

Safeguarding by Consent:
An integrated approach to addressing vulnerability in the context of safeguarding activity

Knowledge Exchange Report

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August 2017

1. Background

This impact project originated as the result of discussions between researchers at the University of Sussex and individuals, organisations, and agencies working within the third and public sectors across the county of Sussex. Conversations initially primarily focussed upon the Prevent Strategy. Although not legally bound by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, the **third sector representatives we engaged with were concerned they lacked adequate support, experience, training, knowledge, and networks** to support those who could be susceptible to radicalisation and potentially drawn into terrorism.

To discuss the issues raised in further detail, a roundtable meeting was organised at the University of Sussex in September 2016. The roundtable – attended by representatives from the third sector, local level public sector and Sussex Police – had three principal aims. First, identify, at the local level, the issues and concerns facing charities, NGOs, educational partners, etc. with the delivery of Prevent Strategy requirements. Second, to recognise the expert and specialist knowledge and skills of third sector agencies. Third, and finally, to improve knowledge exchange between local level individuals, groups, agencies and providers by jointly identifying knowledge gaps/opportunities to develop.

During the roundtable, although participants discussed a number of important concerns, two salient issues emerged:

1. **The remit needed to be widened from only focussing upon Prevent** alone to the consideration of other interdependent and interconnected issues – such as sexual abuse, child exploitation, and human trafficking – under an **‘umbrella of safeguarding’**.

2. Second, more needs to be done to **encourage and facilitate networking, knowledge exchange and general co-production** between local providers (e.g. Sussex Police, East and West Sussex County Councils, etc.), third sector agencies, and academics, in terms of duties relating to ‘vulnerabilities’ (a brief explanation of co-production is provided in section 3 below).

As a result, participants agreed there is a critical requirement for the development of a ‘safeguarding forum’ in Sussex, which would address some of the aforementioned issues. One particular barrier to co-production with this type of activity concerns the fact that many third sector organisations lack both the resources and capacity to travel, network and exchange knowledge with relevant partners. These issues also affect local level providers in the current climate of austerity.

To further explore these concerns and identify key themes moving forward, around 50 people working within the third and public sectors across Sussex attended a one-day open space workshop hosted at the University of Sussex in May 2017. Once again, echoing recommendations made at the roundtable, participants outlined significant issues around knowledge exchange, co-production, and support in relation to the topic of safeguarding. The remainder of this document presents a short synopsis of the one-day workshop, including key considerations to emerge, and sets out how these ideas could be developed further within the framework of co-production through grassroots/local level led pilot projects funded through the University of Sussex.

2. ‘Safeguarding by Consent’ Workshop Key Considerations

A primary aim of the one-day workshop was to better understand the current issues experienced by those involved with any type of safeguarding, working within the third or public sector. The specific approach taken by this project is clear in the sense that the considerations of current issues and concerns need to be formulated through a bottom-up grassroots and local level approach. This is

mainly due to an appreciation that those working at the grassroots level or local level, arguably, have deeper insights of the day to day issues experienced within the topic of safeguarding.

With this in mind – and with the overarching co-production approach adopted for this project – the one-day event ran as an ‘open space’ event. Here, no agenda was predetermined, where respondents were responsible for conceiving and running their own workshops based on pressing issues facing their particular organisation or sector, or issues they perceived as being of importance that needed exploration. The following participant led workshops ran throughout the day:

1. “How to encourage people to report crimes which go unreported?/What challenges do we face in safeguarding?”
2. “How do we change/challenge our approach to safeguarding boys?”
3. “Prevent in the context of adult safeguarding + Voluntary sector contribution to safeguarding issues within context of prevent.”
4. How to mitigate the ‘silo’ approach to vulnerability in communities? The flaw of categorisation and definition.”
5. “How can education professionals address vulnerabilities? + Exploring safeguarding issues within closed estates – universities for example. Within the context of Prevent.”
6. “Family and friends of vulnerable victims often know. How do we access this info to safeguard?”
7. “Whose responsibility? Keeping our communities safe.”
8. “How do we best adhere to our Prevent duty?”
9. “Challenge of information sharing in a context of safeguarding and vulnerability.”
10. “Problems of safeguarding those without a voice.”
11. “What is the training for teachers in fulfilling their duties?”
12. “What do we mean by the term safeguarding/consent/vulnerability?”
13. “How do we engage those hardest to engage?/How can we use online platforms to facilitate co-production?”

The following key issues/considerations were raised during the workshops:

(1) Partnerships

Participants at various workshops throughout the day highlighted concerns that the complexity and interdependence of many safeguarding cases were not being recognised, particularly where statutory agencies are typically only equipped to deal with one specific issue. There was broad support for a more joined-up, holistic approach to safeguarding, focussing upon the individual at risk. However, concerns regarding a lack of funding, flexibility and tensions between statutory duty and daily realities represent key obstacles.

Key subthemes/considerations:

- **Importance of advocacy:** Advocacy roles undertaken by particular agencies or key individuals within these agencies are vital with refocusing our approach on the individual, and ensuring consistency between services;
- **Bridging the gap:** Addressing the issue of maintaining consistency when individuals move between services – including, for example, entering/leaving prison, mental health services, – or at the juncture between child and adult services. With the latter, we need to consider the implications of information sharing in relation to risk (with consideration of the Every Child Matters principles and framework);
- **Role of the third sector:** There is potential for the voluntary sector to provide this advocacy and consistency, having greater flexibility to engage with service users on the basis of need

rather than strict measures of eligibility. However, wider support is needed to ensure growth in capacity;

- **Knowledge partnerships:** Different individuals, organisations, services, agencies, authorities, typically have disparate but equally valuable information, knowledge, and experience. This could be useful both vertically (across different sectors, including engaging with public) and horizontally (within sectors).

(II) Trust and Confidence

Concerns over trust and confidence referred to relationships across and within different sectors and agencies. Participants highlighted various challenges with building trust with service users and the community. These discussions often focussed upon Prevent, but concerned safeguarding more widely.

Key subthemes/considerations:

- **Underreporting of safeguarding concerns:** Primarily due to a lack of understanding regarding the roles and responsibilities for statutory agencies after a referral has been made;
- **Role of the police:** Although Prevent Duty widened the scope of responsibility across other sectors, there were still concerns raised that a fear of disparate police response may lead to a reluctance in making Prevent referrals for the public and for those working with vulnerable people in other agencies. In addition, how can “softer” engagement be encouraged between all parties involved, where necessary?;
- **Role of the third sector in building trust:** Third sector agencies have the flexibility to “bridge” key points, like the move from child to adult services. Additionally, third sector agencies may have a role in providing a point of access to services without the need to involve statutory agencies on every occasion;
- **Wider safeguarding context:** Tensions may exist between statutory duty to report and how a Prevent/child protection referral may impact wider safeguarding concerns.

(III) Communication

Participants raised key challenges in communicating with the public and engaging individual service users due to linguistic, cultural and generational differences. These discussions highlighted the value of working with communities to adapt engagement strategies. Participants also raised concerns over the inadequate communication between different sectors and agencies.

Key subthemes/considerations:

- **Learning from each other:** Better processes and systems needed for knowledge exchange and information sharing, both vertically and horizontally;
- **Informing the public:** There is persistent difficulty in informing the public on what services are available to them and how to access these services;
- **Young people:** Engagement with young people is seen as particularly difficult, due to: a lack of understanding about contemporary issues (particularly online); challenges in presenting information in a way that promotes engagement; and subcultural/generational differences;
- **Language and culture:** Cultural differences need to be better understood, as they can add an extra layer of complication, including, for example, considerations around mental health and how perceptions of religion and gender differ across communities and service providers, and cultural practices;
- **Interpreters and translation:** Language is a barrier to engagement and limited resources for translation and interpreters create difficulties regarding engagement.

(IV) Capacity Building

Participants at the workshop demonstrated broad concerns over risk aversion, training and ensuring staff are equipped to make difficult decisions on safeguarding.

Key subthemes/considerations:

- **Definitions and working terms:** The importance of consistency in interpreting key terms like 'vulnerability', 'safeguarding', 'consent', and 'risk'. What do the differences in understanding and definition across sectors/agencies/organisations mean for delivery?
- **Consistency of approach:** There is a need to overcome assumptions regarding who is vulnerable, particularly surrounding issues of gender, culture and refugee status;
- **Requirements vs. reality:** How do we manage tensions between statutory requirements and the reality 'on the ground'? Resolving these tensions often comes down to experience and professional judgement;
- **Up-to-date information:** Vital need for information about policy and services to be up-to-date and consistent within and across institutions. This is particularly relevant when dealing with 'fast moving' areas such as the Internet, social media, and tensions surrounding major political issues such as the EU referendum.

(V) Resources

Availability (more so lack) of funding and other resources were prominent themes. Respondents outlined how this restricted the development of a number of issues (discussed throughout the one-day workshop) including training, support, information exchange, and co-production, for example.

Key subthemes/considerations:

- **Flexibility:** When funding was available, its limitations did not always represent the practical reality of the work at hand;
- **Third Sector:** Resource allocation in the public sector is often determined by eligibility rather than need. Third sector organisations have the potential to be more flexible in this regard, but are constrained by a more general lack of resources;
- **Collaboration between sectors:** Potential for third sector organisations to collaborate with other agencies to secure funding. Further, advice on how to apply for funding would also be invaluable to the third sector;
- **Engaging the hardest to engage:** Resource limitations have a particular impact on more challenging cases that may benefit from greater time investment or employees with broader training;
- **Training:** Providing appropriate training to all relevant parties involved in the safeguarding process is a significant task and therefore resources are stretched. This means that training may be insufficiently broad, too infrequent or otherwise inadequate.

3. Co-Production and Funded Pilot Projects

This impact project is based on a framework of co-production. Co-production is a broad approach grounded in the principle of mutual collaboration and partnerships between public services, service users and other parties including the third sector and academia. This approach recognises the value of bringing together diverse and experienced perspectives to develop both intellectual and practical knowledge grounded in the issue at hand. Through co-production, initiatives can be developed that

reflect the combined experience, expertise and capabilities of all those involved in service provision, including service users and the wider community.

With this in mind, the next stage of the project will involve a small number of follow-up pilot projects, aiming to further investigate the issues raised in this document and explore potential solutions which are grounded in the principle of knowledge exchange and co-production.

We invite you to be part of this and work with researchers at the University of Sussex to develop pilot projects. There is the potential for you and a researcher from the University (dependant on availability and matching of experience) to apply for funding from the IAA Fast Track Engagement Fund. In the link below, you can find more information about the funding, including the application procedure:

IAA Fast Track Engagement Fund: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/rqi/impact/iaa/fasttrack>.

Each application can be up to a **total of £3,000**. It must be noted that all applications must go through internal review and assessment to determine if they match relevant criteria and minimum standards required.

To register your interest and discuss potential pilot projects in more detail, contact Dr Suraj Lakhani by email (s.lakhani@sussex.ac.uk), including a brief project summary of **no more than one page of A4**. In the summary, indicate what the research will be about, which public and third sector partners may be involved, and the changes/outcomes you hope to achieve.

This summary will then be sent to relevant researchers across the University, who will be in contact with you if there is interest in pursuing a joint funding application.

The deadline for registering interest and submitting a 200-word summary of proposed pilot project is **5pm on Friday 17th November 2017**.

Based on the themes discussed in this knowledge exchange report – particularly around the principal focus on addressing issues around support, experience, training, knowledge, and networks – examples of projects could include (but are not limited to):

- Exploration of the potential for partnerships between services in ensuring greater consistency when people move between services (e.g. juncture between child and adult services, entering or leaving prison, mental health services);
- Improving communication, knowledge exchange and partnerships across and within sectors, through the development of better processes;
- Fostering stronger relationships within and between different sectors on a range of different issues relating to safeguarding;
- Investigating how to better inform members of the public on the services that are available to them and how to access these services.

4. Medium/Long-Term Goals

Over the medium/longer-term, this impact project will have a number of potential intended goals that build on the themes discussed in this document, potentially through larger funding applications;

(a) Further development of one or more of the pilot projects (depending on intention of third/local sector partner and associated researcher);

(b) Exploration of the development of an online safeguarding portal to directly address improving and developing relevant issues around support, experience, training, knowledge, and networks;

(c) Annual networking event to bring together public sector providers, third sector organisations, and academics working on safeguarding from across Sussex to discuss current issues and begin to develop strategies to respond to them.

5. Feedback

Finally, we are very keen to ensure this project achieves the maximum benefit and impact for those working across issues of safeguarding. Thus, we would greatly appreciate any information regarding how this document, or any aspect of this project (including the one-day workshop), have been used to develop your own work or been applied by individuals and organisations working across topics of safeguarding. If this is the case, please email Dr Suraj Lakhani (s.lakhani@sussex.ac.uk).