

EXTERNAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (CSE)

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Appendix A: Hillingdon CSE Strategy

REASON FOR ITEM

The Committee received an update on the procedures to deal with Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) at its meeting on 13 January 2015. This meeting is being held to enable officers and partner organisations to update Members about procedures that are in place to deal with CSE, action that has been taken since the last meeting and to identify any areas for possible improvement.

As the issue of CSE is cross-cutting, the Chairmen and Labour Leads from the Social Services, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee and the Children, Young People and Learning Policy Overview Committee have been asked to join the External Services Scrutiny Committee Members in this single meeting review.

OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO THE COMMITTEE

- Each organisation will be asked to explain what their role is with regard to CSE and identify their biggest challenges and obstacles.
- The Chairman of the Committee will describe a range of scenarios and ask each witness to explain what action their organisation would take in that situation and whether/how this has changed over the last two years.
- Members will then be able to ask question of the witnesses.
- Members may make recommendations to address any issues arising from discussions at the meeting which will then be included in a report submitted for Cabinet consideration.

INFORMATION

In recent years, the term *Child Sexual Exploitation* (CSE) has increasingly been talked about in local and national media but what does this mean, who is at risk and what is being done about it?

What does CSE mean?

This official definition of child sexual exploitation was created by the UK National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People and is used in statutory guidance for England:

Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g., food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology

without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.

It can involve violent, humiliating and degrading sexual assaults. 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.

Child sexual abuse online

When sexual exploitation happens online, young people may be persuaded, or forced, to:

- send or post sexually explicit images of themselves
- take part in sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone
- have sexual conversations by text or online.

Abusers may threaten to send images, video or copies of conversations to the young person's friends and family unless they take part in other sexual activity. Images or videos may continue to be shared long after the sexual abuse has stopped.

Child sexual exploitation in gangs

Sexual exploitation is used in gangs to:

- exert power and control over members
- initiate young people into the gang
- exchange sexual activity for status or protection
- entrap rival gang members by exploiting girls and young women
- inflict sexual assault as a weapon in conflict.

Girls and young women are frequently forced into sexual activity by gang members. Research by Beckett (2012)¹ found that girls considered to be engaging in casual sex were seen as forfeiting their right to refuse sex. The majority of sexual exploitation within gangs is committed by teenage boys and men in their twenties (Berelowitz et al, 2012²).

It should be noted that child sexual exploitation isn't a separate category of abuse in child protection procedures. This means data is often: missing or incomplete; concealed in other categories of abuse or crime; or unreported. Furthermore, in law, there is no specific crime of child sexual exploitation and offenders are often convicted for associated offences such as sexual activity with a child. As such, it is not possible to obtain figures from police statistics of sexual exploitation offences.

¹ Beckett, H. et al (2012) **Research into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence: interim report (PDF)**. Luton: University of Bedfordshire.

² Berelowitz, S. et al (2012) **"I thought I was the only one. The only one in the world."** **The Office of the Children's Commissioner's inquiry in to child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups: interim report (PDF)**. London: Office of the Children's Commissioner.

Not a great deal is known about who commits CSE and identifying abusers is difficult because:

- data often isn't recorded or is inconsistent or incomplete
- children and young people often only know their abuser by an alias, nickname or appearance
- victims may be passed between abusers and assaulted by multiple perpetrators
- children and young people are often moved from location to location and abused in each place
- young people may be given alcohol or drugs

It is likely that the number of known perpetrators is far higher than those reported. People who sexually exploit children are often described as highly manipulative individuals. They exert power over young people through physical violence, emotional blackmail or financial pressure, for example holding them in debt.

To maintain control, or to distance children and young people from those who may be able to protect them, abusers create or exploit weaknesses such as:

- being isolated/distant from friends and family
- disengagement from services such as education or health
- challenging or criminal behaviour

The focus on manipulation and control has similarities with domestic violence, although more research is needed to establish this link and fully explore motivations for child sexual exploitation.

The Children's Commissioner's study found that:

- 72% of abusers were male
- 10% of abusers were female
- in 18% of cases, gender wasn't disclosed²

The evidence indicated that the age range of abusers was from 12 to 75 years. Where ethnic group was recorded, the majority of perpetrators were White and the second largest group were Asian.

In 2012, Barnardo's reported an increase in sexual exploitation by peers in eight of their services. They found young people were sexually exploiting peers either directly by sexually abusing victims themselves or indirectly by introducing children and young people to abusers³. The Children's Commissioner Inquiry found that, of the 2,409 victims reported to them, 155 were also identified as perpetrators of child sexual exploitation. According to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), perpetrators can use one victim to gain access to others, asking victims to bring their friends along to pre-arranged meetings or 'parties'. In some cases, if victims try to break free, the perpetrator will use their peers to draw them back in⁴.

³ Barnardo's (2012) **Cutting them free: how is the UK progressing in protecting its children from sexual exploitation (PDF)**. London: Barnardo's.

⁴ Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) (2011) **Out of mind, out of sight: breaking down the barriers to child sexual exploitation: executive summary (PDF)**. London: CEOP.

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre published its thematic assessment in June 2011 with the aim of identifying what is currently known about CSE and made recommendations for tackling this form of abuse. The report talks about common findings among victims of this abuse and it states: "victims frequently do not recognise that they are being exploited and do not disclose abuse."

The report also details some commonalities among offenders:

Many of the detailed cases submitted to CEOP showed that grooming is used to manipulate victims, distance them from families and friends, and place them under the control of the offender. Offenders will often use flattery and attention to persuade victims to view them as a 'boyfriend'.

Warning signs to consider include:

- Having an older boyfriend/girlfriend
- Having unaccounted for money or items
- Signs of underage sex such as sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy
- Disclosure of serious sexual assault and then withdrawing the allegation
- Regularly coming home late
- Going missing from school, home or care home
- Not attending school or being excluded
- Being taken to nightclubs and hotels by adults
- Being friendly with adults or suddenly changing peer groups
- Chatting to or exchanging pictures with strangers online
- Experimenting with drugs and or alcohol
- Changes in behaviour that are out of character
- Hostility in relationships with family members or other carers
- Secrecy
- Repeat offending
- Being a gang member or associating with gangs
- Illness that cannot be explained
- Poor self image, eating disorders, self harm.

Who is at risk?

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) refers to any child under the age of 18 and is a form of child abuse. It is a broad and complex area of abuse that involves children and young people being targeted and abused by adults or peers for sexual purposes. Victims and perpetrators can be male or female and any child can be at risk of exploitation.

CSE is an under reported crime and it is widely accepted that there are difficulties in securing a conviction as many victims do not understand that they are being abused. There can be a combination of factors that would make a child vulnerable and more at risk of being groomed. Child sexual exploitation is a hidden crime and 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.

Perpetrators of CSE go to great lengths to target and abuse children and may trick them into believing that they are in a loving, consensual relationship. They might be invited to parties and given drugs and alcohol. They may also be groomed online (any young person who has a mobile phone and access to the internet is at risk of sexual exploitation - it's not just children in

care). 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.

What is being done?

In Hillingdon, the Council has worked with local partners to improve early interventions and the detection of children who may be at risk of exploitation. The Committee submitted its recommendations which were considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 23 April 2015 where it was resolved that Cabinet:

1. commends and approves the Hillingdon CSE strategy;
2. asks officers to further develop a programme of joint CSE training in partnership with the Metropolitan Police Service, LSCP, CNWL and the CCG;
3. asks officers, in conjunction with CNWL, to liaise with schools to ensure that CSE is included as a permanent part of PSHE lessons; and
4. agrees that consideration be given to the incorporation of CSE work undertaken by the Council into the LSCB annual report.

Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members are keen to receive an update on the progress that has been made in the implementation of these resolutions.

Witnesses

Representatives from the following organisations have been invited to attend the meeting:

- Local Safeguarding Children Board
- Local Safeguarding Children Board - Designated Doctor / Designated Nurse
- Public Health
- Hillingdon Local Medical Committee
- The Hillingdon Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)
- Metropolitan Police Service
- Education Practitioners - Representative head teachers from Primary, Secondary and PRU
- The Office of the Children's Commissioner

SUGGESTED KEY LINES OF ENQUIRY

1. Does the Council continue to have an officer with specific responsibility for ensuring all agencies provide a coordinated support package to those at risk of, or identified as, being sexually exploited?
2. What improvements have been made to the Council's coordinated multi-agency response to concerns around sexual exploitation?
3. What ongoing training has been provided (or is planned) for frontline staff (including teachers and children's home workers)?

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4. What improvements have been made to the way that the Council and its partners gather and share information on alleged offenders and disrupt their activity?
5. What action has been taken to ensure that there is social and corporate responsibility in identifying and sharing information on CSE?
6. What progress has been made with regard to the inclusion of CSE as a permanent part of PSHE lessons? How is the impact being measured?