

Children, Sports & Leisure Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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| Title: | Report on Child Sexual Exploitation |
| Report of: | James Thomas |
| Cabinet Member Portfolio | Children |
| Wards Involved: | All |
| Policy Context: | BCBL |
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Protecting children from sexual exploitation more effectively is a priority for Westminster's Child Protection services and for our Local Safeguarding Children's Board and is the shared responsibility of all agencies. Child Sexual Exploitation is also a national priority and an issue that continues to receive a high level of media coverage, most recently in respect of the failings of safeguarding agencies in Rotherham.
- 1.2 In 2014 our LSCB has implemented a revised Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy alongside Local Operational Guidance, both of which refer to the pan-London Child Sexual Exploitation Operating Protocol which has been approved by the London Safeguarding Children Board. In January 2014 our Tri-borough Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Panel was initiated, which is jointly led by the Police and Children's Social Care. This Panel tracks the progress of all children who are being sexually exploited to ensure that all agencies are working effectively, and will provide an overview and analysis of the issue in Westminster and tri-borough.

- 1.3 The LSCB has decided that a dedicated Sub-Group will have responsibility for delivering the Action Plan in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation. This Sub-group also provides oversight of the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and of Missing Children, and is chaired by the Director of Family Services.
- 1.4 The Policy & Scrutiny Committee last considered a report in respect of Child Sexual Exploitation in February 2014.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- 2.1 Include here the main points that you wish the committee to provide a view, steer or decision upon:
 - Assurance that all agencies in Westminster are taking appropriate proactive action to identify and protect victims of Child Sexual Exploitation
 - Recommendations for the improvement of safeguarding children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation

3. Background

Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham 1997-2013

- 3.1 Members will be aware of the findings of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham 1997 – 2013, which was the subject of significant media attention when it was published on 26th August 2014.
- 3.2 The report documents the appalling abuse suffered by teenagers in Rotherham and is critical of the actions of Rotherham Council and other key partner agencies, in particular the police, over the period covered by the inquiry. The report states that the “the collective failures of political and officer leadership were blatant” and that at an operational level the police gave no priority to child sexual exploitation (CSE).
- 3.3 The specific criticisms of children's social care services were that for children living with their families in the community, thresholds were too high and so referrals of this nature did not receive attention and also that there was poor risk assessment and risk management. This was not the case for children looked after by the local authority, for whom the inquiry found there was good assessment and care planning. The report talks of a children's department which, during the 16 year period, was frequently over-stretched, understaffed and struggling to cope with demand.
- 3.4 The report makes reference to looked after children who were targeted by perpetrators of child sexual exploitation. There were concerns about children's homes in Rotherham in the late 90's being overwhelmed and unable to protect children, not because the abuse took place in the children's homes, but because they could not prevent young people in their care from leaving the home during either the day or the night. As a result, more children were placed away from Rotherham, some in secure settings. The outcomes for some of

these children were positive, but the inquiry described how placements in out of area residential units remained problematic because children tried to return to Rotherham and to their abusers, in some cases leading to increased risk. In terms of the scale of the problem, in Rotherham the child population is just over 50,000, and in July 2014, 16 children who were looked after by the local authority were identified as being subjects of child sexual exploitation.

Awareness of Child Sexual Exploitation and National Initiatives

- 3.5 There has been a growing awareness nationally of child sexual exploitation which is now much more likely to be defined as a specific problem or need, rather than an issue that would be dealt with by services as one of a number of needs presented by a child or family. As the Rotherham report states “What was viewed in the late 1990’s as the problem of child prostitution is now correctly defined as an issue of interagency responsibility for safeguarding children”.
- 3.6 Key reports and guidance have been published over recent years including statutory guidance in 2009 which required Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB) to take the lead in developing strategic and front line responses to child sexual exploitation.
- 3.7 In late 2011 the Department for Education produced a national action plan which brought together a series of initiatives by the Government and other partner agencies to protect children who were subject to child sexual exploitation. This action plan encouraged LSCBs to prioritise child sexual exploitation, to undertake risk assessments, to map the extent and nature of the problem locally and to ensure there was an effective response by all agencies. Subsequently the government lead on this issue has passed to the Home Office.
- 3.8 The growing clear direction from Government, national protocols, raised awareness, research studies, lobbying by voluntary bodies and increased activity has led to a position where most local authorities will now have in place a strategy and a service response to protect children who are sexually exploited. It is recognised that in many areas, these children were often already receiving services including youth and social work support, but they may not have been classified as children who were being sexually exploited.

Local Need and Response

- 3.9 Over recent years and in response to the growing awareness of the prevalence of child sexual exploitation, there has been significant work undertaken to provide a co-ordinated response between Westminster City Council and the police, health services and other key agencies. The creation of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has enhanced the information gathering for children where there are risk factors. In January 2014, monthly Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) meetings were initiated, jointly chaired by the Police and Children’s Services. This panel provides oversight of all cases of child sexual exploitation and ensures that appropriate safeguarding plans are in place and tracks progress.

3.10 The LSCB approved a revised Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy in early 2014 and agreed to adopt the new Pan London Child Protocol. The strategy sets out the approach for Westminster which aims to:

- Take a shared and co-ordinated multi-agency approach to raise awareness of the problem
- Intervene early
- Provide targeted child-centred support and achieve good outcomes for those who are at risk of or already victims of exploitation
- Take a shared and co-ordinated multi-agency approach to deterring and disrupting child sexual exploitation and prosecuting potential and active perpetrators wherever possible.

3.11 A key priority of the strategy is to ensure that the professionals and other adults in contact with children and young people are alert to risk factors such as going missing, misusing drugs or alcohol, self harm. Front line practitioners need to be aware of how to identify and support such young people and the range of services available to them. In Westminster a range of awareness raising activities and training is taking place and there is specialist advice available from a Child Protection Advisor within Family Services.

3.12 The implementation of the Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy is overseen by a sub-group of the LSCB which also provides multi-agency oversight of MASH and Missing Children, and is chaired by Westminster's Director of Family Services.

3.13 **Prevention**

- **Primary prevention** seeks to ensure that men and boys do not behave in an abusive and exploitative way, and that girls and boys (adolescent girls in particular) are able to recognise abusive behaviour and feel able to protect themselves and seek help when necessary. Responsibility for this work lies with universal services and schools in particular, and with those working with particular cohorts that should be targeted, such as the Youth Offending Service.
- **Early and effective recognition** of Child Sexual Exploitation is the next best way to prevent exploitation and abuse developing or repeating – we are working to improve the awareness of Child Sexual Exploitation risk factors across all agencies, have developed a shared risk assessment tool, and have taken action to ensure that there are clearly understood referral pathways to safeguarding services.
- **The borough local safeguarding lead on Child Sexual Exploitation** is ensuring there is a consistent and systematic approach to assessing risk and delivering appropriate interventions to children and young people who are vulnerable and whose behaviour is risky but falls below any clear evidence of Child Sexual Exploitation.

- We have developed a **Local Problem Profile of Child Sexual Exploitation** – this will then inform where to target effort in prevention and disruption. For instance there are good examples from elsewhere of engaging hotel reception staff or taxi drivers in becoming protective factors in recognizing and acting upon Child Sexual Exploitation.

Protection

- Our tri-borough **Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE)** panel meetings commenced in January 2014, chaired by Police and Social Care, providing oversight of all cases which meet the pan-London Operating Protocol threshold.
- We are developing the role of the **Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)** in ensuring both the effective identification of Child Sexual Exploitation, and in using an Analyst role to map patterns of exploitation and associations between perpetrators or victims.
- We are working with Looked After Children and Placement Services to ensure the effective protection of those **placed out of borough** and so not falling within remit of our tri-borough MASH or MASE.
- We are monitoring and reviewing the effective use of **Multi-Agency Planning, Child Protection and Looked After Child planning meetings** to develop effective individual plans for children and young people.
- We will build on current best practice to provide clearer guidance on **effective interventions** – including the respective roles of Social Care and Police, parents and carers, schools and health services, and specialist workers/agencies.

Prosecution

- The Police have stated their strong **commitment to improving the detection and prosecution of perpetrators** of sexual exploitation – through the new specialist team for higher levels of risk and borough commands for lower levels.
- We will **engage the Crown Prosecution Service** to ensure effective prosecution of perpetrators of sexual exploitation.
- We will further develop a shared understanding of **effective interventions with perpetrators**, including with those who are themselves children. This will include strategies to disrupt their activities where prosecution is not possible.

3.14 Effective safeguarding for victims of sexual exploitation rests primarily upon a key worker, usually a Social Worker or Young People's Practitioner, establishing an effective relationship with them in order to support changes in their behaviour and engagement with plans to make them safe.

- 3.15 Through the Integrated Gangs Unit and the Your Choice Programme, Westminster has prioritised specific work in respect of Girls and Gangs, with a particular emphasis upon the risks of sexual exploitation. Led by a dedicated Independent Sexual Violence Advocate, a programme of training, individual and groupwork has been rolled out.
- 3.16 Multi-disciplinary audits were carried out by the LSCB in December 2013 in relation to nine girls aged 13 to 17 at risk from Child Sexual Exploitation, the key findings being:
- Overall positive picture of practice and persistent interventions to protect these girls;
 - Good examples of effective safeguarding, but some girls continued to be at risk – the key challenge of practice in this area once risk has been recognised is to engage the young person in working with a protection plan; the engagement by well matched, consistent and persistent key workers and foster carers is closely associated with improved outcomes;
 - Specific recommendations about improved sharing of information between health professionals;
 - Specific recommendations about the need for more effective interventions to achieve re-engagement with education and training;
 - The need for closer engagement of Police in seeking to prosecute and deter perpetrators;
 - Endorsement of the benefits that the MASE Panel is expected to bring in sharing of intelligence.

4. Problem Profile

- 4.1 The production of a Problem Profile was recommended in the Office of the Children's Commissioner's report "If Only Someone Had Listened" (November 2013). The report advised that a Problem Profile should seek to draw together all the known intelligence/relevant data held across different agencies to inform strategic decision making and local practice development. It requires collective ownership across all partners to support its development and a committed/effective analyst to review and identify key findings and intelligence gaps.
- 4.2 The first of these Problem Profiles was produced locally in May 2014 based upon information gathered over the previous 6 months, supported by the data analyst in MASH. As this mechanism is developed we hope to see more involvement from other agencies and make use of intelligence held by the police.
- 4.3 Based on the information available, the Problem Profile identified that there is no evidence of:

- Specific geographical “hotspots” where child sexual exploitation appears to be more prevalent or localities where young people who live there are more likely to be involved in CSE.
- Networks or gangs of adult perpetrators who are linked and sexually exploiting children in a coordinated way.
- Loose networks of young people who are signalling being at risk to one or more agencies or through contact from concerned parents or carers, as was the case in recent high profile cases involving adult gangs in other parts of the country.

4.4 The Problem Profile identified there were two children in Westminster where there was evidence that they had been sexually exploited, and a further 25 children where there was evidence of risk factors for sexual exploitation and ongoing risk assessment but insufficient information to substantiate concerns.

4.5 The analysis indicated that there were significant overlaps in the profile of these children, with the key common risk factors being: histories of going missing; use of alcohol and drugs; being in care; and being out of mainstream school and in alternative provision.

4.6 The Problem Profile will be updated at six monthly intervals and there is activity to engage partnership networks to identify victims and cross reference with different cohorts of children to build a picture.

4.7 Whilst the current Problem Profile suggests that there is no major concentration of child sexual exploitation in Westminster, we should guard against complacency. Ongoing vigilance is required to ensure that victims of child sexual exploitation are identified and responded to swiftly and purposefully.

5. Health and Wellbeing Implications

5.1 Health services are fully engaged in the multi-agency approach to safeguarding including in the MASH and MASE.

6. Financial Implications

None.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact James Thomas x2253
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