schools have been tackling this issue for some time and have been vigilant around this, well before the website was established. However, despite this vigilance there remains work to be done. This will continue, as the nature of this issue is dynamic and it is embedded in wider societal and cultural connotations.

One of the areas highlighted by the Ofsted report is that children and young people often find it very difficult to share experiences and feelings with responsible adults in school, whether that's safeguarding leads or others, and this may be one reason why there has been an explosion on the website as it allows individuals to retain their anonymity whilst sharing their concerns and experiences. One of the issues therefore is how to encourage children to share sensitive private information in the safest way possible.

Historically it has always been, and remains, an inherently difficult subject for children and young people to discuss and share concerns around sexual harassment, whether this is within or outside of school. Initiatives are in place in individual schools to encourage information sharing and to address issues of harassment, consent, respect and healthy relationships. Good pastoral work supports this.

The extent of peer-on-peer sexual abuse and harassment in Staffordshire schools.

Data showing enquiries to the ESAS

Month	Total No of Enquiries to ESAS	No of Enquiries to SHB	% relating to SHB
September 2020	488	18	4%
October 2020	406	8	2%
November 2020	491	11	2%
December 2020	310	4	1%
January 2021	291	0	0%
February 2021	287	2	1%
March 2021	442	16	4%
April 2021	227	8	4%
TOTAL	2942	67	2%

Sexually Harmful Behaviour (SHB) Enquiries into ESAS September 2020- April 2021

Sexual Violence & Harassment (SV&H) was not a specific recording option until May 2021. Prior to this concerns around SHB were recorded but may not all relate to peer-on-peer SV&H

SV&H Enquiries into ESAS May 2021- December 2021

Month	Total No Enquiries to ESAS	No of SV & H Enquiries	SV & H % relating to SV&H
May 2021	398	12	3 %
June 2021	366	16	4 %
July 2021	297	16	5 %
August	55	1	2 %
September	483	22	5 %
October	402	7	2 %
November	400	18	9 %
December	222	15	7 %
TOTAL	2623	107	4%

For the two eight-month periods analysed above, the total percentage of enquiries relating to SV&H doubled in the second period.

Staffordshire Youth Offending Service (SYOS)

SYOS currently have three streams of work with children who have displayed inappropriate and/or illegal sexualised behaviour towards peers.

- YOS Prevention Offer referrals from professionals and/or families for children and young people who display behaviours that have not yet met the threshold for a formal criminal justice intervention, however their behaviours are of concern and there is evidence that should this behaviour continue, they may go on to commit offences.

Referrals are received for a range of behaviours, including inappropriate sexualised behaviours. The prevention team hold approximately 230 cases at any one time and at the time of writing this report they have 12 cases that have been referred for inappropriate sexualised behaviour towards peers.

Referrals can be made by many different professionals, including from schools, police, early help. All referrals are assessed by SYOS staff to ascertain levels of risk and need and a plan is put in place to ensure that

these needs are addressed. SYOS have a number of prevention staff who are trained in the AIM 3 assessment and intervention tool, and they also utilise the NSPCC pilot (problematic sexualised behaviour resources). SYOS work in partnership with other agencies and families to ensure the best outcomes for all involved.

- Out of Court Disposals (Triage) SYOS work in partnership to deliver Out of Court Disposals (OoCD) with Staffordshire Police. These disposals are given for proven offences committed by children and young people that are not deemed serious enough to warrant a “formal” outcome via the court process. These cases are referred to YOS via police custody using nationally recognised tools to assess the seriousness of the offence. Once referred YOS staff complete an assessment with child and family in order to ascertain areas with the child’s life that need to be addressed to move them away from such behaviours. SYOS Victim Liaison officers attempt to contact all victims of offenses that are referred via this route and the victims wishes and feelings are taken into account. Victims can also be sign posted to support services at this juncture if this is felt appropriate. It is also possible for YOS to facilitate a restorative conference between victim and perpetrator as part of this process.

When all the information is gathered SYOS and Staffordshire Police review the case and make a joint decision on the most appropriate outcome. This can be a Community Resolution, Youth Caution or Youth Conditional Caution. In all three outcomes the YOS will work with the child to address their offending behaviour, utilising the Aim 3 assessment and intervention when appropriate whilst also using the NSPCC pilot material for harmful sexual behaviour. SYOS has very experienced staff working with children who exhibit these types of behaviours who also work closely with partners and families to ensure that any intervention is holistic. At any one-time SYOS has approximately 120 cases via Triage of which currently 6 have been referred for sexualised offences against peers (inappropriate touching, sexualised communication etc.).

- Statutory Cases are cases that meet the more serious offence threshold and are therefore dealt with either through the Youth Magistrates Court or Crown Court. Children and young people can receive one of three outcomes from Court: a Referral Order; a Youth Rehabilitation Order; or they can receive a custodial sentence. SYOS prepare Court reports for all such cases, informed by the ASSETplus assessment. The Aim 3 assessment can also be completed at this juncture if appropriate. SYOS attempt to make contact with all victims of such offences and information is shared with the victim and their thoughts are taken into account within the report for Court. The victim can request some form

of restorative justice and SYOS will try and facilitate this if possible. Victims can also be signposted to specialist support agencies at any point in the process, if require.

Following sentence SYOS work with the child to address the factors that led to their offending, whether they are in the community or in custody. SYOS also work with the family and wider partners to deliver appropriate interventions.

Currently SYOS have 4 cases that have a statutory outcome for peer on peer sexualised behaviours.

Work taking place

Proactive work is evidenced within Staffordshire schools. In particular an example was shared involving students in auditing the extent of the issue within their school and working with them to identify the barriers they feel prevent them from sharing their safeguarding concerns. Once the barriers had been identified an action plan was produced, with strategic meetings held to consider how these barriers could be overcome and students were included in this process. The Pastoral roles as well as the role of Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) within school are highlighted as an important part of this work. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the pastoral resources between sectors varies greatly.

Through our discussions with both the Primary and Secondary Heads Forum Chairs a number of other school-based initiatives to support work in addressing peer on peer abuse were shared, including:

- Relationship & Sex Education (RSE) and Safeguarding audits to look at individual school's responses including staff and student voice activities, ensuring different groups of students are represented (LGBTQ+)
- Tracking using CPoms (***CPOMS** is a software solution for monitoring Safeguarding, wellbeing and all pastoral issues*) of key issues that are being raised to be used to direct, reshape or respond to emerging concerns

- Work with external agencies to support students as appropriate e.g., New Era¹ and YESS² (funded by the school) and referrals to YOT for students causing a concern as perpetrators
- Continual Professional Development (CPD) sessions with all staff to address the mindset of, 'it could happen here and has happened here', remove the mindset of 'boys being boys', 'it is all part of growing up' and 'banter', explain the reporting procedures for allegations and ensuring staff are vigilant and report 'overheard' conversations
- Planned Sex & Relationship Education (SRE) curriculum where it is reinforced to students that they must report any incidents and that they will be listened to, and they will be believed – schools evidenced students coming forward following SRE lessons
- a dedicated school email address so students can report incidents in a safe environment
- Online safety included as part of the PSHE curriculum
- Procedure for when reports are made regarding sexual violence/sexual harassment, which always involves parents and, on a case-by-case basis, social service and the police
- Information regarding sexual violence and sexual harassment included in a Safeguarding Newsletter which is sent home to parents
- Explicit assemblies delivered to students on the topics of online safety, sexual harassment, sexting and peer on peer abuse.
- Delivery of a bespoke CHARACTER curriculum which incorporates RSHE delivery as well as promoting British values, which includes specific lessons on consent.

From the schools we spoke to within the Primary Sector the relaxed restrictions around numbers of level 2 safeguarding leads in a school has been welcomed. This gives schools the opportunity to have a greater number of safeguarding leads, as appropriate for their setting, and has

¹ New Era is the holistic Domestic Abuse (DA) service operating across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent since 1 October 2018. It offers help to all those affected by domestic abuse in Staffordshire or Stoke-on-Trent, providing free and confidential support for victims, perpetrators and their families and is the service commissioned by the County Council.

² YESS (Your Emotional Support Service), a Mental Health and Well-being Staffordshire based organisation providing emotional support and opportunities for children, young people and adults.

been particularly helpful following the restrictions schools have worked within throughout the Pandemic, enabling pupils to have easy access to safeguarding leads. It also gave a greater resource to undertake safeguarding checks. Whilst this doesn't necessarily mean children are any more likely to disclose their concerns, it does ensure a mechanism through which they can be encouraged to do so.

Examples of other initiatives were shared, including those developed to help overcome concerns with primary pupil verbal communication, with a slot timetabled every day as "connect" time in which pupils are encouraged to discuss news articles, conversations are promoted, and questions asked. This time has also been used to support addressing any safeguarding concerns in a timely and appropriate manner.

Contextualised safeguarding is a key factor, with students' activity outside of the education setting, who they meet, and how their experiences are shared, having a significant impact. With older pupils, particularly at post 16, tutorial work around consent is used as a tool to help promote healthy relationships and give an opportunity for sharing concerns. Work is also undertaken around alcohol and substance misuse as these types of behaviours can have a direct impact on safeguarding students. Student conferences give an opportunity for the enhanced student voice to be heard, encouraging them to talk about these more difficult issues. Such group work must be undertaken mindfully with an age-appropriate focus to avoid students becoming dismissive, disinterested or too uncomfortable that they no longer take part.

Addressing the wider societal issues around sexual harassment cannot be tackled by education settings alone. However, support to change perceptions, culture and lack of respect when young contribute to broader societal change. One concern raised as part of this review is around different perceptions of what is "banter" and the tension between this and what is acceptable language, with schools often faced with parents who have very differing views on this. Such "banter" can often reinforce negative views and values and can have a direct impact on children and young people's perceptions of themselves and others.

Parents can sometimes also be a barrier to the wider education safeguarding work with some parents not wanting to acknowledge or discuss sex education. However, the new DfE Relationships and Sex Education Policy, implemented in schools in 2020, requires them to revisit how they teach sex education, with this being part of the Ofsted schools inspection process moving forward. Time is set aside in the curriculum to cover this work in an age-appropriate way.

Section 175 /157³ audits highlight incidents of child sexual abuse. Staffordshire's Section 175 annual audit is currently under review, with consideration given to how more robust detail can be captured that helps identify training need and informs schools' action plans resulting from their self-audit. Alongside this audit the Education Safeguarding Team visit schools to look at policies, processes, practices and culture. Schools themselves should be looking at refreshing their policies regularly.

Peer on peer harassment and abuse is the focus of the Ofsted Review and schools Safeguarding Policy has always included peer on peer abuse, as well as sexual violence and sexual harassment. This academic year a template for a standalone peer on peer abuse policy was produced, which included sexual violence, and sexual harassment. It is important that within the policy structure schools choose, the coercive control and manipulation element, and bullying around sexual abuse more generally, is not lost.

To support early intervention and prevention work the Office of the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner (the Commissioner) undertook consultation with schools and partners around possible initiatives. As a result of this he commissioned a three-year PSHE Coordinator post, hosted by Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS) to support formal and informal education providers to improve the quality and consistency of their PSHE offer to local young people.

The coordinator post aims to enhance what is already happening and not duplicate, being responsible for:

- Mapping current PSHE education provision;
- Developing a suite of quality assured resources and set of guiding principles for use by those delivering PSHE
- Engaging with children, young people, parents and professionals about PSHE;
- Supporting organisations to access relevant, good quality training and resources and building and maintaining a network of local contacts to advance PSHE education activity;
- Developing partnership meeting to ensure consistency of key messages and sharing of best practice.

A multi-agency steering group has been established to ensure that all relevant partners are linked in with the work of the coordinator, helping to overcome barriers, avoid duplication and maximise impact.

³ Sections 157 and 175 of the Education Act 2002 places a statutory duty on independent and maintained schools to make arrangements to ensure that in discharging their functions, they have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and that any services they contract out to others are provided having regard to that need.

This work is being piloted in Newcastle, with the choice of pilot being based on analysis of need produced by the JSNA. There are also initiatives from the District Council that align and partner engagement which support this choice. Much of the initial, as well as ongoing work, being undertaken will benefit the whole of Staffordshire, for example developing quality assured resources only needs doing once for the whole County.

An aligned initiative from Newcastle Borough Council is their commissioned service from Glow. Referral levels to the ESAS from Newcastle schools is lower than other Districts and this may be influenced by this commissioned service. Glow addresses relationship abuse, raising awareness and providing education on how to spot and respond to abusive relationships in schools, businesses and communities and work with those responsible. They have a number of preventative and bespoke interventions implemented throughout the Borough, including:

- **relationships without Fear** a bespoke 6-week preventative education programme for primary and secondary schools which provides children and young people with the skills and tools to recognise unhealthy relationships and where to access support. This is a fully evaluated programme that provides schools with data that evidences whether the intervention has worked and what difference it has made, giving details to schools' around differences in gender, and the values and beliefs that underpin our attitudes towards relationships.
- **X-Roads** designed for children and young people in secondary and further education, already on the brink of offending, exclusion or perpetrating abusive behaviours and is an intensive programme designed to divert them from the criminal justice system and provide them with longer term consistent support to do this.
- **1-1 Service** supports children and young people aged 5-19, providing one to one specialist sessions in schools, colleges and academies where they can discuss their thoughts, feelings and experiences. One to one support is tailored around the needs of the young person and includes safety planning, healthy and unhealthy relationships and feelings and behaviours.
- **Young person's violence advisor (YPVA/ISVA)**
The YPVA's/ISVA's are specialist qualified professionals who support young people who are at high risk from domestic abuse either through their family situation or in their own abusive relationship, including those who have experienced sexual violence. The service is for people aged 5-19. YPVAs work in partnership with other agencies to safeguard children

and young people by attending court to support young witnesses, attending and reporting to MARAC and contributing to the development of child protection plans.

The majority of work undertaken by Glow is through education, which the Commissioned Service felt helped to create a joined-up approach with safeguarding and other partners, avoiding waiting lists and enabling consistent support for young people. They work without either a maximum or minimum service length to ensure every intervention is bespoke and the help is there until it is no longer needed.

Newcastle College have relied on this service to hold workshops with vulnerable young people, identified through student welfare officers. A drop-in service that can be accessed by all students is also available.

The work and remit of the DSLs

Every school must have a DSL who should take lead responsibility for safeguarding and child protection (including online safety), with the expected role of the DSL set out in the DfE's "Keeping children safe in education 2021 Statutory guidance for schools and college". Some of the work DSLs undertake in Staffordshire schools includes:

- leading the in-school investigation of sexual harassment/sexual violence to ensure the investigation is conducted properly to a satisfactory end
- ensuring that Social Services and Police involvement takes place whenever necessary
- ensuring incidents are always recorded so that repeat offenders are identified, necessary actions taken and appropriate agencies are involved
- remaining abreast of current documentation e.g., KCSIE – Sep 2021, DfE Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools – Sept 2021, when to call the police – National Police Chiefs' Council, Sharing nudes and semi-nudes – UK Council for Internet Safety
- delivering regular assemblies addressing emerging safeguarding concerns identified through the safeguarding monitoring software used
- meet regularly with the safeguarding team within school to discuss specific safeguarding cases and quality assure the actions taken
- updating the local academy council and/or governing body regularly

- being responsible for Level 1 safeguarding training delivery in full each academic year to all staff
- Online learning opportunities being shared with staff throughout the year.

Identifying areas for further work

Sharing information that is age and ability appropriate is a key concern across all sectors, ensuring resources into settings are specific for the setting's age group and ability range. Where new regulations are introduced, having less generic and more sector specific communications would help schools to more immediately understand the changes necessary for their setting and how to implement these in the most timely way.

Teachers are educationalists rather than safeguarding specialists, and whilst everyone works towards making sure young people are safe and well and can learn, teachers need support in tackling safeguarding issues appropriately and particularly want to ensure that an issue will not be made worse by misguided well intentioned interventions. Good support, effective training and appropriate resources, including lists of organisations that can help with resources and training, are essential and can be cascaded to school DSLs and across the wider school staff to help prevent this. Examples were shared where schools had great difficulty in finding specific and appropriate resources to help tackle issues in a timely and age-appropriate way. Having easy access to a resource bank would help support schools with this.

There is a disparity between the resource available, and the awareness of its availability within schools. For example, the NSPCC has training around harmful sexual behaviours which should be available to schools but which not all those schools we spoke to were aware of. These concerns were mirrored by the Voice Steering Group (part of The Voice project) who felt mapping resources would be an essential toolkit for schools. Some work has already been produced on this, with the Commissioner's Office having commissioned a county wide service through Staffordshire Women's Aid to provide advice and a referral service for children who are victims of sexual abuse and sexual assault. They have produced a directory of services which is available on the Commissioner's website:

<https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk/initiatives/survive/>.

The issue of consent is a key component when considering healthy relationships and can be taught from reception onwards. The focus does not have to consider consent only in relation to sex education. Much broader learning around consent at a young age helps to support learning

to respect and value individuals. Simple examples were shared around pupils asking and waiting for consent to be given before sharing specific items, e.g., a book, pen etc. This is an early opportunity to reinforce positive behaviours of consent and respect. Much work is already done in primary schools on healthy relationship teaching and learning to reinforce good behaviours. However, schools are very much doing this in isolation and developing a framework for this would help give consistency whilst supporting schools sharing of best practice. This would help to alleviate some of the time pressures on schools, ensure support is there for them and help teaching staff in appropriately addressing issues such as power and coercive control.

Ofsted emphasized the importance of hearing the voice of children and young people when considering the extent of peer on peer abuse and the impact of any measures to address concerns. The Voice Project, which is a consultation and participation project working across Staffordshire with vulnerable young people, works mainly through meeting with young people directly. This may be on a one-to-one basis, in groups and focus groups, with the majority of work being with looked after young people and those that are on a safeguarding plan. During a recent forum meeting with young people in care they sought opinions on sexual harassment in schools. Discussion centered around barriers for them seeking support. They instanced young people who may have additional challenges and the need to safeguard the rest of the class as well as the individual. They particularly felt that there was a lack of understanding around what the term "sexual harassment" actually meant, candidly saying that there was no handbook given to help you identify what is and isn't sexual harassment, or to help identify whether what is happening is normal and acceptable. Young people felt that if they didn't understand what the term meant or referred to, then how could they identify whether or not it had happened to them.

Young people in the Project shared previous experiences where concerns had been flagged and yet nothing had changed, or things had changed very little. They also had an understanding that if they say something things change for them but not for others, ie they may have to endure change, changed class, changed school, changed friendship group, so they quickly learn that if they don't want this added uncertainty and disruption to their lives then it's best not to say anything because often as a young person you don't want these things to change, you want things to remain the same but without the horrible element that's destructively impacting your life. Having someone trusted to talk to is key, however expecting young people in care to talk to parents or foster carers when they often have attachment difficulties cannot be taken for granted and in many cases is unlikely. If you have lost trust in people, then even where there are designated safeguarding leads in schools' young people will find it difficult to open up.

This may be another reason for the success of the Everyone's Invited platform, as experiences are shared anonymously without fear of unwanted impacts to themselves. There may also be a release from being able to share this information.

The young people also discussed the stigma associated with reporting incidents, feeling that this may give them a certain label, and as a looked after child they felt they already had a label and didn't want another, you simply want to fit in and feel as though you belong. To help overcome these concerns there is a need for children and young people to be clear about what should or could happen if they raise concerns, i.e., if I do flag this what are the implications for me and what are the implications for those that are doing it to me.

Ofsted recommendations included closer working with Local Safeguarding Partnerships so schools are aware of the range of support available to children and young people who are victims or who perpetrate harmful sexual behaviour. The Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (SSCB), whose safeguarding partners are the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), Staffordshire Police and SCC, will meet later in January to consider how to respond to this specific recommendation as well as more broadly looking at how agencies are responding to the Ofsted report. The Board is looking for a collective response, both strategically and operationally, and some of that will include the work schools do.

The SSCB stress the need for all agencies, including schools, to be transparent and honest about the culture within their settings. Incidents often happen in social spaces within a school (as well as outside of school) and it is the culture within a school that contributes to this, for example the level of "banter" that's accepted both amongst adults and children sets a tone for the accepted culture within the setting. From reviews undertaken by the SSCB where children and young people have been subject to sexual abuse, they say that they will only disclose their concerns to someone they trust, and part of that trust is based around the culture within the organisation and how it builds relationships. It is therefore essential that the culture within a school enables and fosters that trust to be built.

Some concerns were shared that the recommendations within the Ofsted report promoted a compliance culture whereas what is needed is to see what difference is being made to children, and how better and safer they feel. Particularly where incidents happen that don't necessarily meet a safeguarding or criminal threshold, children still want and need adults to address their concerns and to keep them safe. It is therefore important to consider how children and young people can be given the confidence to know they can talk to staff confidently and securely. There is a need to be

able to evidence the difference being made by the culture fostered, and a need to see actions taken as a result of a disclosure. Children need to feel safe because if they don't feel safe, they won't learn.

The SSCB will be looking at this in more detail over the coming months to understand again from children and from partners what the difficulties are in responding to sexual abuse. Commissioning of services to support children is extremely important, with the Board looking at services for children who are subject to abuse which doesn't reach the criminal threshold.

There was a feeling that whilst the Ofsted report had identified where they felt there were failures or inadequacies in schools across the board, they hadn't addressed the reasons why the system wasn't working. The SSCB is looking to understand the "whys", with a concern that the most stringent policies may be in place but if they aren't working there is a need to understand the reasons for this before a solution can be identified, to highlight what part of the system is creating the failings. If processes aren't working, there is a need to look at the effectiveness of the system used.

District SEN and Inclusions Boards are locally led initiatives giving headteachers or special needs coordinators the opportunity to work cooperatively, sitting together and sharing information, breaking down barriers created by the competitive culture schools have to work within. These work well and consideration was given to whether a similar approach could be developed around safeguarding and sexual harassment in schools, allowing smaller local discussions and sharing of best practice amongst DSLs. This would create an opportunity to share concerns and/or experiences and ask for support without fear of being criticized. It would also provide the opportunity of having safeguarding professionals in the room to help support those discussions and helping to signpost and support teachers in their safeguarding role. This could also be an excellent opportunity to develop a case study resource from schools across the County that can be used as reference to support tackling future incidents and to give greater clarity to policies and practice.

The ESAS was already giving consideration to some sort of pyramid DSL meetings, although this wouldn't necessarily be at a district level. A more formalised method of cooperative learning and sharing information that was more helpful to practitioners was also being considered. The intention is to provide support across schools, empowering them to help and support each other. This also works across multi academy trust structures as the learning can cascade across all schools within that trust. The RC Birmingham Schools Diocesan Commission had similarly looked to share best practice across diocesan schools.

Ensuring the right staff members access appropriate training was an issue highlighted, with schools needing to consider whether this should include non-teaching staff. The SSCB have commissioned Staffordshire Women's Aid to provide training on child sexual abuse, and they will be looking to commission further training if additional need is identified. Training commissioned by the Board is all evaluated and quality assured.

To evaluate impact the SSCB monitors the success of their activity including monitoring the effectiveness of partnership arrangements. The Board talks to children and to practitioners to see what the front line looks like for them and the difference they are making and can make going forward. The SSCB wants to work towards changing from a deficit model to a good practice model, listening to what works well and how this makes a difference to practitioners. One area highlighted in the Ofsted report was practitioners' confidence in dealing with sexual harassment, as well as the need for clarity when certain thresholds are reached in who deals with the issue, whether it remains with the school or moves to a designated professional. SSCB acknowledge that there is further work for them in respect of communication with schools to explain the services available and their accessibility. For example, the range of Tier 2 mental health services commissioned that schools could access. There is a need to look again at the systems in place, as, if the SSCB is providing support and information that is not being accessed because of practical challenges such as a lack of time resource in schools to find available resources, then there is something wrong with the system and way it's designed. A better system is needed to be able to facilitate that engagement with children and practitioners and SSCB advised they will look at this again to identify what improvements can be made to the system to remedy this.

Sexual harassment and abuse clearly has an impact on children and young people's mental health, both the victim and the perpetrator. Wellbeing and mental health is a priority for all schools. Health is a really important aspect of this, with the conduit between health and schools previously having been school nurses. The reduced school nurse capacity is noticeable now and accessing GPs and sharing information without that has become increasingly difficult for schools.

Even where schools have a highly positive culture, and staff who are confident and competent enough to challenge behaviours, post incident management can still be incredibly difficult, whether the incident happened inside or outside of school. Some schools are having to manage situations where children remain in their setting whilst on bail or under bail conditions, sometimes post charge but still attending school. Schools have to manage very complex and highly sensitive situations which are extremely difficult.

This will include managing parents, often of both the perpetrator and the victim, the wider community, and social media elements. It is an enormous responsibility and incredibly challenging. It can also have a huge impact on a school and its wider community. At least every day the SEAS and the Education Safeguarding Lead's will be supporting one Staffordshire school with a risk assessment and that support is invaluable to them. Parents of perpetrators understandably find this difficult and challenging and often schools find themselves in the middle, trying to manage both parties. The demand it takes on schools is not to be underestimated. In many cases the perpetrator may also have been a victim themselves and there needs to be great care taken in how we deal with these young people as they are often some of our most vulnerable children. We need to remember these are children and they all need supporting and providing with the right help.

Children and young people's access to pornography across all settings, including in primary school, is a matter of great concern. Children have their own mobile phones and these aren't always monitored by parents and/or they haven't necessarily got the right parental locks or controls on them. Access to this type of material gives children a very distorted view around relationships and balance. A recent DfE event highlighted cross departmental working within the Government to discuss the social media aspect to this and work with some of the social media giants considering children's access to the internet and the types of information they are able to see there. This is an area of continued concern.

The ESAS held a multi-agency briefing for DSLs in October 2021 with partners attending from YOS, Police and Social Care (the Front Door/First response) to share and explain referral processes and thresholds. This was really well received but the fear is that learning from this session fades once partners return to their incredibly busy "day job" which can then result in a lack of consistency. For example, Schools have a clear document guiding them to when incidents should be referred to the Police and yet these referrals are not always accepted. Consistency in accepting referrals to all partner agencies would be helpful for schools in understanding processes and accessing support.

Problems also sometimes exist with a perception from parents and young people that contacting the police will lead to charges. Any referral to the Police would not be about criminalising children and young people but rather accessing appropriate support. It is not possible to give a clear figure from a Police perspective on the number of sexual harassment and abuse cases relating to Staffordshire Schools as the Police operation system doesn't necessarily capture the location of the incident. Equally some of the harassment and abuse takes place in social settings and/or via social media

so that, whilst schools are impacted by it, the school setting won't necessarily feature in the crime recording.

Community Impact

Resources and Value for Money

Should the recommendations be accepted there is a resource implication in creating a one stop shop resource bank for both training/lesson resource/support and for best practice case studies. There will also be a resource implication in setting up a system of DSL localised meetings.

Equalities and Legal Implications

All schools in England are required to have a child protection policy in place, which includes protection against sexual harassment. It is important that policies and procedures are developed in line with their legal obligations, including the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010, especially the Public Sector Equality Duty, and their local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

Risk Implications

Peer on peer abuse and its impact on both the victim and the perpetrator has the potential to have destructive consequences for their wellbeing and longer-term life chances if not appropriately addressed.

Climate Change Implications

There are no climate change implications.

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We would like to thank all those who attended the 14 January Spotlight Review and all those who contributed information towards this report. The time pressures these individuals work within show how important they feel this issue is to have given up so much of their valuable time to it, and we greatly appreciate the time they gave. We would like to particularly thank Viki Hulme who has supplied an enormous amount of information and answered our never-ending stream of questions.

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List of Appendices / Background Documents

Review of sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges Ofsted rapid review June 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges>

Keeping Children Safe in Education statutory guidance for schools and colleges September 2021 [Keeping children safe in education 2021 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101321/keeping-children-safe-in-education-2021.pdf)

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Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teacher [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101321/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-and-health-education-guidance-2020.pdf)

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The Draft Online Safety Bill and the legal but harmful debate House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee [Online safety and online harms \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/digital-culture-media-and-sport/committees-work/online-safety-and-online-harms/)