

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	11 September 2019
Title of Report:	Child Exploitation Update
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Lead Strategic Director:	Alison Botham (Director for Children's Services)
Author:	Siobhan Wallace, Head of Service Referral, Assessment and Early Help, Children, Young People and Families Ollie Mackie, Strategic Director, NSPCC and Missing and Child Exploitation Sub-Group Chair
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Your Reference:	Click here to enter text.
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part 1 - Official

Purpose of Report

This report provides an update on the work being undertaken across Plymouth to prevent and respond to child exploitation.

Recommendations and Reasons

No recommendations- report is for information only

Alternative options considered and rejected

Not applicable- report is for information only

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

This project is relevant to the Caring Council priorities of keeping children, young people and adults protected, focus on prevention and early intervention and people feeling safe in Plymouth.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

No implications from this report for the Financial Plan.

However responding to Child Exploitation is part of the core business for the Children, Young People and Families service. Prevention of Child Exploitation impacts on demand for statutory and preventative services. Failure to prevent or detect a serious child exploitation concern would lead to a potentially significant financial, and reputational, risk for the LA (service provision, compensation claims etc.)

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

No direct carbon/environmental issues identified

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

The work undertaken around child exploitation is relevant to risk management and health and safety in that it aims to prevent the sexual and criminal abuse of children.

This work is underpinned by the agenda for a Trauma-Informed city, and relates to I-thrive principles.

Prevention of the harm caused by child exploitation will have a long-term impact on prevention of offending, substance misuse and domestic abuse. This project is therefore relevant to the Safer Plymouth agenda.

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)						
		<i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Child Exploitation Update							
B	PSCB Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy							
C	CSE Scrutiny Review							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)						
	<i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Alison Botham

Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Choose

Date agreed: Date.

Approved by Jean Kelly 09/09/2019

Cabinet Member approval: *Cllr Jemima Laing (email and at CYP&Fs PFH meeting)*

Date approved: 29/08/2019

1.0 Introduction

1.1 What is CSE?

- 1.11 Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside clothing. It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).
- 1.12 Child sexual exploitation is a crime with devastating and long-lasting consequences for its victims and their families. Childhoods and family life can be severely affected, and this is compounded when victims, or those at risk of abuse, do not receive appropriate, immediate and on-going support. The first response to children, and support for them to access help, must be the best it can be from social workers, police, health practitioners and others who work with children and their families. Serious case reviews show that the language and approach of professionals is highly significant in influencing when and how children will tell adults that they have been abused. Insensitive language can place “blame” with the victim and result in them being seen, and treated by safeguarding professionals as “adults”.
- 1.13 The definition of child sexual exploitation is as follows:

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 does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology¹.

- 1.14 Like all forms of child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation:
- can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years, including 16 and 17 year olds who can legally consent to have sex;
 - is still abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual;
 - can include both contact (penetrative and non-penetrative acts) and non-contact sexual activity;
 - can take place in person or via technology, or a combination of both;
 - can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence;
 - may occur without the child or young person’s immediate knowledge (through others copying videos or images they have created and posting on social media, for example);
 - can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults.
 - can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time, and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse; and
 - is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse. (Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources).

¹ DfE, Child Sexual Exploitation. Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders, and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation (Feb 2017)

- 1.15 One of the key factors found in most cases of child sexual exploitation is the presence of some form of exchange (sexual activity in return for something); for the victim and/or perpetrator or facilitator. Exchange can include both tangible (such as money, drugs or alcohol) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived love or affection). It is critical to remember the unequal power dynamic within which this exchange occurs, and to remember that the receipt of something by a child/young person does not make them any less of a victim. It is also important to note that this can also be the prevention of something negative, for example a child who engages in sexual activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm his/her family.

1.2 What is Child Exploitation?

- 1.21 We know that children can be exploited in a number of ways other than sexual exploitation, including criminal exploitation (for example shoplifting to order), “County Lines” drug supply networks, or human trafficking. There can often be cross-over between different types of exploitation and the experience of a young person does not always fall neatly into one category. Increasingly policy makers and professionals have recognised this, and now refer to “Child Exploitation” rather than concentrating solely on child sexual exploitation in order to ensure all risks to children and young people from this activity are recognised.
- 1.22 In line with other LA areas nationally, Plymouth now considers child sexual exploitation as part of the wider concern of child exploitation.

1.3 Co-Operative Scrutiny Review

- 1.31 In 2016, a Co-operative Scrutiny Review of child sexual was undertaken. This made a number of recommendations, all of which were completed.
- 1.32 This paper provides an update on developments in the work undertaken around child exploitation in Plymouth.

2.0 Governance and Oversight of Child Exploitation (CE) Work in Plymouth

- 2.1 The oversight for the work with child exploitation in Plymouth currently rests with the Plymouth Local Safeguarding Board (PSCB), soon to transfer to the new Local Safeguarding Arrangements. Safer Plymouth also maintain oversight of a number of strands of this work, in particular reporting online abuse, as part of their role to address cyber-crime and fraud.
- 2.2 There is a regional Strategic Child Exploitation Group, chaired by police colleagues, which looks at practice and emerging issues across Plymouth, Torbay, Devon and Cornwall.
- 2.3 In Plymouth, child exploitation work is overseen by the strategic Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE) subgroup of the PSCB, chaired by the NSPCC. Under this sits an Operational MACE Subgroup which meets fortnightly and considers emerging patterns and concerns regarding individual or groups of children, offenders and locations, and plans disruption activity.
- 2.4 The I-Thrive and Trauma Informed City agendas are directly relevant to work with child exploitation, and the MACE subgroups are focussing on embedding a trauma-informed approach to work with exploited young people. An example of this was the National Citizenship Scheme workshops held over the last two summers which explored an understanding of what child

exploitation looks like through the eyes of young people and considered what language and approach could be used to widen understanding amongst young people.

- 2.5 All children and young people who go missing are offered return home interviews. These gather information and a child exploitation risk assessment is undertaken. Any child or young person where the threshold for significant harm or high-level child in need is met is referred to the Children Young People and Families Service for assessment, support and safeguarding.
- 2.6 Barnardos run a BASE project, offering support and recovery work to young people affected by child exploitation. This includes young people engaged with statutory safeguarding services as well as children in need. Other services such as CAMHS, NSPCC and Firstlight can also offer therapeutic support and intervention as part of their sexual abuse services.
- 2.7 Together for Childhood is undertaking a scoping exercise on tertiary services and pathways. This paper will describe what tertiary services are currently on offer to children who are victims of sexual abuse along with services for children and young people who display sexually harmful behaviour within Plymouth. It will also consider the need for such services along with the pathways to the services and make recommendations to ensure children and young people are able to receive the support they need. The long-term vision is to scope the development of a child sexual abuse prevention hub within Plymouth that would provide a sustainable offer to meet the needs of children within the city.
- 2.8 Where an individual or group of individuals poses a risk to children and young people, a strategy discussion is held and actions are identified to safeguard the young person. Alongside this, police colleagues can undertake a range of activities to disrupt the behaviours of the alleged perpetrator. This may include triggering a full-scale police operation, leading to the arrest and sentencing of offenders.
- 2.9 The Operational MACE has led a number of small scale disruption activities as follows:
- A Return Home Interview provided information that a number of girls aged 12-13 years were visiting a private address and receiving gifts in return for photography sessions. Names of these young people were not known. Discussion in Operational MACE led to police visit to the address, camera equipment checked, words of warning given regarding allowing young people on the premises.
 - Intelligence shared at the Operational MACE indicated that a range of people were visiting an address where an adult of concern lived. The address was checked by Community Connexions, who subsequently issued a Community Prevention Order that stated no young people under the age of 18 were to be permitted to enter the premises. Any breach would constitute a criminal offence.
- 2.10 In addition, a number of multi-agency complex strategy meetings were arranged following Operational MACE discussions about groups of young people who were engaged in risky behaviours. On two occasions, these led to police operations to prevent criminal activity. A number of retail outlets were also identified as either selling alcohol to under-age young people, or adults buying on their behalf or where shop-lifting was regularly reported. These reports to the Operational MACE were followed by a police visit and reported, where appropriate to trading standards.
- 2.11 Some young people can be both victims and perpetrators of child exploitation. In some cases these young people also receive Youth Offending Team intervention.

3. Prevalence and Local issues

3.1 Whilst there have been a number of small scale investigations into child exploitation in Plymouth, we have not experienced organised abuse on the scale seen in Rotherham, Bristol or Oxford. However, we know that young people do become the victims of child exploitation, including County Lines activity in Plymouth, and professionals' work to address these risks has become core business for frontline workers. Social workers and police officers work closely to safeguard young people and to pursue and charge the offenders who exploit them. These operations are highly confidential and the detail of any current live investigations cannot be shared.

3.2 It is difficult to quantify how many children and young people are at risk of child exploitation in Plymouth. At any one time, the Children, Young people and Families Service will be working with around 70 children and young people who are considered at risk of child exploitation- but this will range from very low risk to young people where there is a serious concern for their well-being. Children who have been exploited but are now safe may be closed to the Children Young People and Families but supported by other agencies.

3.3 During 2018-2019 the number of children and young people reported to the REACH (Reducing Exploitation and Absence from Care and Home) team by Devon & Cornwall Police were as follows-

Reported Missing Episodes – 995

Missing Children – 602

- Of this number, 146 (24%) were looked after children. This does not indicate that 146 individual looked after children were reported missing, as the same child may have been missing in different reporting months during the year.
- Nearly two thirds (59%) of the missing children reported were either open to Children's Social Care as LAC/CiN/CP, which is a further indicator of levels of vulnerability and risk. In addition, a total of 93% of children were either open or previously open to Children's Social Care, with only 7% not known to statutory children's services.
- Information from the Operational MACE group suggests that a number of high risk young people are not reported missing and agencies are also providing support to these children by referring to statutory services.

3.4 156 children who were not reported as missing but considered to be vulnerable to child exploitation were also discussed at the Operational Missing and Child Exploitation Group. These young people were identified either from Return Home Interviews completed in respect of reported missing children or raised as concerns by other agencies at the Operational MACE.

3.5 390 CSE/CE Screening Tools were completed by the REACH Team in respect of missing children last year. Where a child has multiple missing episodes in a short time span, a Child Exploitation screening Tool is only repeated where there is an indication of new or changed risks. Of the tools completed:

- 5% - indicated No Risk
- 44% - indicated Medium to High Risk

- 3.6 The police produce an annual Serious Organised Crime Local Profile of Child Exploitation. This has identified that the most prevalent form of exploitation in Plymouth is peer-on-peer. A lot of this occurs at “parties” or in local parks. From work the National Citizenship Scheme, and other direct feedback from young people, it appears that our young people often do not recognise this activity as abuse, and so the citywide work on healthy relationships is targeting this as public health messaging. The extent is still unknown due to a lack of awareness and recognition of peer on peer abuse. The first phase of response to this information is work with young people to recognise unhealthy relationships. National Citizenship Scheme activity over last 2 summers consulted with approx. 800-1000 young people in total. A report on the learning from this was submitted to the Strategic MACE last year and incorporated into the MACE work-plan and the development of Together for Childhood Relationship and Sexual Education Building Block development.
- 3.7 There has been a significant issue with County Lines activity identified in mid-Devon. We are seeing limited evidence of this in Plymouth so far, although there have been several recent incidents where young people from London or elsewhere have been arrested and found to have been involved in the drug supply network. In addition there are isolated cases of individual vulnerable young people in Plymouth being drawn into this activity. Police have identified several organised crime gangs operating in Devon and Cornwall.
- 3.8 Whilst we have not yet seen gang activity in the form experienced in some of the metropolitan areas, over the last year we have had concerns about a group of 15-16 year old young people exploiting 13-14 year olds. The younger children have been encouraged to shoplift to order or travel to Cornwall, where they are not known to buy alcohol, in exchange for drugs.
- 3.9 Agencies in Plymouth have a good track record of working closely and creatively to address these concerns as they arise.

4 Examples of Work in Plymouth

- There have been a number of joint police operations resulting in the conviction of perpetrators of child exploitation.
- In 2018, there was a multi-agency operation, named Operation Greywild, which targeted and disrupted large groups of young people who were congregating in the city centre and becoming involved in criminal and anti-social behaviour. A number of these young people were vulnerable to criminal and sexual exploitation. This was successful and highlighted as good practice by other police forces.
- A multi-agency approach to travelling fairs (Operation Dalitron) took place in 2018-19. This was successful in engaging the fairground owners and operatives in a number of initiatives to prevent child exploitation on their sites.
- There has been a significant improvement in the quality and timeliness of return home interviews undertaken by REACH staff, and the information contained within these is now accessible to police intelligence.
- BASE has secured further funding and consideration is being given to integration within the new proposed Family Hubs model. The proposed 0 – 19 model of early help and targeted support is being developed in consultation with the Strategic MACE, encompassing the need for a whole family response to recognising and responding to child exploitation. Much of this will be focussing on support to parents to recognise and support young people at risk of child exploitation.
- Barnardos have delivered “In Plain Sight”, targeting awareness-raising in the night time economy.
- The MACE has developed and launched a new screening tool for all professionals concerned about potential child exploitation. This will support better intelligence gathering about prevalence and types of child exploitation in Plymouth.

- The National Citizenship Scheme has now run very successful workshops with over 800 young people in Plymouth over the last two summers, specifically focussing on child exploitation and healthy relationships. The feedback from last year report has been disseminated and learning has shaped this year Strategic MACE work plan and influenced the need to prioritise contextual safeguarding in 2019-20. The learning will directly shape future CE campaigns and public messaging from a YP perspective.
- The Operational MACE is starting to monitor children going missing who are in Elective Home Education, as we recognise this is a particularly vulnerable group as they can be “under the radar” in terms of contact with professionals and other adults.
- Together for Childhood are piloting the new InCTRL programme for young people, regarding on online safety. In Ctrl will primarily offer a group work intervention for children and aims to work with them to raise awareness of potential risks in their on and offline world and build resilience. The children who will be eligible for this service will be:
 - Children who have had adverse childhood experiences as outlined above.
 - Aged between 9-13 years old (there can be some flexibility according to need).
 - Engaged in online experiences that are concerning but not considered as sexual abuse.
 - Have some positive or protective factors to support their engagement in the group

5 Next Steps

- Like many local authorities, we struggle to have a clear picture of the prevalence of Child Exploitation, due to the varying sources of data held across the agencies and the fact that much child exploitation is still unrecognised or under reported. There has been significant development in this over the last 2 years through the work of the REACH team, the Operational MACE and the police Serious and Organised Crime Local Profile. This area of work remains a priority for the Strategic MACE going forward.
- We recognise that there is a lack of expertise about the online world for most practitioners. We have invited the PCC Leadership Associate (Technology) to join the strategic MACE, and this will be an area of focus for workforce development going forward.
- We will continue to develop links through Safer Plymouth.
- There is a significant piece of work ongoing to develop practice across agencies and embed the new Child Exploitation Screening Tool.
- A task and finish group has been set up to look at contextual safeguarding. **Contextual Safeguarding** is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. The terms of reference are yet to be agreed as the working group is currently being established. Implementation of the Contextual Safeguarding framework is to be the primary focus for the Strategic MACSE in 2019-20.
- Theatre company, Alter Ego, are delivering an awareness training programme to professionals and schools.
- There is regular auditing of child exploitation cases within the Children Young People and Families Service. The findings from these audits are used to inform practice improvements going forward.