One minute guide

Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Framework (MACE)

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What is the Multi-agency Child Exploitation Framework?

The Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Framework describes arrangements in Leeds for responding to the challenge of children vulnerable to exploitation, including: child sexual exploitation (CSE); those children who go missing; and other forms of abuse such as child criminal exploitation (CCE) and trafficking.

The arrangements were refreshed in 2018 and have resulted in the MACE Framework. The MACE Framework promotes a multi-agency approach that responds to the government objectives outlined in 'Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation' Progress Report February 2017 which are: tackling offenders; reducing vulnerability; and supporting victims and survivors.

The MACE framework has three interrelated steps: Bronze Group; Silver Group; and Gold Group.

What is the Bronze Group?

The Bronze Group is the Multi-agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meeting. There are two distinct MACE meetings that take place:

Child-focused MACE meetings take place every two weeks, and focus on children where there is either a low/ emerging risk of exploitation, or where there is a high risk because the vulnerability and risk management plan (VRMP) for the child is not having the desired effect. The purpose of the MACE meeting is to: analyse risk; share information; consider connectivity and push and pull factors; and to enable further actions in relation to each child or young person to be decided. The meeting also identifies themes, trends and suspected/ known perpetrators.

Through the MACE meeting, recommendations are made to ensure that the needs of children at risk of exploitation are responded to. The meeting does not and should not replace statutory planning processes such as strategy meetings, child protection conferences or care planning reviews for children looked after. The child may be at risk from: CSE; CCE (including county lines); gang-related crime; and human trafficking. They may require a complex multi-agency response.

Contextual MACE meetings are held every four weeks, focusing on themes, trends, places, spaces, peer groups and suspected/ known perpetrators linked to exploitation concerns. They take a contextual approach to identifying, responding to and disrupting child exploitation.

Both meetings are chaired by a senior Children and Families or Youth Justice manager. Membership includes lead practitioners and managers from: Early Help; Children's Social Work; Police Child Exploitation Leads; Adults and Health; Youth Justice; Health; Education; CAMHS; Youth Offer, Safer Leeds; third sector partners, accommodation providers and others. The MACE meetings report to the Silver Group.

What is the Silver Group?

The Silver Group is a sub-group of the Leeds Safeguarding Children Partnership. The group is chaired by a senior leader from the police, health or the local authority.

It includes senior officers such as a Police Superintendent, Heads of Service from Early Help, Children's Social Work Service, Youth Justice Service and CAMHS.

The purpose of the Silver Group is to oversee the partnership strategy and action plan and ascertain that there are sufficient resources and policy direction to enable operational lead officers to undertake work to prevent exploitation, protect victims and to prosecute offenders. This is put into action by responding to themes, trends, emerging risks and practice issues reported from the MACE meeting.

In addition, the group seeks assurance that best practice is undertaken and also takes account of local and national research to continually improve safeguarding arrangements in this area of work. The Silver Group reports to the Gold Group.

What is the Gold Group?

The Gold Group are the Director of Children and Families Services, the Assistant Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police and other chief officers from the children and families partnership in the city, who meet every four to six months.

The purpose of the group is to enable senior leaders to have a line of sight about the most vulnerable children and young people, in addition to a clear understanding of the scale of child exploitation in the city. Gold Group receive an overview and recommendations from the Silver Group on commissioning, policy change and resource pressures. The group may be asked to review or prioritise resources or specific activity for some individual children at high risk, and will challenge practice where appropriate.

What should practitioners do?

Practitioners should continue to support children, young people and their families to manage risk within current well established frameworks - for example, the Child Exploitation Risk Identification Tool and Vulnerability and Risk Management Plans (VRMPs) - as part of the overall plan for the child or young person. If it is felt that the criteria for referral to the MACE meeting is met (see front page) and a discussion is warranted, the referral form should be completed and emailed to chs.mace@leeds.gov.uk.

Please note that any professional from any agency can refer into MACE; a child is not required to be open to the Children's Social Work Service for a referral to be made. Referrals will be triaged and, if selected, the social worker, team manager or other relevant practitioner involved will be invited to attend the MACE meeting for a short discussion.

Key contacts and further information

Referrals to the MACE meeting should be emailed securely to chs.mace@leeds.gov.uk.

Guidance is available through the Leeds Social Work Procedures website; please use this link, and search for 'Child Exploitation Practice Guidance'.