



Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee

Report title: Multi Agency Response to Child Exploitation

Date: 13 March 2024

Key decision: No.

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors: Patricia Garner, Sara Rahman, Mark Humphreys, Peter Haycock

Outline and recommendations

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview to the Safer Stronger Select Committee on the Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) arrangements in Lewisham.

It is recommended that the Safer Stronger Committee take note of the contents of this report for information.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

N/A

1. Summary

- 1.1. Lewisham has recognised for some time the risks facing some of our children and young people in relation to exploitation. Initially this involved working with the police to establish a Concern Hub, but with the development of a pan-London multi-agency child exploitation model and a review by the Lewisham Safeguarding Partnership, in February 2022 Lewisham replaced the Concern Hub with a Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE). The MACE leads and monitors practice for extra-familial harm and exploitation of children and young people up to the age of 25 and this includes Serious Youth Violence.
- 1.2. The Lewisham MACE has 3 layers that includes the Strategic MACE board, the Tactical MACE Group and the Pre-MACE Operational Meeting. The Ofsted report published on the 31st of January 2024 judged Lewisham Children's Services to be 'Good' in all categories. The commented positively on the work taking place in relation to child exploitation and shared that 'Children who are potentially at risk of exploitation benefit from a prompt and highly effective response from the 'Safe Space' service. Assessments are thorough and carefully consider cultural and push-and-pull factors. Detailed planning supports interventions to reduce and mitigate risk. At a strategic level, multi-agency child exploitation meetings are well attended by key stakeholders. Leaders have developed an effective partnership response to exploitation, for example identifying exploitation 'hot spots' to inform disruption activities'.
- 1.3. The function of the MACE system is to ensure agencies are sharing information and working together effectively, using powers and resources at their disposal; to safeguard children and young people at risk of criminal and/or sexual exploitation and violence, taking necessary steps to pursue and disrupt individual and groups who exploit children and young people. Case responsibility remains with the lead professional (normally the Local Authority children's social work team), MACE/Pre-MACE actions are monitored monthly and a CYP review takes place every 12 weeks, with the lead professional attending MACE

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Safer Stronger Select Committee is asked to note the contents of the report for information.

3. Policy Context

- 3.1. The Council's Corporate Strategy 2022 - 2026 outlines the Council's vision to deliver for residents over the next four years. Of relevance to youth violence, the strategy states "we will continue to focus and develop our successful public health approach to youth violence, aiming to tackle knife crime and reduce sexual exploitation across the borough".
- 3.2. Statutory requirements from the Police and Justice Act (2006), introduced additional duties, which were updated by subsequent legislation that includes the Crime and

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Disorder Regulations 2011. The requirements included the production of a Strategic Assessment and a Partnership Plan.

- 3.3. The Safer Lewisham Partnership Plan 2023, highlights priority areas the Council have identified to focus on as a Partnership for Lewisham.
- 3.4. There are three priorities identified in the Plan, one of which includes, a Public Health Approach to tackling violence, with a focus on youth violence
- 3.5. The Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) operating protocol is being fully utilised to manage child exploitation and violence concerns. The Child Exploitation Strategy and Strategic plan was agreed by the Lewisham Safeguarding Children's Partnership.
- 3.6. The Government announced legislation introducing a new Serious Violence Duty on public bodies. The Duty is part of the Government's programme of work to prevent and reduce serious violence, taking a multi-agency approach to understand the causes and consequences of serious violence, focused on prevention and early intervention, and informed by evidence.

4. Background

- 4.1. The Lewisham MACE is an Enhanced Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) model. The MACE panel operates in line with Pan London MACE Guidelines (2021). The current Pan London MACE guidance was developed following consultation with a number of London local authorities including Lewisham.
- 4.2. MACE panels operate in accordance with established statutory procedures relating to protecting children under the London Child Protection Procedures 2017, Working Together 2018 and The Pan-London CE Operating Protocol 2021.

5. The Multi Agency Child Exploitation Framework

- 5.1. The developing Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) dashboard allows us to view a breakdown of the referrals received by MACE and some of related demographic information. This information is used to analyse any themes and trends and particular areas that need to have focus such as any disproportionality, referral sources and so on.

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MACE Referrals - Jan & Feb 2024

Summary

There have been 15 people referred in 2024. 66.7% of these referrals shown are currently open. 33.3% of referrals were assessed to be an emerging risk, 53.3% were assessed to be a moderate risk and 13.3% a significant risk.

Demographics of people referred (numbers shown in brackets are comparisons with Lewisham's population aged 10-21 yrs):

- 73.3% (~34%) were black; 13.3% (~36%) were white.
- 60.0% (50%) were male.
- 86.7% (33%) were 14-17 years old, inclusive.

Referral Numbers

15

Closed at Pre-MACE

5

Open to Pre-MACE

10

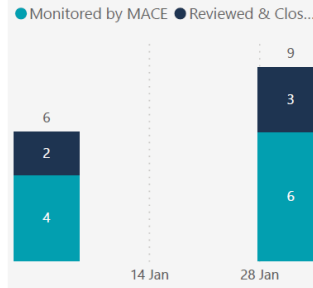
Closed at MACE

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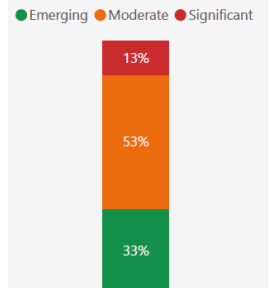
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2

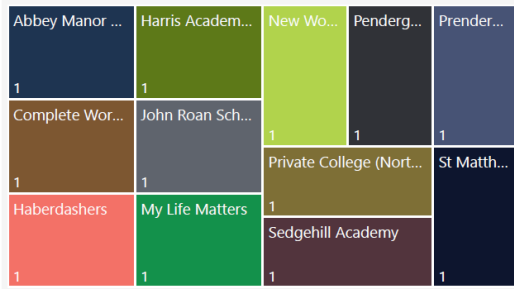
Referral Totals by Month



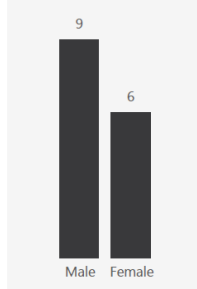
Risk Rating %



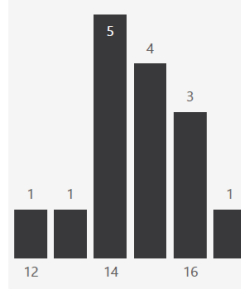
School



Gender



Referral Age



Ethnicity

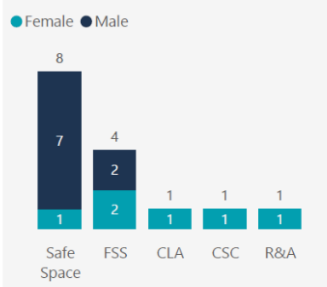


Updated to the end of February 2024

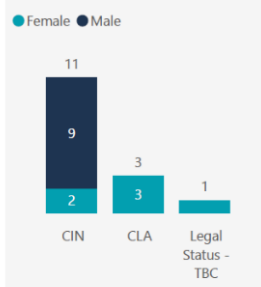


MACE Referrals - Jan & Feb 2024

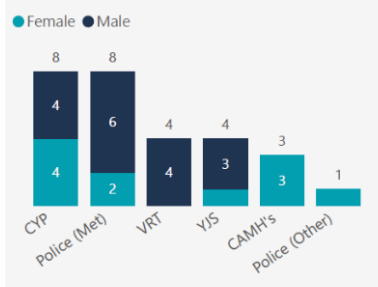
Key Team



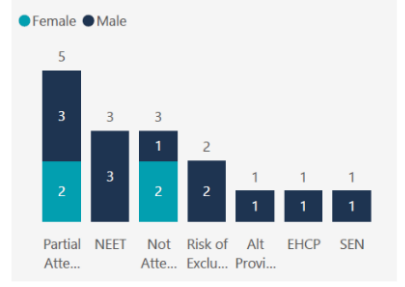
Legal Status



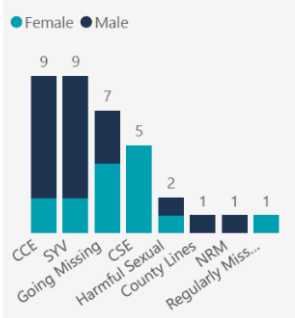
Known To



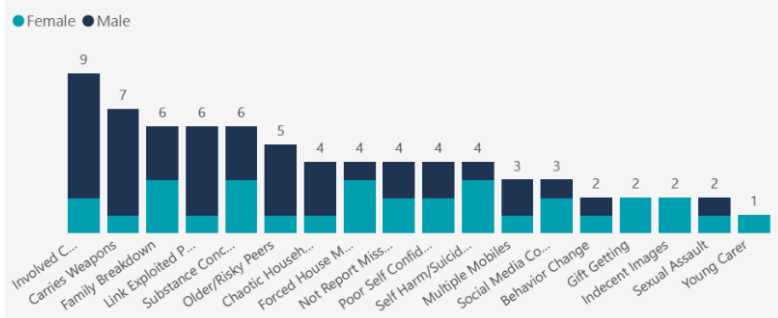
Education Status



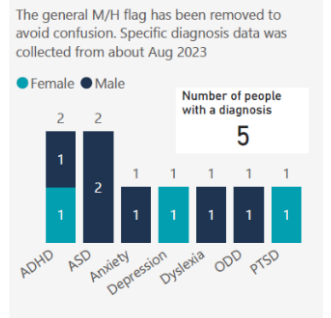
Primary Risk Category



Wider Risk Factors / Vulnerabilities



Neurodiversity Diagnosis



Updated to the end of February 2024

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5.2. An annual Exploitation and Missing report is produced to provide an overview of the MACE activity and performance, and the first one published in June 2023 was presented at the Corporate Parenting Board.

5.3. **Thresholds for referral to MACE**

The decision to attend the Pre-MACE Operational Panel will be made following a strategy discussion, where there are clear concerns regarding contextual safeguarding matters. When a decision has been made that a child or young people should be discussed the allocated social worker and/or manager will be invited to attend and key partners and other professionals will provide any information they hold about the young person or family. In advance of the meeting, the social worker will complete a referral including a risk assessment and have a clear safety plan, which should be collaboratively undertaken with a young person and family. When the social worker and manager attend the operational panel, they will clearly set out the risks and safety plan as well as sharing any concerns or barriers faced. Multi-agency partners will contribute with intelligence and solutions to enhance safety and protective measures and unblock identified barriers.

5.4. The pre-mace referral form includes the following risk descriptors for all referral categories:

- Emerging Risk – some evidence that the child or young person is at risk of exploitation and/or places him/herself at risk. Some concerns that the child/young person is at risk of being targeted or groomed, but there are some positive protective factors in the child’s life. The child/young person may require a referral to targeted early intervention services for education/intervention.
- Moderate Risk – Child is vulnerable to being exploited but there are not immediate/urgent safeguarding concerns. There is evidence the child/young person may experience protective factors but circumstances and/or behaviours place him/her at risk of exploitation.
- Significant Risk – Evidence/disclosure suggests that the child is at immediate and/or continuing risk of criminal exploitation and extra-familial harm. The child/young person is engaged in high-risk situations/relationships/risk taking behaviour. Evidence/assessments, suggest that the child is experiencing exploitation (they may not recognise this).

5.5. Significant risk factors including when exploitation is suspected, where there is concern that the abuse involves one or more abuser, multiple victims, a group, or where additional focus is required to monitor peer networks, locations and activities, the case is escalated to MACE for consideration.

5.6. There was a review of MACE in August 2023 with a focus on how the partnership could work more effectively to disrupt activity where child or young person are at risk of exploitation and or missing episodes. The data and intelligence shared at the MACE panel is used to identify locations and individuals of concern. For example, there was a cohort of young people who were brought to MACE as regular missing persons frequenting an address of an adult female. Police colleagues were able to service a Child Abduction Warning Notice (CAWN) on the adult to disrupt the activity at the address. MACE partners were also able to link in with housing colleagues to consider enforcement under housing legislation as another way to disrupt the activity.

5.7. External organisations including Safer London and Red Thread regularly attend MACE panel to contribute to intelligence tasking and solutions, with Police, Safer Communities, Safer London, Health and Education, to enhance safety and protective measures and unblock identified barriers.

5.8. Intelligence covers cross-border issues that impact multiple Basic Command Units

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(BCU) and boroughs, including overview of children placed in and outside of the borough. Mapping and the sharing of this intelligence is key.

5.9. All professionals give appropriate consideration to the following Victim Offender Location Themes (VOLT) areas:

- a) Victim/children at risk of being exploited. Where an individual presents with concerns in more than one area (e.g. harmful behaviour and being exploited) they will be prioritised and discussed as a victim in the first instance.
- b) Offender(s)/perpetrators/persons of concern
- c) Location(s)
- d) Theme(s)

5.10. **National Referral Mechanism (NRM)**

5.11. In March 2023 Lewisham Children's Services launched its first National Referral Mechanism (NRM) panel after a successful Home Office bid for devolved decision-making pilot sites. The benefits of a local multi-agency decision-making process is that NRM decisions are informed by professionals who know the children and young people and the family, who have access to the latest information on the children.

5.12. Where the panel decide there are reasonable grounds to believe a child or young person is a victim of modern slavery, they qualify for a service from Barnardo's Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Service (ICTG). ICTGs are an independent source of advice for trafficked CYP in England and Wales and somebody who can speak up on their behalf. They are independent of those authorities responsible for making decisions about children. An ICTG direct worker provides one-to-one support for children for whom there is no one with parental responsibility for them in the UK.

5.13. Under the pilot we are achieving timely outcomes for children and young people, in particular for those who have entered the criminal justice system, as a positive NRM decision influence how they are dealt with by the courts for offences that they have been forced or coerced into doing.

5.14. **Case studies/outcomes**

5.15. Case Study 1

5.16. In July 2023 two Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWNs) were served to disrupt and adults association with 5 children reported missing residing at Adult X's (female) address. The children were between 12 and 16 years of age and three were known to Lewisham Children's Social Care. There were concerns around sexual activity at the address and the adult female was known to misuse substances and had a mental health diagnosis of bi-polar known to misuse substance. In July Adult X was located at a property where a male was shot and wounded.

5.17. *Impact/Outcome:* Two Child Abduction Warning Notices CAWNs have been served on Adult X. Adult X's children have been made subject to CP plans. The case was discussed at MACE in September 2023 for perusal of a Slavery Trafficking Risk Order as some of the YP continued to frequent the address. MACE will use this cohort of YP as case study to plan a level 2 Contextual Safeguarding response, which is a response to contexts of harm as well as the individuals impacted.

5.18. Case study 3

5.19. A young person (male) convicted of supply of class A drugs offences linked to modern

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slavery, and sentence of a 10-month referral order. The young person received a negative National Referral Mechanism (NRM) on conclusive grounds as the young person was involved in exploiting a vulnerable adult in Southwark in his family home that he used as a cuckooed address. The themes picked up with this case was that the young person was not known to any services prior to this incident and questions were raised around the possibility of the young person's needs and vulnerabilities being missed historically. It is unusual for a child in this situation to have never been known or come to the attention of children's services.

5.20. Case study 3 (example of contextual safeguarding response from partners)

5.21. In July 2023, a large group of young people (15-20) from a Lewisham School were seen by an education colleague entering a location underneath the railway arches (Westdown Road, SE6). Concerns that weapons or drugs were being concealed in the area or that it could be a cover for activity that was occurring in the neighbourhood.

5.22. *Actions:* Education colleague reported the incident to the school's police and the Local Authority MACE Chair. The Safer Neighbourhood Team and Safer School's officers were deployed to the location and consider a weapon sweep of the area.

5.23. *Outcome/Impact:* The key holder for the location was spoken to and the location has since been secured preventing access. Therefore, activity at this location has successfully been disrupted. The MACE Chair has linked in with School's Officers who have agreed to attend MACE or pick up actions from MACE.

5.24. **Operation Make Safe**

5.25. In September 2023, Police colleagues visited local businesses to raise awareness around exploitation and how they can support with protecting children and young people if there are signs or indicators of exploitation observed during their contact with them. In total, 18 visits were conducted by the South East Child Exploitation Team as their contribution to the Met wide initiative. Venues included branches of McDonalds, Travelodge's, KFC, Costa Coffee, Independent Convenience Stores.

5.26. **Strategic MACE panel**

5.27. The strategic MACE panel is a multi-agency partnership that considers strategic matters that are fed through from the Pre-MACE operational panel, as well as local, national learning and good practice. It is co-chaired by the Police and Director of Families Quality and Commissioning.

5.28. The objective of this panel is a strategic oversight, accountability and ensuring the tracking of impact. Where there are blockages to plans, themes, locations, and persons of interest; these will be discussed here with a view to early identification, planning, and disruption.

5.29. The multi-agency responsibility includes adhering to and complying with Data Protection laws and regulations, understanding that the purpose of information sharing is to safeguard vulnerable children and/or to detect and prevent crime. The oversight also extends to ensuring that the oversight and actions from the panel is recorded.

5.30. Safeguarding as a result of MACE meetings has led to improved multi-agency protocols with reference to contextual safeguarding. Roles, responsibilities and procedures are clearly understood, accountability is clear and accepted.

5.31. Safety planning has been strengthened through robust multi-agency working which has led to timely investigation by the Police and evidence-based decision making in response

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to peer connections (including when specific cohorts and individual children are missing), location-based issues and contributed to disruption activity. The risk profile of children and those who exploit them within the extra-familial context is better understood so children and young people can receive specific support to reduce escalation and vulnerability to risk.

- 5.32. The MACE Purpose Statement has been updated to incorporate the promotion of Anti-Racist / Anti-discriminatory practice (appendix 1).
- 5.33. There is an existing Terms of Reference for the MACE, however this is currently being updated by the MACE partnership.
- 5.34. Individuals discussed at MACE panels are open to Children's Social Care and the rationale for sharing sensitive information is made explicit within the minutes. Information discussed by agency safeguarding representatives within the panel meeting is strictly confidential and generally not be disclosed to third parties without the agreement of the partners at the meeting.
- 5.35. Multi-agency partners will contribute with intelligence and solutions to enhance safety and protective measures and unblock identified barriers through consideration of the VOLT factors.

- 5.36. **Themes and trends**
- 5.37. County lines intensification week took place in Oct 2023. Police colleagues visited local businesses to raise awareness.
- 5.38. Safer Communities colleagues flagged an address in Bellingham as a location of concern to the MACE partnership. This enabled Children's Social Care and Police to complete checks to establish if any children were at the address. It was confirmed that no children were residing at the address, and it was already on the police radar due to concerns around substance misuse and anti-social behaviour.
- 5.39. The MACE Serious Youth Violence police partner and the MACE chair linked in the Children's Social Care Elevation Group with the police Stop and Search Charter to ensure that the voices of children and young people in Lewisham are heard. Questionnaires were completed by the young people to reflect their experiences and suggestions.
- 5.40. An estate in Catford was flagged as a hotspot. A location assessment is planned for this estate linking in with the Violence Reduction Team, Housing and Contracts Manager, and Safer Communities.
- 5.41. Police colleagues have shared police audit/risk assessment of the estate undertaken in 2022 which will feed into the children's services and Safer Communities location assessment of the area.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1. This report is for information and there are no expected cost implications. In a wider context, Lewisham have a vision to improve outcomes for young people by improving prevention for serious youth violence and exploitation and reducing higher costs at a later stage.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1. There are no significant legal implications arising from this report.

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8. Equalities implications

- 8.1. A priority in the Safer Lewisham Plan 2023 is Lewisham's Public Health approach to violence reduction and the reduction of disproportionality. The Committee will consider wider Equalities matters when reviewing the Plan and when making any recommendations. The Integrated Adolescent Service and the MACE framework adopts a trauma informed, anti-racist approach that builds on the successful work of the Lewisham Youth Justice Service. Disproportionality is now a standing feature of the MACE performance reporting such as ethnicity and gender, and this will assist in identifying areas that need attention in relation to anti-racist practice and the journey of the black and mixed heritage child.

9. Crime and disorder implications

- 9.1. The purpose of the Safer Lewisham Partnership Plan 2023 is to set out the strategic approach to crime and reducing violence. The approaches outlined in this report are in line with this plan in partnership with the wider Council.

10. Health and wellbeing implications

- 10.1. The overall purpose of the Public Health approach is to improve the overall health and wellbeing of all residents in the borough. Crime and serious violence have wider implications for the borough such as resident safety, desirability to live in Lewisham, mental health, education, and employment outcomes and so on. Taking a public health approach allows the partnership to take a place-based approach to tackling these issues.

11. Background papers

- 11.1. [London Borough of Lewisham - Open - Find an Inspection Report - Ofsted](#)

12. Glossary

Term	Definition
MACE	Multi-Agency Child Exploitation A multi-agency case management forum coordinating support and interventions to reduce the risk of child exploitation to children and young people up to the age of 25 year where they are screened at medium/high risk of being criminally or sexually exploited.
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements The process through which various agencies such as the police, the Prison Service and Probation work together to protect the public by managing the risks posed by violent and sexual offenders living in the community.
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference A meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, probation, housing, and other specialists.
CCE	Child Criminal Exploitation When a child or young person is exploited, they're groomed by being given things, like gifts, drugs, and money in exchange for carrying out a criminal activity.

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Term	Definition
VOLT	The VOLT mnemonic is used to ensure that key information and intelligence is properly captured, as follows, V - Victim, O - Offender(s)/perpetrator/person of concern, L - Location, T -Theme(s)
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls An umbrella term used to cover a wide variety of abuses against women and girls, including domestic homicide, domestic abuse, and sexual assault.
CAWN	Child Abduction Warning Notice A measure of protecting a child who is regularly missing but may also be used to address controlling, grooming type behaviour which is not associated with missing episodes.
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder A developmental disability caused by differences in the brain. People with ASD often have problems with social communication and interaction, and restricted or repetitive behaviours or interests.
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder A condition that includes symptoms such as being restless and having trouble concentrating.
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation A term used to describe where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child under the age of 18 into sexual activity.
SYV	Serious Youth Violence Defined as any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime where the victim is aged 1-19, i.e. murder, manslaughter, rape, wounding with intent and causing grievous bodily harm.
YJS	Youth Justice Service Multi-agency service made up of several professionals from different agencies, who work together to prevent children and young people entering the youth justice system for the first time, supporting them to move away from offending.
HSB	Harmful Sexual Behaviour Involves one or more children engaging in sexual discussions or acts that are inappropriate for their age or stage of development. These can range from using sexually explicit words and phrases to full penetrative sex with other children or adults.
NRM	National Referral Mechanism A framework identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. Modern slavery is a complex crime and may involve multiple forms of exploitation. (NRM first launched in Lewisham in March 2023).

13. Report author and contact

13.1. Patricia Garner, Head of Service, Integrated Adolescent Service

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13.2. *Patricia.garner@lewisham.gov.uk*

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