PLYMOUTH
CITY COUNCIL

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Co-operative Scrutiny Review 2016

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Chairs' Foreword

The Ambitious Plymouth Scrutiny Panel is pleased to present this report that follows a Co-operative Review on child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Plymouth.

The Jay report on child sexual exploitation in Rotherham has led us to carry out review to understand what is happening in Plymouth and how children and young people are being kept safe.

The OFSTED report of Plymouth City Council in 2015 highlighted how Plymouth had responded to national reports on child sexual exploitation and reported that "*The development of multi-agency arrangements to protect children from sexual exploitation (CSE) is relatively recent and, while there are signs that they are effective, it is too early to see the full impact".*

Scrutiny continues to hold a specific and important role in the oversight of significant issues affecting the population. Difficult issues are all too easily ignored but in Plymouth committed to addressing the findings of the Robert Francis report on the care in Mid-Staffordshire, and the Jay report, which both flagged scrutiny as too often being absent or inadequate. By undertaking scrutiny into issues such as child sexual exploitation scrutineers are ensuring that all elected members, as representatives of the community and as corporate parents, can be assured that the right policies, processes and actions are in place to protect children.

We would like to thank those people who participated in this review and share openly their views and concerns on this important subject. We were impressed with the dedication and professional commitment of those who came to meet us.

Child sexual exploitation is still a largely hidden and unknown crime. The only way that agencies will tackle this issue is by working together. We were encouraged by the progress that has been made in Plymouth and across the South West Peninsula in this regard.

Councillor Mrs Beer
Chair, Ambitious Plymouth

Councillor Bowie
Vice-Chair, Ambitious Plymouth

Membership

The co-operative review was made up of six elected Members.

- Councillor Mrs Beer
- Councillor Bowie
- Councillor Mrs Bowyer
- Councillor Sam Davey
- Councillor Jordan
- Councillor Singh

Officers co-opted to support the work of the Co-operative Review included –

- Siobhan Wallace
- Charles Pitman

Members were advised that the information that would be shared with them could be distressing and they were directed to the Council's Occupational Health provider for support if required.

Methodology

The support officers undertook a literature search of national and regional policy in this area. The review group agreed that the review be undertaken by inviting written responses through a call for evidence and subsequently invited relevant organisations to meet with the review over a number of sessions.

The following organisations and people agreed to participate:

- Plymouth City Council
- Devon and Cornwall Police
- Plymouth Safeguarding Children Board
- Barnardos
- Plymouth Octopus Project (written response)

Context

Throughout the witness sessions and evidence provided to the review group the following understanding of Child Sexual Exploitation, its victims, perpetrators, impact and prevention was developed.

What is Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)?

CSE is a form of sexual abuse that involves the manipulation and /or coercion of young people under the age of 18 into sexual activity in exchange for things such as money, gifts, accommodation, affection or status. The "grooming" process involves befriending children, gaining their trust, often encouraging them to drink alcohol and take drugs, sometimes over a long period of time before abuse begins. This abusive relationship involves an imbalance of power which leaves child or young person feeling that they have limited options. This form of abuse has often misunderstood by victims and professionals and historically it has been considered by some professionals to be "consensual".

CSE can manifest itself in different ways. It can involve an older perpetrator exercising financial, emotional or physical control and violence. It can also involve peers manipulating or forcing victims into sexual activity. As seen in areas such as Rotherham sexual exploitation can also involve organised networks of perpetrators who enable the abuse of young victims in different locations.

Technology is widely used by perpetrators as a method of grooming and coercing victims, often through social networking sites and mobile devices[1] (Jago et al 2011) this form of abuse usually occurs in private or semi-private places such as parks, and areas where young people are known to congregate.

Who is likely to be sexually exploited?

Sexual Exploitation could happen to any young person whether in urban and rural location, a range of ages, male and female, and from any ethnic background. Victims have been identified from heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and bisexual orientations.

Child Sexual Exploitation and Online Protection Centre's (CEOP) national research and thematic assessment[2] analysed over 2,000 known victims of CSE. The vast majority were female, although in 31% of cases the gender was unknown. It is recognised that additional difficulties in reporting / recognising sexual exploitation in boys and young men is likely to have led to an under-representation of male victims.

There was inconsistent data with regard to ethnicity, however the report identified that of the cases reviewed 61% of victims were white, 33% were of unknown ethnicity, 3% were classified as Asian, and 1% of victims were recorded as being black. Victims most commonly become known to statutory and non-statutory agencies at the age of 14 and 15, although victims as young as 9 years old were identified.

[1] http://www.beds.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/121873/wgoreport2011-121011.pdf
[2] https://www.ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/ceop_thematic_assessment_executive_summary.pdf

Researchers recognise that children who go missing and/or are in care are at heightened risk of CSE. CEOP's assessment found that in 1,014 cases where this information was recorded, 842 (83%) were also reported missing on at least 1 occasion.

The features of children's background experiences that are likely to make them more vulnerable to the risk of CSE are –

- Living in chaotic and dysfunctional households (with features of parental substance misuse, domestic abuse, parental mental health, and parental criminality)
- History of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional and neglect)
- Recent bereavement or loss
- Attending education settings with children already sexually exploited
- Learning disability
- Unsure of sexual orientation
- Friendships with children being sexually exploited
- Homeless
- Low self esteem
- Young Carer
- Living in care/Hostel/Foyer

What are the signs and symptoms of CSE?
The signs and symptoms of CSE are often mistaken for "normal" teenage behaviour as young people push and test the limits of parental and societal expectations. There are a range of vulnerabilities which can impact on young people and the risk of exploitation increases if young people are subject to more than one vulnerability. Parents, carers, and all agencies delivering services to/for young people need to be alert to the following signs and symptoms -

- Underage sexual activity
- Visiting hotels or unusual locations
- Going missing from home or care
- Truanting or opting out of education altogether
- Changes in the way they dress, and having unexplained amounts of money
- Having older male and female friends
- Getting in and out of cars driven by unknown adults
- Receiving gifts from unknown sources
- Having multiple mobile phones and worrying about losing contact via mobile
- Mood swings, volatile behaviour, emotional distress, self-harm or thoughts of suicide
- Drug or alcohol misuse
- Criminal Behaviour
- Suffering physical injuries or sexually transmitted infections
- Unwanted pregnancies
- Displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- Associating with or recruiting other young people into sexual exploitation

(Berelowitz et al 2012[3])

Who are the perpetrators?
According to the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry, there is a great deal that we do not currently know about the perpetrators of CSE. This is partly because agencies rarely record data on perpetrators, and when they do, it is incomplete and inconsistent. Frequently victims only know their abusers by aliases and nicknames, or they can only provide physical descriptions as children are often heavily intoxicated by drugs and alcohol, and abused by multiple men. For these reasons, many abusers remain unidentified, and the actual number of abusers is likely to be far higher than those reported (Berelowitz et al 2012[4]).

Of the identified perpetrators, the vast majority are men and boys. The Children's Commissioner's study found that 72% were male, 10% female, and 19% gender was undisclosed. Perpetrators often exacerbate their victims' vulnerabilities to gain, and maintain control over their victims and create a distance from the people who may be able to protect them (CEOP 2011[5]).

What is the prevalence of CSE?
It is difficult to assess the numbers of victims of CSE, as a "hidden" form of abuse which leaves victims reluctant to make disclosures. Many young people do not even consider that they are being abused as those perpetrating the abuse manipulate them into believing they are in loving relationships, or they are dependent upon the abuser for protection (CEOP 2011[6]).

There is no Home Office code for the recording of CSE within police databases and as a result the data relating to CSE is therefore partial, concealed in other categories of data, or simply unrecorded. In addition, when perpetrators are convicted for involvement in CSE cases, there is no specific crime of child sexual exploitation.

The Children's Commissioner's Inquiry estimated from the evidence that 16,500 children in the UK were at risk of CSE. Owing to the reasons above, figures of reported victims is likely to be an underestimate of the true prevalence of CSE in the UK.

Information from Devon and Cornwall Police indicated that around three children or young people per thousand living in our area reported sexual offences against them last year, with girls and young women reporting most of the offences. These figures are not a true picture of the extent of child exploitation within the city due to the lack of recording/flagging of CSE as a factor in these crimes. Both the recent OFSTED report on services for Children provided by Plymouth City Council and Local Safeguarding Board[7], and the HMIC Police

[3] http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/I%20thought%20I%20was%20the%20only%20one%20in%20the%20world.pdf
[4] http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/I%20thought%20I%20was%20the%20only%20one%20in%20the%20world.pdf
[5] https://www.ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/ceop_thematic_assessment_executive_summary.pdf
[6] https://www.ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/ceop_thematic_assessment_executive_summary.pdf
[7] http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/plymouth

Effectiveness review 2015 (vulnerability)[8] identified that further work was required by all bodies to understand fully the extent of CSE in the City. The review group noted that both inspection regimes also reported that progress was being made in this area by all of the partner agencies.

What is the impact of CSE?
CSE can have an ongoing and devastating impact on a victim's physical and mental health and development. It can also have profound long-term effects on a young person's social integration, economic well-being, and is likely to adversely affect their long term life chances. Some of the difficulties faced by victims' include:

- Isolation from family members
- Teenage pregnancy/parenthood
- Failing examinations or dropping out of education
- Unemployment
- Mental Health problems extending in adulthood
- Suicide attempts
- Alcohol and drug dependency
- Aggressive behaviour
- Criminal Activity

It is likely that victims may need intensive multi-agency support to mitigate the long term damage inflicted by CSE.

How can we prevent CSE?
Raising awareness amongst young people, parents and carers, the professional networks working with children, and those working with adults living in chaotic households is key to prevention. Campaigns and training for professionals to ensure identification of vulnerabilities and the signs and symptoms of CSE are essential.

[8] https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/police-effectiveness-vulnerability-2015-devon-and-cornwall.pdf

The Plymouth Response

Do we have a local CSE strategy and action plan?

A South West Peninsula Child Sexual Exploitation currently is in place and adopted by the Safeguarding Children Boards in respective local authority areas.
Its aim is to:

- Inform the strategies and action plans maintained in each local authority taking into account statutory guidance and
- Inspire continuity and common practice across the Peninsula.

The strategy[9] sets the framework for local action which is led by the South West Peninsula CSE Protocol[10] and sets out the policies and processes to enable local agencies to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation.

Locally in Plymouth there is a strategic and operational CSE group. As a sub group of the PSCB the strategic group is chaired by the police and the operational group is chaired by manager of REACH (Reducing Exploitation and Absence from Care and Home) team. Intelligence is shared on an operational basis amongst relevant and appropriate agencies including Plymouth City Council, Police and Schools.

The NWG risk assessment tool[11] is currently in use in the city which allows members of the public and professionals to explore the vulnerabilities and indicators present in a young person who could be at risk of CSE and support a referral to relevant agencies.

CSE was highlighted by both Plymouth City Council and Devon and Cornwall Police as a key priority, the review group held an extensive witness session with representatives of Plymouth City Council, Devon and Cornwall Police and the Chair of the local safeguarding board who provided details of the current system and how it might be improved.
The group also received a copy of the Plymouth Safeguarding Board CSE implementation plan.

How effective is the Local Safeguarding Children Board?

The review group met with the chair of the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Board who reported –

- Membership of the Board is wide ranging and representative of the whole community, senior officers from partnership agencies are members of the board
- All members of the Board have important roles as Board members; these roles are often different and additional to their "day jobs".
- A review of the capability of LSCB staff was currently underway; there was also Proposals under consideration for the creation of a full time CSE coordinator on behalf of the board.

[9] http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/pscbpeninsulacsestrategy.pdf
[10] http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/pscbpeninsulacseoperatingprotocol.pdf
[11] http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/cse_risk_assessment_tool.pdf

- The Board linked into wider national and regional networks for information sharing and best practice exchange.
- There was strong leadership in respect of CSE and the governance underpinning the work of the Board was in place and further development was being planned.
- A key priority for the board was the CSE profile for the city this was under development and consultation with the Board
- Operations Global, Weevil and Illustrate were three operations which had demonstrated partnership working around CSE.
- More work was required on awareness raising and prevention.
- The Board was implementing learning received from the HMIC report and OFSTED report of 2015.
- A communication plan for the Board was also a priority and would be developed; the Board had a role to stitch together information from across the city and required a higher profile to do so.

The review group was assured that the Board had effective leadership and the developments and priorities as outlined by the chair assured the group that progress to a better understanding of CSE and its impact was clearly being made.

Does the relevant scrutiny panel receive the LSCB's annual report, and use this to challenge local priorities and outcomes?
Currently the Ambitious Plymouth Scrutiny Panel, the relevant panel for Children and Young People does not receive updates from the Local Safeguarding Children Board nor its annual report. Given that the issue of Child Sexual Exploitation is expected to be subject of ongoing review this situation will be rectified in the new municipal year.

What other multi-agency forums exist to facilitate joint working?
The review group was assured that a number of groups and forums existed to facilitate joint working, this included governance surrounding the integrated health and wellbeing programme, children's partnership and the PSCB and sub groups. However the group felt there should be a single group which is seen to lead on this work.

How is CSE incorporated into local training programmes, and who is able to access this training?
The review group were made aware that CSE had been introduced into the programme of training offered by the PSCB.
Local Safeguarding Children Boards are required to ensure the distribution of up-to-date best practice to all agencies and as such the Board is providing –

- Formal, structured higher level learning, including lectures, reading texts, comparative theories, and learning audits
- Facilitated by lead professionals working in the field, specially trained by Plymouth Safeguarding Children Board (PSCB) to deliver informed and detailed learning
- Multi-agency, bringing together core workers from at least six different agencies onto each course to ensure a culture of networking and sharing
- Certificated and accredited, as the lead agency for Safeguarding in Plymouth.

The review group was assured that training opportunities were in place; in particular the group was pleased to see that licensed taxi drivers had undertaken CSE training. The group did however feel that further work was required to drive the take up of training by groups across the city, particularly those in the voluntary and community sector and that the issue of cost may also be a factor to be reviewed.

Is awareness raising programme in place for children, families and the wider community?

The review group was made aware of the "We're worried about you"[12] leaflet produced by the PSCB and work carried out in the taxi and hospitality trades. However the group remained concerned that the level of awareness of CSE, the signs, symptoms and routes to raise concerns were not clear and a high profile campaign was required to raise awareness of CSE. In particular the group was disappointed at the lack of response to the "Call for Evidence" which they felt was a sign of a lack of awareness amongst partner organisations.

What support is available to current, potential and historic victims of CSE?

The panel met with Kerstin Neason following the submission of evidence from the Barnardos' BASE project. Kerstin explained that –

- The Barnardos Against Sexual Exploitation (BASE) service had been in place for 5 years and was entirely funded from voluntary funds at around £200K per year. The service employed 3.5 FTE and more staff as required.
- Since the submission of evidence had been provided demand on the service had increased and the service was seeing approximately 50 young people a year.
- Due to the rise in demand higher thresholds had been put into place and young people were being declined the service and signposted elsewhere. 40% of referrals into the service were being declined
- The service worked one to one with young people and helps them to re-engage with other services. The service worked with families or individuals for up to 18 months.
- Exiting the service was a particularly difficult for many young people as there was no "step down" services available to build on the work the BASE service had carried out.
- Multi-agency workforces had received training from Barnardos and were spotting more cases of CSE. In particular workshops had been run to enable the identification of young men that may be at risk of or showing symptoms of being exploited and since those workshops the numbers of referrals had increased.
- There were gaps in the service and Barnardos would be carrying out more work to understand CSE within Black and Minority Ethnic Communities and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities.
- There was lack accountable on the BASE service; there was no accountability to the Local Authority and Members as Corporate Parents.
- The service was entirely reactive; there was no capacity for development work with communities and further workforce development was required.

[12] http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/we_are_worried_leaflet.pdf

The review group was made aware of the work of the Targeted Youth Service, the NSPCC and Twelves Company who also support victims of CSE.

Recommendations

1. Agreed that the members were assured that strategies and action plans are in place to tackle child exploitation in Plymouth. It was felt however that the CSE implementation plan required refinement and should return to scrutiny in the future.

2. Agreed that the Plymouth Safeguarding Board should be promoted as the lead body with regards to Child Sexual Exploitation.

3. Agreed that the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Board should promote CSE training more widely and review its pricing structure to allow small community groups with limited resources to undertake this training. This would be subject to a report at a future scrutiny meeting.

4. Agreed to recommend to the Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Board that a comprehensive and wide ranging communications plan should be developed in relation to CSE. In particular this should include a high profile awareness raising campaign in which all partner agencies should play a key part and should be particularly focused at General Practitioners and Schools.

5. Agreed that the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Co-operative Commissioning should explore how more robust and resilient services for victims of CSE should be developed in partnership with other statutory agencies and non-statutory agencies already proving services. This will be subject to scrutiny in the future.

6. Agreed to recommend to the Co-operative Scrutiny Board that the Scrutiny Panel responsible for Children's services will receive regular updates from the Local Safeguarding Children's Board to include the annual report and specific updates on progress in tackling CSE.

7. Agreed to recommend to the Cabinet with responsibility for Co-operative Commissioning that Voluntary and Community Sector organisations delivering support for those subject to Child Sexual Exploitation in the city are invited to join System Design groups supporting the four Integrated Commissioning Strategies.

8. Agreed to recommend to the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Co-operative Commissioning that consideration is given to formally commissioning a Child Sexual Exploitation service which would include and appropriate step-down service.

9. Agreed to recommend to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner that consideration is given to the further development of the Sexual Assault Referral Centre in Plymouth to ensure that young people in Plymouth who have been subject of CSE are able to receive the appropriate support without having to visit Truro or Exeter.

10. Agreed to recommend to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner that they consider how through partnership an advocacy service can be developed to support CSE victims akin to an IDVA used in domestic abuse cases.

11. Agreed that the Scrutiny Panel with responsibility for children and young people will receive the quarterly report written by Barnardos' on their BASE service.