

Scrutiny and Performance Panel

**Agenda
Item No.**

25 September 2018

6

Half Year update on Child Sexual Exploitation and the response by the Walsall Partnership

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr T Wilson- Portfolio Holder for Children's Services Social Care

Executive Summary:

This report provides an overview of the issue of child sexual exploitation, including the national and regional response activity around this significant priority for the Council and the wider partnership. It outlines the response to this issue in Walsall, led by the Walsall Children's Safeguarding Board (WSCB).

Reason for scrutiny:

The report was requested by the Chair of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to provide an update for Members of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Panel to enable them to fulfil their key responsibility and duties in holding the Council and its Partners to account for its work in preventing and protecting children and young people from harm through CSE in Walsall. This report builds on previous reports on CSE presented to Scrutiny on 14 October 2014, 15 April 2015, 22 November 2016, 26 January 2017 and January 2018.

Recommendations:

That:

- Scrutiny notes and supports the contents of the report and the current activity to protect Walsall children and young people from the risk of child sexual exploitation, to pursue perpetrators and to disrupt their activities, including through prosecution.
- Scrutiny challenges the partnership on the outcomes for children and young people in Walsall in relation to preventing and protecting against child sexual exploitation

Background papers:

The following reports provide an overview into the issues of CSE nationally and regionally.

- Working Together to Safeguard Children A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, March 2013
- 'If only someone had listened': the Office of the Children's Commissioner inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups report, November 2013
- The Jay Report: Independent Enquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham August 2014
- The Sexual Exploitation of Children: It Couldn't Happen Here, Could It? A thematic report by Ofsted, November 2014
- The Louise Casey Report of an Inspection of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, February 2015
- Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation across the West Midlands Assessment, 18 March 2015
- Tackling Child Exploitation Her Majesty's Government March 2015
- Time to Listen – a joined up response to child sexual exploitation and missing children September 2016

Resource and legal considerations:

Responding to children at risk of significant harm is a statutory duty placed on local authority Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services, LSCB Chairs and senior managers within organisations who commission and provide services for children and families, including social workers and professionals from health services, adult services, the police, Academy Trusts, education and the voluntary and community sector who have contact with children and families.

The resources required to respond to this statutory requirement come from within the existing resources across the partnership of organisations working in Walsall to protect vulnerable children and those at risk of harm.

Citizen impact:

The effective delivery of high quality services to protect children and young people from significant harm, including the risk of child sexual exploitation has a direct impact on the welfare and well-being of children and young people in Walsall. It directly links to the corporate priority to Improve Health and Wellbeing and the Children's Services objective that all children in Walsall are safe and supported.

Environmental impact:

There is no environmental impact

Performance management:

The performance of the partnership in successfully supporting children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation, prosecuting offenders and the promotion of disruption activity is monitored by the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board at every meeting

Equality Implications:

The co-ordinated provision of services designed to address the protection of children and the disruption and prosecution of activities by adults provides specific support for those children and young people who are at risk of significant harm. This includes those protected characteristics of gender, disability, race and religion

Consultation:

This report has been prepared collaboratively between Walsall Children's Service Social Care and West Midlands Police

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of [sexual abuse](#). Children in exploitative situations and relationships receive something such as gifts, money or affection as a result of performing sexual activities or others performing sexual activities on them.

Children or young people may be tricked into believing they're in a loving, consensual relationship. They might be invited to parties and given drugs and alcohol. They may also be [groomed](#) and exploited [online](#).

Some children and young people are [trafficked](#) into or within the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation can also happen to [young people in gangs](#).

- 1.2 Young people often trust their abuser and don't understand that they're being abused. They may depend on their abuser or be too scared to tell anyone what's happening.

It can involve violent, humiliating and degrading sexual assaults, including oral and anal rape. In some cases, young people are persuaded or forced into exchanging sexual activity for money, drugs, gifts, affection or status. Child sexual exploitation doesn't always involve physical contact and can happen online

- 1.3 In February 2017 the Department for Education issued a new definition of CSE:

“Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual.”

(Child sexual exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners Department for Education February 2017).

Walsall Safeguarding Children Board has adopted this definition of sexual exploitation of children and young people under the age of 18 years.

- 1.4 Sexual exploitation / criminal exploitation and trafficking is complex – however what is not in question is who is responsible for the exploitation of children – responsibility for exploitation of children lies with the perpetrator.

The Home Secretary recently set out the scale of online child sexual exploitation with a 700% increase in child abuse images being referred to the Nation Crime Agency in the last five years.

This report will provide updates in relation to sexual exploitation since the last scrutiny report from January 2018.

2. The Regional Response

- 2.1 As part of the regional work on Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People (PVVP), a Regional CSE co-ordinator had been in post since August 2015 with an Implementation Officer being appointed in October 2015. Both posts form part of the PVVP programme which also benefits from a programme manager. The posts, which are hosted by Solihull MBC and report into the Director of Children's Services, have now been vacant for some time and despite efforts to recruit to these posts this has been unsuccessful. This has led to some disruption in relation to the regional work.

The regional meetings have recently been refreshed and have agreed that the focus will now be on exploitation and this is in response to the increased awareness of risks to children being exploited for criminal reasons by gangs, in particular the risk of involvement in 'county lines', and the recognised relationship in some cases between risk of child sexual exploitation and gang association.

- 2.2 There is no legal definition of 'county lines' or criminal exploitation. County lines relates to the supply of class A drugs (primarily crack cocaine and heroin) from an urban hub into rural towns or county locations. This is facilitated by a group who may not necessarily be affiliated as a gang, but who have developed networks across geographical boundaries to access and exploit existing drugs markets in these areas.

A key feature of county lines drug supply is the use of a branded mobile phone line which is established in the marketplace and promoted throughout the existing customer base. Group messages are sent out periodically to the customer base to advertise the availability of drugs and orders are placed back to this line in response.

A relay system (another phone) is then used to pass orders onto dealers in the rural marketplace. The branded phone line is generally controlled by senior group members who are traditionally located in the urban hub.

- 2.3 The absence of a Regional coordinator has meant that the collation and analysis of the identification of vulnerability to CSE and classification of that risk across the region is currently unavailable; however, this does not impact on practice or activity undertaken in Walsall to safeguard individual children and we continue to collate local data in relation to exploitation in Walsall which is reference later in this report.

3. The Local Response

3.1 Governance

3.11 The Child Exploitation and Missing Trafficking Committee (CMET) sub group of the Walsall Children's Safeguarding Board

3.12 In June 2018 a multi-agency Delivery Group was developed that is accountable to the CMET sub group. Membership of this group included Children's Social Care, Education, Licensing, Youth Services, West Midlands Police, Legal Services, voluntary organisations, and partners from health.

The purpose of the Delivery Group is to operationalise, support, develop, monitor and evaluate the impact of the Child Exploitation Strategy and in doing so improve the multi-agency response to safeguard and protect children who are at risk of, or are being exploited.

The group focus is on specific areas of the CMET strategy and agree how these will be progressed and implemented, i.e.

- a) To operationalise at ground level the actions of the delivery plan
- b) Problem solve and troubleshoot any operational issues
- c) Develop, monitor and review multiagency practice in relation to CMET in the Borough
- d) Report back to the CMET Sub Group any issues and areas of concern
- e) Target work through Task and Finish groups as necessary

The key priorities of the group are

- a) To be clear on the scope of the problem in Walsall
- b) Raise awareness of exploitation within partners agencies and communities
- c) Monitor, review and co-ordinate provision and practice against the delivery plan
- d) Promote multiagency and collaborative working practices
- e) Promote cross boundary information and intelligence sharing
- f) To ensure that all decisions are made considering the voice of the child.

The group have identified specific areas on the delivery plan and are currently working of ensuring that there is traction in progressing these issues

3.2 Operational Practice

3.21 The Ofsted report published 4 September 2017 recommended that Children Services:

"Improve the response to all children at risk of child sexual exploitation, making sure that all assessments, safety plans and interventions are of a consistently good quality".

3.22 To address this challenge, and ensure the delivery of the post Ofsted Action Plan, Children's Services have appointed a specialist Principal Exploitation Reduction Officer

Since appointment the work undertaken by the Officer includes

- Review of the data
- Developing a partnership response through a delivery group
- Development of change champion sessions with team managers and senior practitioners to look at practice uplift.
- Exploitation newsletter
- Development of a communication strategy to enhance and raise awareness
- Auditing and benchmarking the work at Walsall
- Development of a gang / criminal exploitation pathway
- Developing an exploitation monthly report
- Challenged victim blaming language
- Piloted a new CSE assessment tool
- Reviewing the exploitation strategy
- Reviewing process, pathways and procedures for social workers and other agencies
- Reviewing the training delivered to taxi drivers in Walsall and working with colleagues to consider how this can be enhanced to take into account the emergence of criminal exploitation.
- Delivering awareness raising sessions and developing an awareness raising campaign for Walsall
- Celebrated national child sexual exploitation awareness raising day
- Undertaken audits
- Developing a transition policy between children's services and adults services
- Working and supporting regional colleagues to start to develop new processes and ensure a consistent response exploitation across the region.
- Reducing the victim blaming cultures

3.23 The importance of an integrated approach to sexual exploitation through multi-agency working is well recognised. Supporting sexually exploited children and disrupting perpetrators is a complex process and requires a response from a range of stakeholders. Multi-agency responses are supported through MASE and CMOG in Walsall and we continue to develop and strengthen our responses through strategic meetings and joint training.

We recognise that there can be a tendency to focus on victims and through multi-agency work we share intelligence to inform disruption and prosecution of perpetrators by our Police colleagues.

3.24 As part of the Ofsted Action plan the current process for undertaking return home interviews has been reviewed and an in house solution is being developed which will deliver improved timeliness in completion and enable a seamless join up between any issues identified as part of the return interview and follow up offer of support and intervention along a continuum from early help through to the allocated social worker.

Work has been ongoing in relation to this and the missing service that will be moving from street teams to the local authority from later this year.

- 3.25 The Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Operations Group (CMOG) continues to meet on a monthly basis and reports to the strategic Child Exploitation and Missing Committee (CMET) of the Walsall Children's Safeguarding Board.

In May 2018 the way the CMOG group considered children was changed to reflect those who are sexual exploited and those that are missing or criminally exploited by the development of two panels. It is recognised that some children may be considered in both panels.

These panels ensure that all children at risk of sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation who go missing and/or are trafficked are identified and acknowledged, have a lead professional supporting them and have an effective safeguarding plan in place.

This ensures that all cases are considered by a single multi-agency group who are then able to identify any links between individual cases and ensure that all agencies are supporting victims and ensure that intelligence relating to patterns of abuse and risk are identified and action taken where necessary.

This includes the sharing of intelligence relating to:

- Victims
- Perpetrators
- Locations

4. Current known size of the challenge in Walsall

4.1 Sexual Exploitation

- 4.11 At present there are 102 children who have been assessed as having some level of risk of sexual exploitation in Walsall. These are children who have vulnerabilities and who are at risk of grooming or may have begun to be groomed. Of these, 14 children are assessed as being at significant risk and 24 children are assessed as being at serious risk, the highest level of risk. Both these categories relate specifically to children who are being exploited.

It must be recognised that recognising and assessing the risk a child faces is an important first step in addressing the issue. It enables professionals to work with the child and their family to address their educational, health, psychological and social care needs. It also enables West Midlands Police to tackle the perpetrators who seek to exploit our children.

- 4.12 Every individual child who is assessed as being at serious (high) or significant (medium) risk of harm from CSE is the subject of a multi-agency sexual exploitation meeting (MASE). The child or young person and their parents and carers are invited to attend with those professionals who are working with that child or young person. This meeting discusses how best to protect the child, sharing information and intelligence and is designed to identify specific actions relating to the exploitation this child experiencing.

These meetings are attended by the police, child, parents or carer, social worker, school or college, health and any other professional who can share information and offer support.

- 4.13 A clear plan of action (safety and disruption plan) is put in place to protect the child and this becomes the responsibility of a named professional to ensure the actions are delivered and the intended impact is achieved.

The impact of exploitation on children has far reaching affect exploited young people are at increased risk of rape, sexual assault, physical violence, sexually transmitted infections, trafficking and pressure to use drugs and alcohol.

CSE can impact on every aspect of a child/young person's life, such as:

- Physical and mental health
- Education and training
- Family relationships
- Friends and social relationships
- How they view others and the impact can go far beyond childhood into adulthood and affect their relationships with their own children in the future

As part of our ongoing work the MASE process and subsequent safety planning are under review to ensure that we have best practice in place throughout our processes. Children's Services now have a full time dedicated MASE chair that

4.2 Missing

During quarter one (March to June) there were 169 missing episodes reported. There were 87 individual children, of which 32% (28) repeatedly went missing and 61% (53) were first time missing. The number of repeated missing episodes as a % of all referrals was 49%

During the autumn of 2018 West Midlands Police will be adopting the Police College Guidance in respect of dealing with reports of missing persons. This will result in a change from current practice where some children are currently considered as absent to a position where any child whose whereabouts is unknown will be considered as missing. This move recognises the inherent risk in going missing. As a result the number of children currently reported as missing will increase; however, this will also mean that the information available to us regarding missing episodes will be more accurate and, in turn, we will be able to try and intervene much earlier in address this pattern of behaviour.

4.3 Trafficking

Our figures relating to children who are accepted as having been trafficked are obtained from the National Crime Agency. This includes foreign nationals trafficked into the country as well as Walsall children who are trafficked

internally. The Walsall figures have increased from a total of 10 throughout 2016 to 12 as at June 2018. This is due to an increased recognition of exploitation and the work that has been done to raise awareness of trafficking offences when children are sexually exploited.

5 Next Steps

- 5.1 Child sexual exploitation is a complex crime for which there is no quick fix solution. As a partnership we know that we must tackle those that perpetrate abuse and seek to do this through disruption and prosecution of perpetrators, which we hope will deter others.
- 5.2 Following the Ofsted inspection an improvement plan was put in place to look at how we respond to sexual exploitation. This has included training, awareness raising and audit work. As a partnership we continue to address the concerns that Ofsted noted in their inspection and build on research and an evidence informed practice as to what works to tackle sexual and criminal exploitation.
- 5.3 Our ongoing focus is on developing a strong partnership response to sexual exploitation; we know that this is most effective in tackling sexual exploitation as well as criminal exploitation.
- 5.4 Through the Delivery Group we will direct our efforts into working hard to ensure that all communities, families in Walsall are aware of what exploitation is and how to report concerns. Through a joined up partnership awareness raising campaign in Walsall we will improve early identification and our responses to children at risk before risk escalates.
- 5.5 We know that for some children who suffer exploitation in childhood this does not end just because they reach the age of 18. We know that those that suffer abuse as a child can continue to be exploited as an adult and can go on to endure chronic mental health issues throughout their lives, we are working closely with colleagues in Adult Services in Walsall, as well as Street Teams to develop a transition pathway and support post 18.
- 5.6 As a partnership we will continue to work with all professionals to develop a model for children to build positive trusted relationships with a professional of their choice, knowing that this encourages them to have the confidence to recognise and / or disclose their experiences.

