

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SUSPECTED OF SEXUALLY HARMFUL BEHAVIOUR AND SEXUAL OFFENDING

Guidance notes concerning the application of:

ASSESSMENT PLANNING PANELS (APP's) in the LONDON BOROUGH of MERTON

Introduction

It is estimated that between a quarter and a third of all cases of sexual abuse in the UK involve children or young people as perpetrators. This knowledge places a responsibility on professionals to intervene in young people's lives if it is known or suspected that their behaviour is sexually harmful¹. It also presents a good opportunity to offer (and provide) effective treatment to young perpetrators in order to prevent them from participating in sexual harmful offending behaviour in the longer-term. Early intervention with young people who display sexually harmful behaviour is the most effective way to reduce the risk that such young people pose and present. This policy guides practitioners in Merton on how best to intervene in such cases. Reference should also be made to the March 2015 edition of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children', with particular reference to the section on Early Help which outlines the responsibilities of professionals to intervene and provide support to children as early on as possible when they are showing signs of harm and/or neglect.

Criteria for convening APP's

- Where the young person, under the age of 18, is suspected of sexually harmful behaviour, or has been arrested for a sexual offence. The victim may be another child, young person or an adult,

and,
- The young person is a resident of Merton, or is a Merton looked after child placed outside of Merton,

or,
- The young person is from another area and receiving education in Merton, where the young person is looked after and placed in Merton or where the young person is from another area but is being supervised by Merton's Youth Justice Team (on behalf of another local authority under a 'caretaking' arrangement). In such cases, liaison must take place with the relevant or originating Children's Services Department.

¹ "Sexually harmful" should be interpreted widely but will always include unlawful acts, unwelcome acts and acts where there is coercion, exploitation and a large difference in age between the victim and perpetrator.

All young people displaying sexually harmful behaviour should be referred into the MASH even if they are already open to another Social Work team.

Decision to hold an APP

The recommendation to hold an APP will usually be made in a Strategy Meeting, or following a request to the Service Manager for MASH and Child Protection Services, Family and Adolescent Services or Service Manager, for MSCB, Practice Development and Learning and Development from a school, social worker, the Youth Justice Service or another professional in Merton.

A decision not to hold an APP will be made by discussion by one of, or between the aforementioned Service Managers. The referrer or referring agency should be notified of this decision in writing.

The Indicators for “Concerns” and for “Strengths” taken from the “AIM” Project should be used to help decide whether an APP needs to be held. Disagreement should be resolved as per the protocol set out in the LSCB guidelines relating to ‘Resolving Professional Differences’.

Chairing, timing and minuting of APP’s.

It is the responsibility of the social worker in the MASH to arrange the meeting as quickly as possible, and where applicable and wherever possible, prior to the young person being charged. APP’s will be chaired by the Service Manager for MASH and Child Protection Services, Family and Adolescent Services or MSCB, Practice Development and Learning and Development or a Child Protection Chairperson and will usually be held within 7 days of the request and no later than 4 weeks following the request.

A copy of this policy should accompany all invitations as not all professionals will have attended such a meeting and will need this for guidance.

Social workers, schools and residential units may need to conduct an immediate risk assessment in relation to a young person whilst awaiting the APP meeting. Where a young person who has been referred for an APP meeting is implicated in an additional incident of sexually harmful behaviour, the existing procedures, which would be to call the Police and/or to make a referral via the MASH, should still be followed.

The meeting requires formal minuting but does not require other Child Protection Conference features. Decision sheets and minutes are required within the same timescales as for Child Protection conferences and will be distributed to attendees and those invited. Decision Sheets and Minutes will be uploaded by the minute taker onto the child’s electronic file.

Attendees must note that the Decisions and Minutes of the meetings will be disclosable in legal proceedings that may result in some cases.

Membership:

APP's will be chaired by the Service Manager for MASH and Child Protection Services, Family and Adolescent Services or Service Manager, for MSCB, Practice Development and Learning and Development or one of the child protection chairpersons in Children's Social Care and attended by:

- Social worker – together with Team Manager as appropriate
- A manager from the Youth Justice Team.
- Police CAIT officer involved (if perpetrator was in a “trusted” role – e.g. baby sitting) or investigating Police Officer PPD or CSU Sapphire Team (if “the incident was indicative of a stranger” assault)
- Designated Dr for CAMHS (or another nominated member of the CAMHS team who can make resource decisions)
- Designated Nurse for Child Protection (or nominated representative)
- Senior Education Officer (Education Inclusion or MASH Education navigator)
- Senior Probation Officer (or nominated representative) when the perpetrator is 17
- The Designated Teacher, or Head of Year, from the young person's school or college
- Representative from any placement (for Looked After young person)
- Inclusion Officer in Virtual Behaviour Service
- Voluntary Organisation Project Worker working with young person (e.g. Jigsaw4u, Barnardo's , Catch 22)
- Formal record taker

APP's are professionals only meetings; parents and the subject should NOT **be invited**. However, they should usually be informed that a meeting is taking place. A decision not to inform the parents must be agreed by the chairperson and the reason recorded in the young person's file.

At least 3 agencies must be represented for the APP to be considered quorate in situations when securing full attendance proves problematic.

Reports and information

APP's should receive a summary report from a social worker based on a Single Assessments. The report will in addition, comment as far as possible on;

- Details of the specific incidents of concern about the sexually harmful behaviour episodes/s

- The young person's response to these concerns
- The parental attitude to these concerns
- What risks the young person may present in particular situations
- Whether there are any children or other vulnerable people living in the same household who may be at risk and in need of protection and attitude of parent/carers to protecting them from the young person suspected of sexually harmful behaviour.
- Support for the victim(s) / Witnesses
- Wider contextual risk issues

In some cases, the young person may be under criminal investigation and may have been advised not to make any comment about the alleged offence. In these situations, it will then only be possible to report on the young person's general situation under the guidelines of the Framework for Assessment and a view of risk and those at risk as above.

The report must be available to attenders on the day of the APP.

All other representatives need to ensure they provide information held by their agency relating to this young person.

Purposes of an APP:

The primary purposes of an APP are to assess the level of risk if any, which the young person presents to themselves or other young people and adults based on the information available and what further assessments if any, are needed.

The APP will:

- i) Plan the assessment in relation to offending behaviour – taking account of:
 - The risk assessment and the risk management plan
 - The care and protection of the young person
 - The identified needs of the young person
 - The protection of other children or adults (including siblings, extended family, school students and staff, neighbours, local community and employment issues)
 - The need for specialist assessments, e.g. psychiatric
 - Prevention of further offending

- The placement and early treatment (if relevant) – (including implications and planning for any future placements as well as immediate placements)
- Recommendations to the Crown Prosecution Service re criminal proceedings
- Recommendations to the Court re sentencing
- The role and involvement of parents/carers

The APP meeting will also consider;

- ii) Whether a Child Protection Conference is required in relation to the child or young person or victim and if so, when this should be convened.
- iii) Whether the young person should be referred to the Multi Agency Public Protection Panel² in respect of risk management.
- iv) The needs of the victim (suitably anonymised).

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² The Multi Agency Public Protection Panel Arrangements (MAPPA) is a monthly panel meeting run by the police and probation services with other statutory agencies in attendance. The panel makes risk assessments and risk management plans on registered sex offenders and other dangerous individuals.

Sexually Harmful Behaviour Assessment Planning Panel –flowchart of assessment to planning



