



**Working to Increase Safety in Exploitation (WISE)  
Moving from risk to safety and wellbeing**

**Greater Manchester Complex Safeguarding Pilot**

**Evaluation Report**

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## 1. Introduction and background

This report focuses on the piloting and evaluation of the Working to Increase Safety in Exploitation (WISE) pilot. The principal and long-term aim of WISE is to support the removal of risk assessments when working with children and young people at risk of, or experiencing, child exploitation. For the purpose of this report, the term ‘child exploitation’ includes both child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child criminal exploitation (CCE).

WISE was established in April 2019 in response to changes in the field of adolescent safeguarding and child exploitation (CE). These changes included a growing recognition that current CE risk assessment tools and checklists were largely deficit-based and not inclusive of young people from marginalised and minoritised<sup>1</sup> backgrounds. Research also highlights that CE risk assessment tools and checklists do not have a strong evidence base and that, by narrowly linking risks to an individual’s behaviour, they are often victim blaming (Brown et al., 2017). Additionally, due to the risks being scored and measured, risk assessment tools and checklists frequently conflate risk and actual harm (Brown et al., 2017). This means that young people who are being abused and exploited are often recorded as being at high risk of exploitation, as opposed to experiencing abuse and exploitation. WISE aims to create an approach that addresses the limitations highlighted above. A further objective of WISE includes the reframing of professional support and interventions, shifting from a focus on risk and deficits to focusing on enhancing safety, stability and wellbeing.

### Partners and governance

WISE has a phased approach to its work, and its partnerships have been fluid to reflect the needs of each phase. WISE’s core members include: [Listen Up](#), who lead and coordinate the WISE programme; Greater Manchester’s Complex Safeguarding Hub, who facilitate and coordinate WISE in Greater Manchester; and local complex safeguarding teams within Greater Manchester, who piloted WISE’s approach.

During phase two, the [What Works for Children’s Social Care \(WWCSC\)](#) also worked alongside WISE through the [Practice In Need of Evidence programme \(PINE\)](#). The WWCSC has supported this evaluation of WISE. Other partners and contributors to WISE have included Greater Manchester

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘minoritised’ acknowledges the process of minoritisation through the lens of structural inequality (Gunaratnam, 2003) and indicates issues of inequality and marginalisation beyond those implied through the terms Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) or Black and Minority Ethnic (BME).

Police, The Children's Society, Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, The REIGN Collective, Dr Jessica Taylor, Steve Bailey and Professor Carlene Firmin.

## Governance

As WISE has initially been piloted in Greater Manchester, WISE's governance has been via Greater Manchester's Complex Safeguarding Steering Group and Executive Board.

## 2. WISE's approach

WISE has a three-phased approach that provides opportunities to pause and reflect on the progress made, as well as to embed learning as user feedback, research and evaluation findings emerge.

### WISE's three-phased approach

1. Phase one: Practice-based research.
2. Phase two: Design, piloting and evaluation.
3. Phase three: Revising the design, spread and scale and final evaluation.

This report focuses on the findings from the second phase (design, piloting and evaluation). The report relating to phase one can be accessed [here](#). The table on the following page highlights the activities and headline findings from each phase.

## WISE's phased approach

Phase	Associated activities	Headline findings
<b>Phase one:</b> <b>Practice-based research</b> <b>May 2019 – September 2020</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of literature relating to the use of risk assessment and tools in CE (principally CSE)</li> <li>• Conduct practice-based research, including engaging with professionals, young people and parents</li> <li>• Consultation with researchers, academics and those with lived experiences</li> <li>• Publish report on the findings of the above</li> <li>• Design WISE's approach and carry out preparation for the pilot</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Risk assessments can exclude young people from marginalised and minoritised backgrounds</li> <li>II. Current risk assessments victim blame, by narrowly linking risks to an individual's behaviour</li> <li>III. Contextual and systemic factors, such as the availability of resources or the sophistication of the perpetrators rarely form part of routine considerations (fixed items on the assessments)</li> </ol>
<b>Phase two:</b> <b>Design, piloting and evaluation</b> <b>September 2020 – July 2021</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot WISE's approach</li> <li>• Design accompanying learning and development package</li> <li>• Evaluate the WISE pilot (evaluation to include WISE's training package and WISE's tools and guidance)</li> <li>• Publish findings</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Social workers are encouraged by WISE's strengths-based approach and focus on intersectionality</li> <li>II. Social workers and partners recognise the limitations and challenges of scoring and prefer the narrative focus on safety as opposed to scoring risk</li> <li>III. Further development is needed in relation to promoting the roles of parents and carers</li> <li>IV. Practitioners and managers felt they got to know the young people better</li> </ol>
<b>Phase three:</b> <b>Revising design, spread and scale</b> <b>August 2021 – June 2022</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate workshops with multi-agency professionals</li> <li>• Workshops to reflect on the findings from phase two</li> <li>• Revise WISE's approach based on the findings of phase two and the outcomes of the above workshops (including a focus on WISE's training package, WISE's tools and guidance and quality assurance processes)</li> <li>• Pilot WISE's revised approach: this includes spread and scaling the pilot areas</li> <li>• Evaluate the second pilot of WISE in late spring 2022</li> </ul>	<p>Findings to be published in summer 2022</p>

### 3. Evaluation

WISE's approach to design, implementation and evaluation was supported and informed by working with the PINE programme and the completion of the TIDieR<sup>2</sup> process. This approach provided opportunities to explore and explicitly define overall objectives by completing a detailed logic model, as well as pre-empting any unintended consequences by undertaking a 'dark logic model'.

#### The impact of COVID-19

The design, piloting and evaluation of WISE commenced in March 2020 and ended March 2021, all of which was undertaken during three national COVID-19 lockdowns. Furthermore, as the pilot was conducted in Greater Manchester, which was also under localised restrictions, no face-to-face contact took place between WISE and other professionals during the pilot. COVID-19 and local and national restrictions significantly impacted WISE's pilot, resulting in revisions of the scale and nature of WISE's initial ambitions. This resulted in 10 young people being included in the WISE pilot across both pilot sites. Additionally, WISE was limited to a three-month pilot phase, instead of the intended nine-month period. Consequently, this evaluation of WISE predominantly focuses on the implementation of WISE's new approach as opposed to the outcomes for children, young people and their parents or carers.

#### Stated outcomes and measures

- Designing and piloting an alternative to CE risk assessments
- All practitioners contributing to the pilot to undertake learning and development in relation to WISE's underpinning theories and philosophical approach
- For WISE's approach to be underpinned by intersectional thinking
- For WISE's approach to move away from a focus on risk and towards a focus on safety and stability
- For WISE's approach to move away from focusing on the young person's behaviour (victim blaming) and consider wider contextual and systemic factors
- For practitioners to feel more confident in the tools they use and, therefore, become more resilient and effective in their roles.

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<sup>2</sup> TIDieR stands for the Template for Intervention Description and Replication. This process formed part of the WWC PINE's support for WISE.

The following two outcomes were initially included in the logic model and would have formed part of this evaluation. However, due to the impact of COVID-19 and the subsequent limitations placed on the pilot, it is not possible to report on these outcomes. Both outcomes will form part of the evaluation of phase three of WISE.

### Outcomes and measures deferred to the next phase

1. To improve the safety and stability of children and young people at risk of, or experiencing, exploitation.
2. To improve the educational, training or employment outcomes for young people at risk of, or experiencing, exploitation.

### Evaluation

The evaluation of WISE's pilot included:

- Two focus groups of practitioners involved in the pilot
- A staff survey of the two complex safeguarding teams involved in the pilot
- A questionnaire and evaluation of the learning and development package designed to accompany WISE's new approach
- Core questions to enable young people and parents/carers to contribute to the evaluation.

### Ethics

Ethical and safety considerations were central to WISE's pilot and evaluation. Formal and recorded ethical considerations and processes were followed with support from WWCS. This included the completion of an ethical standards framework, the completion of risk assessments and the implementation of consent and suitably adapted assent forms for all those involved. Due to the nature of WISE's focus (service design and intervention), ethical approval via an ethics board was not deemed necessary.

### Limitations

As stated above, due to the impact of COVID-19, the scale and nature of WISE's pilot was considerably reduced. Consequently, this evaluation is predominantly focused on the design, implementation and experiences of safeguarding professionals. Due to the impact of COVID-19, this evaluation has been unable to draw any strong conclusions in terms of the outcomes experienced by

children, young people and families. Phase three of WISE will have a specific focus on a lengthier piloting phase, to enable outcomes to form part of the final evaluation. Additionally, the children and young people who were included in WISE's pilot were all white British, had no recorded disabilities, and did not openly identify as LGBTQ+<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, a limitation of this pilot includes the narrow cohort of children and young people included in this initial phase. WISE's commitment to the wellbeing and safety of children and young people from marginalised and minoritised backgrounds is central to its purpose. Therefore, during the implementation of the next phase of WISE, every effort will be made to ensure ethical and meaningful representation of young people.

## 4. Piloting and findings

Following on from the practice-based research undertaken as part of phase one, WISE had two distinct areas of focus for phase two:

1. The development of a training package to accompany the new approach.
2. The development of an alternative approach to risk-based assessments and tools.

This section of the report will look in detail at the two above activities, including their design, implementation and evaluation.

### WISE's training package

The importance of the provision of training and support for professionals using tools and assessments in the area of CE/CSE was a finding from both WISE's practice-based research and Brown et al. (2017). Several social workers who participated in WISE's phase one survey indicated that their introduction to CE risk assessments was minimal and left them questioning the role of such tools in practice. Experiences ranged from practitioners not being provided with any support to use CE risk-based tools and assessments, to 'informal training' being provided via conversations with colleagues. The consequence of this informal and ad-hoc approach to completing CE risk assessments and tools is illustrated by the below quote:

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<sup>3</sup> The acronym LGBTQ+ is frequently used as an inclusive term for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and all other sexual and gender orientations and expressions.

‘My first time completing a [CE] risk assessment involved me being told to read the last assessment on the child’s record, get a feel for it and add my own update. I got the impression that these assessments aren’t important to the child or my team. Since then, I have always felt that they are more of a tick-box exercise.’

(Participant in WISE Professional Survey)

This highlights the importance of practitioners feeling encouraged, informed and supported to meaningfully carry out expected tasks and procedures. Without sufficient support and training structures in place, safeguarding activities may feel tokenistic.

WISE’s training package, therefore, had three principal objectives:

1. To provide practitioners with guidance and support to feel confident when adopting WISE’s approach.
2. To provide a space to critically reflect on the acknowledged limitations of current CE risk assessments and tools.
3. To facilitate the exploration of alternative approaches to CE risk-based approaches, assessments and tools.

The topic areas highlighted below were identified as the most significant in terms of WISE’s pilot. These conclusions were drawn from phase one of WISE’s practice-based research and the broad messages from research relating to CE and extra-familial harm (Palmer, 2015; Brown et al., 2017; Eaton, 2017; Lefevre et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2018; Firmin, 2018; The Children’s Society, 2018; Hallett et al., 2019; Davis and Marsh, 2020; The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020).

WISE’s training and development topic areas were as follows:

- A critical review of CE risk assessments and risk-based tools
- Equity, diversity and inclusion: intersectionality<sup>4</sup> as an analytical lens in safeguarding
- Working with and supporting adolescents – a case study
- Contextual Safeguarding.

The training package is underpinned by research and is designed to complement the existing training and development opportunities open to practitioners. The training package is intended to provide an

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<sup>4</sup> Intersectionality is a term first coined by Dr K Crenshaw. Crenshaw (1991) identified that a person’s interactions with the world are not just solely based on one aspect of their identity, but are rather layered and multifaceted; interactions in which racism, sexism, ableism, classism, homophobia and other forms of oppression are experienced simultaneously.

overview of the topic areas described above and to introduce the philosophical underpinnings of WISE's approach. It refrains from providing a prescriptive approach.

The training and development package included a one-day (online) interactive workshop and training sessions; takeaway team-based reflective activities; and the links to resources and reading materials to support continued professional development.

## Evaluation of the training package

The training sessions were only open to the two complex safeguarding teams involved in the pilot. A total of 22 professionals attended the training and development sessions, 18 of whom completed the evaluation. Below is a summary of the feedback received.

### Content and structure

Feedback, in terms of content and structure, was overwhelmingly positive, with all participants stating that the sessions met the aims listed above. All participants but one stated they would highly recommend the training to their colleagues.

The discursive and nonprescriptive nature of the session was appreciated, with individuals stating that they felt included and encouraged to reflect on the topics being discussed, allowing for links back to practice to be made:

'[It was] really informative – didn't even feel like training, in the best possible way. Just felt really informal and open to discussion.'

(Participant in WISE's learning and development evaluation)

'The training was excellent. I would recommend everyone to take part in this training.'

(Participant in WISE's learning and development evaluation)

The workshops were designed to be conversational, philosophical and reflective in style (ie, non-prescriptive); therefore, the actual WISE tools were not included in the workshops. This was a conscious decision to encourage critical thinking. There was a concern that if the tool was shared in the sessions, participants may want to focus on the tool and what should be written in each section.

This could unintentionally align WISE to one of the limitations of CE risk assessments: that the tool becomes an end in itself and not simply a method of supporting reflective practice. However, feedback was received by over a third of practitioners (n=8) who felt that either the WISE tool should be included in the training, or that a further session, which focused solely on the tool, should form a part of a future session. The table on the following page provides an overview of the topics explored in the training and practitioner feedback.

## Learning and development evaluation

Topic Area	Brief overview	Overview of evaluation and feedback	Analysis and recommendations
<b>A critical review of CE risk assessments and risk-based tool</b>	This section opened and framed the workshops for the rest of the day. The session explored the research relating to risk assessment tools, their strengths and limitations.	All participants stated that their knowledge of risk assessments tools improved following this session. However, it was the least popular in terms of positive feedback. Practitioners demonstrated prior knowledge and practical experience, which echoed the research.	Although this session was helpful in establishing the need for WISE, the session could be shortened. Providing pre-course material and a brief overview and introduction would possibly suffice.
<b>Equity, diversity and inclusion: intersectionality as an analytical lens in safeguarding</b>	This section was highly interactive and reflective. It required participation and discussion. The session introduced the concepts of intersectionality and social graces. It explored the impact of overlapping oppressions and discrimination, with a significant focus on the impact of racism.	This section generated the most feedback. Participants (n=9) used words such as ‘most useful’ or ‘essential’ to describe the session. Participants appreciated the time and facilitated space to discuss the topics covered in this session. One participant suggested that, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, face-to-face training would be more beneficial, and that care beyond the session should be considered for those affected by the issues raised.	This session was largely welcomed and considered useful by the participants. Future consideration should be given to not only creating a safe space in the session, but also providing information about self-care preceding and following the event.
<b>Working with and supporting adolescents – a case study</b>	A case study was provided, which pulled together all sessions of the workshop, touching on concepts such as trauma-informed responses and relational working through an intersectional lens.	This session was popular among all participants. Individuals felt able to critically reflect on concepts such as trauma and relationship-based practice through an intersectional lens and found this helpful. Several practitioners stated that this provided new insights for their practice.	No comments were provided regarding suggested changes to this session.
<b>Contextual Safeguarding</b>	The section was delivered by Contextual Safeguarding trained associates.	The feedback to this session was positive, with all comments referencing prior topic area knowledge.	No comments were provided regarding suggested changes to this session.

## Training and development evaluation summary

As highlighted in the table above, the training and development package was positively received and considered an important part of WISE's approach. Participants considered all of the topics covered relevant, although the section relating to the use of risk assessment tools was the least popular. The provision of a set mandatory learning and development package delivered as part of WISE's approach provided an opportunity to deliver important and meaningful messages from research. The impact of this approach was particularly evident in the feedback received in relation to intersectionality and the case study. Participants stated that this was 'much needed' and that more training and time within their roles was needed to consider these topics more frequently.

WISE's learning and development package will continue to form part of the ongoing evaluation as part of phase three. In preparation for the next phase, and considering the feedback received, several minor tweaks will be made. These include:

- Training to be delivered prior to professionals undertaking WISE's approach
- Where possible, training to be delivered in person
- A reduction in the time spent discussing CE risk assessments
- For WISE's tools and approach to form part of the training
- Pre- and post-course material to be sent to all participants that highlight topic areas, as well as advice on self-care.

## WISE tools and approach

WISE's learning and development package was designed to support WISE's alternative approach to CE risk assessments. As highlighted at the start of this evaluation, the initial ambition of WISE's approach was significantly inhibited by COVID-19. This resulted in a shorter pilot phase, a reduction in the number of young people worked with as part of WISE and a readjustment of the evaluation outcomes.

The adjusted outcomes include:

- Designing and piloting an alternative to CE risk assessments
- All practitioners contributing to the pilot to undertake learning and development in relation to WISE's underpinning theories and philosophical approach
- For WISE's approach to be underpinned by intersectional thinking

- For WISE's approach to move away from a focus on risk towards a focus on safety and stability
- For WISE's approach to move away from focusing on the young person's behaviour (victim blaming) and consider wider contextual and systemic factors
- For practitioners to feel more confident in the tools they use and, therefore, more resilient and effective in their role.

Due to the impact of COVID-19 and the reduction in the scale and scope of the WISE pilot, the evaluation was unable to draw firm conclusions in terms of outcomes for children, young people, families and carers. This is one of the most important indicators of effectiveness for WISE and, as such, it will form the principal focus of the evaluation of the next phase.

#### [Two different approaches, one message](#)

As the pilot was taking place in two separate complex safeguarding teams across Greater Manchester, WISE adopted two different methods. Both were focused on the same potential outcomes (safety and stability), and both were underpinned by the same research and philosophy. However, one was a written document completed by the young person's allocated social worker, and the other was a facilitated multi-agency meeting. The discussions conducted in the multi-agency meeting were captured in a document, into which all attending professionals could have input. Both approaches concluded with a similar analysis section, which provided professionals with the space for both reflection and professional judgement to be exercised. The scoring mechanism used in traditional risk tools, which has been shown to have little bearing on the actual risk the young person is exposed to (Hallet et al., 2019), was replaced in both areas with two separate statements. The first statement focused on exploitation, and the second on the level of stability experienced by the young person (see the diagram below).



## COMPARISON TABLE

FEATURES	Phoenix Risk Measurement Tool	WISE
This approach is specifically designed to capture the young person's voice, experiences and encourages participation.	✗	✓
This approach primarily focuses on the young person, their behaviour and its impact on their environments	✓	✗
This approach primarily focuses on the person(s) posing the risk and other possible external contributing factors	✗	✓
This approach measures risk in terms of high, medium and low	✓	✗
This approach has a focus on the strengths in the young person's life	✗	✓
This approach promotes professional judgement	✓	✓

The table above illustrates that social workers found WISE's approach to be more participatory and strengths-based than the Phoenix Risk Measurement Tool, which are elements also frequently absent in CSE-based risk assessment tools (Brown et al., 2017). Other encouraging observations included WISE's shift in attention from the young person who is at risk of, or experiencing, exploitation, to the person(s) posing the risk.

### WISE's approach

WISE's approach in both pilot sites focused on four specific areas, whether this was via semi-structured multi-agency conversations or the completion of WISE's tool. The table on the following page provides a brief description and overview of each area of focus, including a concise analysis and recommendations for the final phase of WISE. The four areas of focus were:

1. The young person
2. Family and friends
3. People and places
4. Professional contexts.

## An overview evaluation of WISE’s practice tool and approach

Focused area	Brief overview	Overview of evaluation and feedback	Analysis and recommendations
<b>The young person</b>	<p>This section was focused on the young person and their feelings and wishes. This section framed the rest of the discussion/text and was future-focused (asking questions such as: ‘What does a good day look like for you?’). This section was written using the young person’s words (in the written format of WISE).</p> <p>This section also considered the young person’s intersecting identities and experiences and how this may influence how they are positioned and interacted with by professionals and institutions.</p>	<p>In both sites, this area of focus was well-received by all participants, with several commenting on the marked difference between WISE and the risk tool used locally.</p> <p><b>‘I think it's more meaningful as well. It really does bring out the young person to life and the lived experiences.’</b></p> <p><b>Practitioner in a focus group</b></p> <p>Several practitioners felt that more guidance and support should be given if practitioners are to properly understand what is meant by intersectionality and its connection to safeguarding (this feedback was given prior to the learning and development package being put into place).</p>	<p>This section was well received in both areas. Practitioners commented on the significance of understanding the young person in their entirety and not solely through the lens of CE. The young person’s perspective should continue to be the lead feature in the next phase of WISE.</p> <p>Several practitioners underlined the need to attend the learning and development day prior to commencing WISE’s approach.</p>
<b>Family and friends</b>	<p>This section focused on the young person’s relationships and experiences with their family, carers and friends. This included reflections on family functioning and family narratives, prompting professionals to actively support and encourage non-harmful relationships with family, carers and friends.</p>	<p>The feedback relating to this area of focus was that, although WISE did have more of a focus on the role of the parents and carers than the previous tool, it could go further.</p> <p>In relation to promoting friendships, although it was a focus of WISE’s approach, the data collected did not provide enough information for conclusions to be drawn.</p>	<p>This section requires further reflections and considerations to strengthen WISE’s approach. WISE acknowledges the important role parents, family members, carers and friends play in a young person’s safety and wellbeing. This section requires further evaluation as part of the next phase.</p>
<b>People and places</b>	<p>This section focused on the people and the places the young person spent time at/with. This included the detailing of</p>	<p>In principle, this section was well received, and practitioners felt it was important to have contextual factors discussed as part of what detracts from the young</p>	<p>This is an important section to include. However, it requires further refining to</p>

	known people and places that may pose a risk.	person's safety. Practitioners felt that it was also important to have the space to reflect on the individuals posing the harm; it was remarked that this element created a sense of balance and removed the focus from the young person. Feedback relating to this section also included the repetitive nature of the information being asked for (in the written tool), which made the document overly onerous.	ensure that it feels concise and meaningful.
<b>Professional contexts</b>	The section focused on factors such as the resources available, the appropriateness and number of professionals involved in the young person's life and the level of experience and skills of the professionals involved. It also promoted consideration of the potential impact of professional implicit and explicit biases on decision-making and interactions with the young person and their family, carers and friends. These reflections were encouraged in the written document via a reflective supervision tool, which could be completed during 1-2-1 or under group supervision.	In practice, this area of WISE's approach did not gain significant traction.  Social workers completing the written document stated that the reflective questions were useful, and they did use them to reflect on their practice. However, using the tools in 1-2-1 or group supervision felt like an additional task and demanded too much of their time.  In the multi-agency meeting format, these reflections occurred more naturally and were much less formal and, therefore, possibly less rigorous than intended.	This area requires further exploration in preparation for the next phase of WISE. The feedback suggests that facilitated reflection can be useful; however, the appropriate mechanism to support thorough, timely and worthwhile reflections requires refinement.

## Evaluation of WISE's approach

Below is a light-touch thematic analysis of the data collected as part of WISE's evaluation. The themes below complement the insights highlighted above in relation to WISE's tool and approach.

### Engaging young people

Due to time constraints and COVID-19 restrictions, only four young people engaged in the process of providing feedback. All four reported a positive relationship with their worker and the WISE process.

*Q: 'Does working with [D] feel the same or different to other professionals?'*  
*A: '[D] cares. Different. [D] took her time to get to know me. She knows when I am feeling down, 'cause she got to know me.'*

(Young person – Core Questions)

All social workers involved in the evaluation stated that the focus on strengths and positivity felt new and innovative. This was generally well-received, but some young people struggled with this, particularly if they experienced low self-esteem and were not used to focusing on themselves and the positive aspects of their lives:

*'She finds it really difficult to reflect on herself and to talk about herself. She really struggles with that. So, when looking at, you know, what are your interests or hobbies or what are you good at - she finds it so hard.'*

(Social worker in a focus group)

The level of engagement varied significantly between young people, and there were challenges when working with young people who were experiencing high levels of instability. To some extent the reduced timeframe for the pilot impacted on the ability to work at the young person's pace and complete WISE in a meaningful manner. Therefore, some of the reflections by social workers are based on implementing a light version of WISE:

*'I would say that, for the two young people I did it with, that one young person was totally in the wrong place; his answers would have been totally skewed by years of being in absolute crisis about XXXXX. We would have given you an overview of everything and not WISE, because he couldn't even focus on anything, but what the current crisis is about.'*

(Social worker in a focus group)

## Engaging parents and carers

Participants suggested that they feel that a process that encourages greater parental/carer involvement is important, and suggested that WISE could go further with including parents and carers:

*'Include parents [and carers] more. This has been improved as part of WISE, but I think services frequently work with young people and not their parents or carers, and this needs to be reinforced a lot more.'*

(Participant in WISE's learning and development evaluation)

## Engaging professionals

Participants enjoyed the positive focus of the WISE model, the space for reflection, and the philosophy of the approach:

*'I did find that WISE allowed for more reflection than the other tool. Definitely. It definitely lends itself to being a more reflective tool than the Phoenix measurement tool is. I think it is much better and exciting.'*

(Social worker in a focus group)

All participants were positive about the move away from scoring risk, but there was some uncertainty about how the WISE approach would work in comparison with the previous assessment:

*'... on the Phoenix measurement tool, when it was scored medium or high, it was then referred to the Staying Safe panel. So, I guess one of my questions is, because this isn't scored, do we just refer on professional judgment? ... some guidance is needed around that.'*

(Social worker in a focus group)

Participants in both focus groups and questionnaires were positive about the flexibility within the process and appreciated the autonomy they had with the documentation:

*'It allowed me to write what I wanted and to be very focused on the young people. And with WISE, I have a lot of ownership over that case and that person. And what I thought we needed to, we needed to do the work. I particularly liked that the WISE plan section has only got four things on it. Because, I think, massively, our plans, that social workers write for young people, are flipping ridiculous. How can people be expected to concentrate on so many things at once?'*

(Social worker in a focus group)

Two participants reported that the documentation was too long, and four participants suggested a shorter form would be beneficial:

*'... When you first open the document, I think – before you even write anything – is it like 14<sup>5</sup> pages long?'*

(Social worker in a focus group)

All participants found the section on intersectionality helpful, although some suggested that consideration may need to be given to how this is covered in the training:

*'I have never thought about trauma and intersectionality together before. Obviously, I have thought about how boys and girls differ, but not how these may change when you add race, age and things like that all together.'*

(Participant in WISE's learning and development evaluation)

## 5. Conclusion

WISE was established in April 2019 in response to changes in the field of adolescent safeguarding and CE. WISE's ambition is for tools and processes to move away from a focus on risk and towards a focus on safety, stability and wellbeing when working with children and young people at risk of, or experiencing, exploitation. This includes providing an alternative to child sexual and criminal exploitation risk assessments and tools. This evaluation has demonstrated that WISE has made significant strides towards this aim.

Importantly, the next phase of WISE needs to focus on measuring outcomes for children, young people and their parents, carers, families and networks. Due to the impact of COVID-19, this has been a limitation of this evaluation. In relation to WISE's (adjusted) stated aims, WISE has been well received by practitioners and social workers. Some of the areas of success of WISE include:

1. The development of a training package that explores adolescent development and safeguarding in the context of extra-familial harm.
2. Establishing the foundations for an alternative approach to using CE risk assessments and tools.
3. Developing an alternative approach to risk scoring in CE by focusing on the strengths, safety and stability.

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<sup>5</sup> The WISE written tool is seven pages long prior to completion..

# WISE INSIGHTS

- 1. A REPLACEMENT TOOL DOES NOT HAVE TO BE A FORM**

Practitioners found the structured and dynamic nature of the multi-agency meeting to be a helpful and reflective space
- 2. PRACTITIONERS RECOGNISE THE LIMITATIONS OF RISK ASSESSMENTS**

Practitioners appear ready to stop using risk assessments and tools as they do not reflect current approaches to tackling child exploitation
- 3. YOUNG PEOPLE WANT PROFESSIONALS TO INCLUDE THEIR FRIENDS MORE**

Young people want their friends to be included in some of the work they complete with professionals.
- 4. STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACHES ARE A VALUABLE WAY TO ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE**

Practitioners found strength-based approaches supported increased engagement with young people when compared to risk-based tools
- 5. A YOUNG PERSON'S INTERSECTING IDENTITY IS AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION**

Reflecting on how young people are perceived and interacted with based on biases and assumptions is an important part of safeguarding
- 6. STATEMENTS RELATING TO SAFETY AND STABILITY ARE MORE REFLECTIVE OF PRACTICE**

Practitioners found that focusing on safety and stability was more aligned to their practice than scoring and measuring risk
- 7. BEING YOUNG PERSON FOCUSED ALSO MEANS INCLUDING PARENTS AND CARERS**

Safeguarding young people from exploitation must include working closely with parents and carers where safe to do so





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