

National FGM Centre

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

This report provides background information on the work of the National FGM Centre, which is run in partnership between the LGA and Barnardo's. Leethen Bartholomew, Head of the Centre, will attend the meeting to provide an overview of its work.

Recommendations

That the Safer and Stronger Communities Board notes the work of the Centre, its wider remit since 2017 and discusses the issues raised.

Actions

Officers to continue working with the National FGM Centre to raise awareness of the work of the Centre in tackling FGM, breast flattening and child abuse linked to faith or belief.

Contact officer:	Lucy Ellender
Position:	Adviser
Phone no:	020 7664 3321
Email:	lucy.ellender@local.gov.uk

National FGM Centre

Background

1. In 2015 the LGA and Barnardo's created the National FGM Centre, with funding from the Department for Education's (DfE) children's social care innovation fund. The Centre worked with six pilot local authorities in areas with a low prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).
2. Building on that work, in July 2017 the Centre received further funding from the DfE to provide support over three years. The funding was given on a tapered basis, with the grant from DfE reducing each year, with the aim of making the Centre sustainable by 2020. In October 2017 the remit of the Centre was expanded to include breast flattening and child abuse linked to faith or belief.
3. Leethen Bartholomew, Head of the National FGM Centre, will attend the meeting to outline the work that they have already undertaken, discuss the expanded remit of the Centre and how this links in with wider community safety issues.

Issues

4. The Centre's Vision is "to keep children and young people safe from FGM, breast flattening and child abuse linked to faith or belief, including our aim to end new cases of FGM by 2030." To achieve this the Centre has developed a four part model:
 - 4.1. Social work provision: specialist social workers are embedded in local authorities and provide support in cases where FGM, breast flattening or child abuse linked to faith or belief are a concern. This can range from advice and guidance to frontline professionals, to child protection investigations and applications for FGM Protection Orders.
 - 4.2. Community outreach: engaging communities is key to prevention, through changing attitudes and behaviour. The Centre's community engagement work has included working with men and boys and faith leaders and undertaking stakeholder events, peer research and community intervention programmes with community groups. They have also worked with schools to engage with parents and local communities.
 - 4.3. Consultancy and professional development: the Centre offers training on FGM, breast flattening and child abuse linked to faith or belief.
 - 4.4. The Knowledge Hub: The Knowledge Hub brings together resources to provide a "one stop shop" for guidance, resources, research and information on FGM, breast flattening and child abuse linked to faith or belief.

5. The Centre's work was at first concentrated on areas that had a low prevalence of FGM: Essex, Hertfordshire, Thurrock, Suffolk, Norfolk and Southend. However since receiving the additional part funding in July last year the Centre will be working with three low prevalence and 3 high prevalence areas – including Essex, Hertfordshire, Thurrock, Brent, Harrow and Redbridge. The Centre is also received separate funding from Staffordshire Police and Crime Commissioner to provide services to Children's Social Care in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.
6. Since September 2015 the Centre has worked on referrals for 320 families in two and half years. These families included 416 girls under 18, and 199 boys under 18 as well as 43 unborn children of unknown gender. The Centre has also been involved with 19 FGM Protection Orders, which accounts for around 9 per cent of all orders made across the country.
7. The LGA administers the Centre's Advisory Board, chaired by Cllr Anita Lower. The Board has membership from a range of organisations, with representatives from the NHS and specialist health services, education and the police.
8. LGA and Barnardo's officer hold regular partnership and sustainability meetings to look at the running of the Centre.

Expended remit of the Centre

Breast Ironing/Flattening

9. Breast flattening, also known as breast ironing, is the process during which young pubescent girls' breasts are ironed, massaged, flattened and/or pounded down over a period of time (sometimes years) in order for the breasts to disappear or delay the development of the breasts entirely.
10. In some families, large stones, a hammer or spatula that have been heated over scorching coals can be used to compress the breast tissue. Other families may opt to use an elastic belt or binder to press the breasts so as to prevent them from growing.
11. Breast flattening usually starts with the first signs of puberty, which can be as young as nine years old and is usually carried out by female relatives.
12. It should also be acknowledged that some adolescent girls (and boys in some instances) may choose to bind their breast using constrictive material due to gender transformation or identity, and this may also cause health problems.
13. Breast flattening can happen anywhere in the world and has been recorded in a range of countries.
14. There can be a range of health implications of flattening including abscesses, cists, infection, and tissue damage as well as having an impact on the children's social and psychological wellbeing.

15. Although there is no specific law within the UK around breast flattening, it is a form of physical abuse and if professionals are concerned a child may be at risk of, or suffering significant harm, they must refer to their local safeguarding procedures. More information on breast ironing can be found on the Centre's website:
<http://nationalfgmcentre.org.uk/breast-flattening/>

Child abuse linked to faith or belief

16. There is a variety of definitions associated with abuse linked to faith or belief. [The National Action Plan](#) includes the following definition when referring to Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief (CALFB):
- 16.1. "Belief in concepts of:
- 16.1.1. witchcraft and spirit possession, demons or the devil acting through children or leading them astray (traditionally seen in some Christian beliefs),
 - 16.1.2. the evil eye or djinns (traditionally known in some Islamic faith contexts) and
 - 16.1.3. dakini (in the Hindu context);
 - 16.1.4. ritual or muti murders where the killing of children is believed to bring supernatural benefits or the use of their body parts is believed to produce potent magical remedies;
 - 16.1.5. use of belief in magic or witchcraft to create fear in children to make them more compliant when they are being trafficked for domestic slavery or sexual exploitation.
17. This is not an exhaustive list and there will be other examples where children have been harmed when adults think that their actions have brought bad fortune, such as telephoning a wrong number which is believed by some to allow malevolent spirits to enter the home.
18. As with FGM and breast flattening, CALFB can have a number of health and wider implications including physical injuries, emotional abuse and neglect. Children who have been singled out can also be vulnerable to sexual abusers within the family, community or faith organisation.
19. There are a number of laws in the UK that allow the prosecution of those responsible for abuse linked to faith or belief.
20. Further information on CALFB can be found on the Centre's website:
<http://nationalfgmcentre.org.uk/calfb>

Implications for Wales

21. The Centre has formed links with the South Wales Police and has delivered multi-agency safeguarding children training on FGM. The Centre will be launching its FGM Assessment Tool in Cardiff on 11 October 2018.

Financial Implications

22. There are no financial implications.

Next steps

23. The LGA will continue to help promote and support the Centre to ensure that there is awareness of both its work and the issues it is working on.