

**9 January 2018**

**An overview of Child Sexual Exploitation and the Response by the Walsall Partnership**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr Nawaz – Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and Education

**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 Members of the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee 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 on 14 October 2014, 15 April 2015, 22 November 2016 and 26 January 2017.

**Recommendations:**

- That the Committee 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.
- That the Committee 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, West Midlands Police and the Independent Chair of Walsall Safeguarding Children Board.

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a form of abuse where children receive something – such as accommodation, drugs, affection, gifts or money – in ‘exchange’ for sexual activity. Often the victim is groomed into believing the abuser cares for them.

It is child abuse, involving the child being forced, coerced or intimidated. The child or young person is a victim. It is not an informed choice and the child may not be aware that they are being abused. In varying degrees CSE includes sexual, emotional and physical abuse and neglect. It is not the child’s fault.

CSE can happen to any child or young person no matter what their background, culture or where they live. The child and young people experience additional vulnerabilities, for example being looked after or episodes of missing education or from home. There are many different methods and approaches to sexually exploit children and young people. It can be undertaken by an individual, peers, groups or gangs and may take place entirely online or in person, or both. The problem is not a new one, but it is being considered in a different and more high profile way.

- 1.2 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.

- 1.3 There is no specific criminal offence of child sexual exploitation and legal redress is a prosecution for a range of other offences, including rape, statutory rape, trafficking offences and child abduction. Some local authorities have successfully used the civil court process to obtain injunctions preventing named individuals from approaching vulnerable children. This has the merit of being able to progress through court without the victim having to make a statement to the Police.

## 2 The National Response

- 2.1 There is no national strategy in relation to CSE although there have been a number of enquiries and reports into the challenge that CSE poses in keeping children and young people safe. These include:
- ‘If only someone had listened’: the Office of the Children’s Commissioner inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups report in 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
- 2.2 In March 2015 the Government published its 'Tackling child sexual exploitation' report, a cross-government action plan. This included a commitment to delivering a new system of multi-agency inspections to be carried out by Ofsted, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation) known as Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI's) with a thematic deep dive element.
- 2.3 Five local authorities were inspected between February and June 2016 and a range of key learning identified including:
- strategic goals must be clearly identified, understood and agreed across agencies, which also must commit resources to tackle child sexual exploitation
  - the need for all partners to share information and intelligence to fully understand the local patterns of child sexual exploitation, to disrupt and deter perpetrators and to identify, help and protect children
  - the need for a better understanding about why children go missing at an individual and a strategic level if agencies are to do more to protect them
  - the fact that children benefit from being able to build a relationship with one trusted individual and being actively involved in decisions about their lives

### **3 The Regional Response**

- 3.1 As part of the regional work on Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People (PVVP), a Regional CSE Co-ordinator has 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, are currently vacant. Funding for these posts is on a partnership basis across the 7 local authorities who form the West Midlands Police force area and the West Midlands Police (WMP). The initial funding period is for a fixed term period until March 2019. Both posts are currently out to advert. The delivery of the regional CSE co-ordinator work plan is overseen by the PVVP Board and reports are provided to the West Midlands Metropolitan Leaders Board.
- 3.2 The absence of a Regional Co-ordinator 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.
- 3.3 In 2017 West Midlands Police appointed CSE operational lead for the region, who was also involved in developing the 2017 West Midlands Police CSE strategy and is now part of the implementation process. At a wider regional level the Police (within the Regional Organised Crime Unit) have an appointed CSE Co-ordinator responsible for identifying national best practice and sharing locally, as well as assisting with the co-ordination of cross border criminal investigations.

- 3.4 The 7 local authorities and West Midlands Police also contributed to a regional communications and marketing budget. This year's activities have included a number of press releases and, following consultation with young people a campaign using targeted digital advertising to target young people through popular gaming, social media apps and websites.
- 3.5 The most recent media campaign focusing on the warning signs of CSE will be supported by street signage. With other authorities, Walsall was asked to identify 8 possible locations from an options list provided by the regional office. The sites we identified include:
- Bloxwich Bus Station, Bloxwich
  - Outside Burger King, Walsall
  - The Bridge, Walsall Council
  - Darwin Road/Stephenson Square, Beechdale
  - Stroud Avenue, Walsall
- 3.6 The choice of site for this marketing campaign was constrained by the options made available to Region by the site owners. We carefully considered where we would achieve maximum coverage and footfall, ensuring that the messages about the warning signs of CSE would gain maximum exposure to both young people, parents and carers.
- 3.7 The impact figures for the campaign have shown an impressive increase in traffic to the website ~ [www.seeme-hearme.org.uk](http://www.seeme-hearme.org.uk) including returning and new visitors and length of visits. The website itself has had a refresh and is up to date with key resources and information including the most recently developed licensing leaflet which has been printed and shared with CSE co-ordinators and local partnerships teams for delivery to licensed premises.

## **4 The Local Response**

### **Strategic Response**

- 4.1 Co-ordinating an effective response to child sexual exploitation and children and young people who go missing across the Borough remains a priority for the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) in the 2016-17 Business Plan.
- 4.2 Members will know that the Board commissioned a Local Government Association Peer diagnostic into the response to CSE across the Borough. This took place between 1 and 5 July 2016.
- 4.3 As a result of this peer review the following have been delivered in 2017:
- a new multi-agency CSE strategy for Walsall was agreed in early 2017.
  - a problem profile for CSE in Walsall, covering the years 2015 and 2016, was produced in February 2017 and described the types of risks and offending, victim and perpetrator profiles, and levels of CSE offending by geography. This document will be updated in early 2018 and shared with the Safeguarding Board.
  - a "balanced scorecard" for CSE & Missing is now reported to the Safeguarding Board each quarter. This includes data on numbers of children at risk of CSE (by risk category), number of offences and positive outcomes, number of intelligence logs received and created by the police, and data on missing children. This

scorecard has been recognised as best practice and used as a template for other local authority and Safeguarding Board areas.

- the agenda setting for CMOG has been changed to reflect a greater focus on offenders and locations and associated problem solving, and is now agreed by partners prior to the meeting.

- 4.4 On 4 September 2017, Ofsted published its report following the review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Board. In relation to CSE, the inspectors recommended that: "...the board has an overview of the impact of practice in relation to young people at risk of child sexual exploitation and the minimisation of that risk."
- 4.5 A comprehensive programme of audits is now taking place to scrutinise all parts of the CSE pathway, starting with contacts into the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), CSE risk assessments, Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) safety plans, and police investigations to ensure we identify best practice and areas for improvement.
- 4.6 The Child Exploitation and Missing Committee (CMEC) sub-group of the Walsall Children's Safeguarding Board will be responsible for monitoring actions arising out of these audits and ensuring that any putting in place any improvements as a result of these audits.
- 4.7 An emerging issue during 2017 which has been seen nationally, including in Walsall, is the increasing number of Online Vigilante (self-styled as "Paedophile Hunters") incidents. Whilst not a new phenomenon the numbers of groups, and therefore the numbers of incidents, have increased significantly.
- 4.8 Typically these are members of the public, usually with some co-ordination between a small group who use social media or chat rooms to pose as a child under 16 with the aim of attracting the attention of an adult offender who wants to groom that decoy child. Once a conversation becomes sexualised this sometimes results in the offender wanting to meet the child. In this case the decoy will agree and the group will attend the agreed location – or even the offender's home address – and then confront them. This is usually accompanied by "live streaming" the incident to social media in order to publicise the activity, and then a call to the police to arrest the offender. These live streaming videos are sometime watched by 50,000+ viewers.
- 4.9 This offending behaviour reported to the police is therefore a type of CSE activity, but one which has historically proven challenging for the police to uncover and address (or at least to publicise) due to the powers and associated authorities required to use such covert techniques proactively. This is not a restriction that usually applies to members of the public.
- 4.10 There are public safety risks with such an approach which the Police will then need to manage – to both the suspect and any other persons identified during these "stings", though at the same time potentially dangerous offenders are identified to the police who would not otherwise have come to their notice. On some occasions genuine victims of CSE and grooming have been identified following arrest as a result of the suspect's phones and computers being seized and examined.
- 4.11 Members of the Committee will be aware from previous discussions of the decision taken by Licensing Committee that all taxi drivers in Walsall will undertake training on a range of safeguarding issues including dementia and signs of sexual exploitation. This

programme commenced on 9 February 2017. Since this date, 130 new applicants and 584 existing licensed drivers have successfully completed the required training on a rolling programme.

- 4.12 In the preceding 12 month period the local authority CSE & Missing Co-ordinator has delivered awareness raising and training in the signs of potential CSE to a further 6 hotels within Walsall. The training evaluates positively and has resulted in increased intelligence referrals to West Midlands Police.
- 4.13 Bespoke awareness raising has also been delivered individual schools and supported accommodation providers to support them in pro-actively managing specific situations.

### **Operational Practice**

- 4.14 The Ofsted report published 4 September 2017 recommended that Children's 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".
- 4.15 To address this challenge, and ensure the delivery of the post Ofsted Action Plan, Children's Services have appointed a specialist Operations Lead who has previously developed and delivered a multi-agency approach elsewhere in the region to lead a practice uplift. The current post holder commenced in December 2017.
- 4.16 The Operational Lead is undertaking an end to end review of current practice and process. This includes:
- a review current provision within children's services
  - a review of all children with a current identified vulnerability to the risk of CSE exploitation
  - a review of the current screening tool and assessment tool in light of revised best practice guidance
  - a review of the current multi-agency planning process, safety planning and disruption activity
  - the production of a monthly exploitation newsletter to ensure that exploitation in all its forms is regularly raised and understanding refreshed
  - a review of practice to support best practice transition from Children's Services to Adult Social Care
  - practice uplift sessions for Team Managers
  - developing the identification of CSE champions within teams and services
  - development and delivery of a monthly report to the senior leadership team in respect of exploitation
  - attending the monthly CMOG and quarterly CMEC meetings
  - a small scale trail of the new national assessment tool

As Operational Lead the post holder will also provide challenge to West Midlands Police and Children's Services to strengthen thinking and activity in relation to disruption activity.

- 4.17 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 (CMEC) of the Walsall Children's Safeguarding Board. In Walsall the CMOG

is well supported by partners from across the wider children's partnership and includes representatives from the police, social care, the youth offending team, early help and licensing.

- 4.18 CMOG focuses on perpetrators, both those identified by name and those known only by nicknames or who are not yet named and locations, logging information which is used to:
- identify locations and organisations where additional training may support better identification and protection of children and young people
  - identify locations in order that workers have an understanding of those areas to be aware of when directly working with children and young people
  - support police intelligence gathering to assist in West Midlands Police investigations
  - identify opportunities to tackle potential CSE perpetrators and agree tactics to be used in line with the CSE toolkit, as well as agency ownership
- 4.19 Where partners have intelligence relating to children from other authorities being located in Walsall this information is shared across local authority boundaries as appropriate. WMP has delivered training to social work staff on capturing and sharing information with further training sessions planned throughout 2018.
- 4.20 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, health and any other professional who can share information and offer support. A clear plan of action 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.
- 4.21 As part of the current review, both 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 have retained the role of dedicated MASE chair.
- 4.22 Throughout the latter half of 2017, Children's Services have commissioned Jessica Eaton, a Doctoral Researcher at the Centre for Criminological and Forensic Psychology at the University of Birmingham to deliver training to workers on the subject of victim blaming designed to challenge thinking in relation to exploitation, the use of language in relation to victims and equip workers to think different and challenge both themselves and others when working with victims.
- 4.23 In the first 6 months of 2017/18 the risk of sexual exploitation faced by 16 young people reduced following positive intervention by their social workers, Street Teams, and West Midlands Police.
- 4.24 Walsall also recognises the link between children who go missing and the risk that going missing exposes the child to with regard to sexual exploitation and training is currently being delivered to staff across Children's Services to strengthen understand of this issue, the risks posed and develop skills in intervention strategies to reduce the risk.



- 4.25 The Statutory Guidance issued by the DfE in January 2014 is that once found the child must be offered an independent return interview to be carried out within 72 hrs of their return to their home or care setting by someone not involved in caring for the child.
- 4.26 For children in Walsall these interviews are currently carried out by Street Teams, a Walsall based registered charity which undertakes independent return interviews with children in Walsall. All return interviews include an assessment of the risk to the child of becoming a victim of CSE and copies of the return interviews are provided to children's social care. This information forms an important part of the overall assessment of risk of CSE and the subsequent plans to mitigate the risks to the child or young person. In accordance with procurement requirements the current commissioned service will be re-commissioned with an expected start date of June 2018.

Members of Scrutiny have previously discussed the work currently taking place in Walsall and across the Region to enhance our response to ensuring that those looked after children placed Out of Borough in ensuring that there is a return interview conducted if they go missing.

We know that in Walsall during Quarter 1 & Quarter 2 of 2017/18, 111 children were reported as missing and referred for an independent return interview. Of these:

- 47 children went missing for the first time
- 64 children had more than one missing episode
- 62% of reported missing children are female
- missing children are most likely to be in the 14-16 range
- 85% of reported missing children are of White UK heritage
- 20% of the children reported as missing are looked after children
- 60% of the children who went missing during April – September 2017 were known to Children's Services. This figure is broadly comparable to previous years.

In the first 6 months of the 2017/18 year 36% of the children who went missing had a return interview completed within 72 hrs and a further 18% received a return home interview outside the 72 hr period.

- 4.27 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.

### **Current Known Size of the CSE challenge in Walsall**

- 4.28 There are currently 103 children and young people who were identified as being at risk of child sexual exploitation. Of these, 5 are currently at the highest level of risk. The assessment of the level of risk currently associated with each child is currently being reviewed by the Operational Lead to provide assurance that the risk level is correct and enable further action to be taken if other exploitation vulnerabilities are identified.
- 4.29 The number of young people identified as at risk or potentially at risk of sexual exploitation represents the number of situation where risk has been identified enabling social workers, early help workers and partners to work proactively with these young

people to increase their understanding of what is happening to them and reduce the risks they face.

## **5 Next Steps**

- 5.1 Walsall Safeguarding Children Board continues to provide leadership in this area. Partners across Walsall have made significant progress in embedding processes and practice that will enable children and young people who are at risk of or are being sexually exploited to be identified and supported. Processes are also in place to identify and deal with offenders.
- 5.2 The Safeguarding Board will also oversee and monitor the implementation of the CSE Strategic Plan arising out of the LGA Peer Diagnostic and the Ofsted recommendations, challenging all partners to ensure delivery.
- 5.3 Children's Services will re-commission the provision of a specialist CSE service in line with procurement requirements.
- 5.4 The provision of a return interview for children who have been missing will be delivered in house by Children's Services once the new contractual arrangements are in place.
- 5.5 The review currently being undertaken in Children's Services will enable a better understanding of and response to exploitation of children in Walsall using the information arising from this review to shape our next steps in further developing the response to children who are being exploited and to ensure that they are being effectively safeguarded.