

RESPONDING TO CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION UPDATE

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY, PARTNERSHIPS AND TRANSFORMATION

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on partnership progress to tackle child sexual exploitation and the role of the City Council in supporting this.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Committee received a presentation in relation to tackling child sexual exploitation in Sunderland in July 2016 and the 2015-17 plan that the Sunderland Safeguarding Children's Board had produced. This report will bring members up to date with recent developments and progress.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 Tackling child sexual exploitation remains a key national and local focus, being a Home Office strategic requirement for Police Forces in England and Wales and a key area of priority for the Safeguarding Children's Board and Safer Sunderland Partnership.
- 3.2 Nationally it remains an area of significant media and public interest as evidenced in coverage of recent cases such as Sanctuary (Northumbria), the recent Football coaching abuse cases and International Aid organisation abuse allegations. The national Independent Inquiry Into Child Sexual Abuse established by Theresa May in 2014, and now under the leadership of Alexis Jay continues and will hear accounts of victims of historical abuse in hearings being held in the North East in 2018.
- 3.3 The revised definition and description of child sexual exploitation is useful to set context and reproduced from the Sunderland Safeguarding Children's Board below;

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).

The definition of child sexual exploitation¹ is:

¹ Updated definition February 2017

“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 technology.”
Like all forms of child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation can:

- Affect any child or young person under the age of 18 years, including 16 and 17 year olds who can legally consent to have sex
- Still be abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual
- Include both contact (penetrative and non-penetrative acts) and non-contact sexual activity
- Take place in person or via technology, or a combination of both;
- Involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence;
- 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);
- Be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults. The abuse 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.

The indicators for child sexual exploitation can sometimes be mistaken for ‘normal adolescent behaviours’. It requires knowledge, skills, professional curiosity and an assessment which analyses the risk factors and personal circumstances of individual children to ensure that the signs and symptoms are interpreted correctly and appropriate support is given. Even where a young person is old enough to legally consent to sexual activity, the law states that consent is only valid where they make a choice and have the freedom and capacity to make that choice. If a child feels they have no other meaningful choice, are under the influence of harmful substances or fearful of what might happen if they don’t comply (all of which are common features in cases of child sexual exploitation) consent cannot legally be given whatever the age of the child.

- 3.4 Strategically the Sunderland Safeguarding Children’s Board continues to drive the child sexual exploitation agenda however since 2017 there have been some significant changes with a Vulnerable Adolescents framework being developed to consider child sexual exploitation within a wider context including mental health and substance misuse. This has been predicated partially by the learning from two serious case reviews published in 2017 in relation to vulnerable adolescents (Young Person Mark and Young Person Rachel).

- 3.5 Operationally partners use a dedicated risk assessment tool (attached as appendix 1) where a child is demonstrating possible risk factors and these are assessed monthly by the Chair and Together for Children Child Sexual Exploitation Co-ordinator for case consideration at the Missing and Sexually Exploited and Trafficked Children (MSET) Shared Intelligence Group.
- 3.6 MSET considers medium and high risk cases of concern and is chaired by the Detective Inspector from the specialist multi-agency unit formerly known as Team Sanctuary South (established in 2016 and based in Washington and covering South Tyneside, Gateshead and Sunderland), though in recent weeks combined with north of Tyne arrangements and re named as the Complex Abuse Unit. Together for Children and People Directorate have social work staff based in the unit alongside voluntary sector agencies to support victims and provide a strong interface with wider vulnerable children and vulnerable adult services.
- 3.7 MSET is attended by representatives from a wide range of agencies including Together For Children, the City Council (Community Safety and People Directorate), health services and specialist voluntary sector representatives. Safety planning and the reduction of threat, risk and harm of exploitation is a key focus. Community safety representatives act as an interface with a wide range of Council functions that can support the safety plans where appropriate.
- 3.8 Between January 2017 and January 2018 679 assessments were considered at pre MSET and of these 111 cases were considered at full MSET of which 40 were deemed high risk (it should be noted that overall assessment figures include children who go missing but may not demonstrate a risk of exploitation).
- 3.9 Disruption of offenders is a key area supported by Safer Sunderland Partnership and wider City Council services and can be facilitated in complex cases via referral to extra ordinary Local Multi Agency Partnership Meetings (LMAPS) where offender disruption tactics are considered in detail.
- 3.10 In 2017, an adult male was sentenced to 4 years for sexual activity with children facilitated by his residence in a caravan on a compound in close proximity to vulnerable looked after children in the North area. The case highlighted the importance of significant low level disruption and contribution of efforts by a range of agencies, supporting the police to disrupt potential activity and gather intelligence at the early stages when no offences were being disclosed. The City Council together with the Fire Service and Environment Agency supported the disruption through joint work with the Councils Security Service, Environmental Health, Youth Offending Service and frontline Place Directorate staff in the city centre. The value of this type of disruption is highlighted in the recently published Serious Case Review in relation to young people involved in the Newcastle based Operation Sanctuary (published by the Newcastle Children's Safeguarding Board on 28th February 2018)
- 3.11 There are no "hotspots" of child sexual exploitation as it can occur in a wide variety of situations and locations, but we do identify vulnerability areas

particularly where we have young people gathering or in areas such as retail, fast food and leisure outlets. We do not however know the extent of online abuse and grooming though have seen an increase in activity by online paedophile hunter “vigilanti” groups and this highlights that the threat of on line perpetrators is very real both within and beyond Sunderland. The North East Regional and Serious Crime Unit covering Northumbria, Durham and Cleveland Forces have recently established a dedicated online abuse investigation unit. An updated profile is being commenced with partners.

- 3.12 Transition to adulthood remains an area of focus and recent findings from the Newcastle Safeguarding Board Serious Case Review in relation to Sanctuary has highlighted that abuse can continue and feature into adulthood. The issue is compounded as many children may leave statutory children’s services but not qualify for adult services due to definitions of vulnerability and eligibility under the Care Act 2015. The City Council was aware of this gap and was successful in bidding for a pilot fund of £70,000 from DCLG in early 2017 to run a pilot transitions programme for 12 months with Changing Lives. This has focussed on a number of child victims as they transition to adulthood and included victims involved in criminal trials as witnesses. The pilot phase is ending and an end of project report highlighting key learning will be submitted to the Council by May 2018.

4. Progress to date and future plans

- 4.1 Review of MSET arrangements have led to the following:
- Updated data recording systems and processes have been put in place to allow data quality assurance, statistical data analysis, trend analysis, and interpretation of results.
 - The MSET data will be reported to the Vulnerable Adolescent Strategic Project Group on a bi-monthly and will include;
Number of young people safely exited from MSET
Trend and impact analysis around missing, child sexual exploitation and trafficking - top 10 missing young person, community risk factors and disruption planning, voice of the child
 - The data set will be renewed with the development of the Safeguarding Children’s Board Vulnerable Adolescent Framework and the updated MSET Risk Assessment Tool.
 - This will be part of a wider quality assurance programme which will report on agency attendance, engagement and submission of intelligence and audit programme including: auditing of minutes, quality of risk assessments including how child focused they are and use of disruption plans.
 - An independent evaluation of the MSET Group in October 2017 (OFSTED) found that “the Missing, sexually exploited and trafficked’ (MSET) intelligence group provides good oversight and enhances local responses to children at risk of sexual exploitation. Where there is a concern of child sexual exploitation, all children have a risk assessment and the findings are collated by the MSET coordinator.”
- 4.2 Awareness raising will continue and move into a public phase. The Safeguarding Board supported by partners will deliver a city wide campaign

around child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. This will build upon the intensive work in 2016 that was delivered to multi-agency practitioners and the voluntary sector (taxi drivers, hotels and Pubwatch and licencees) in Sunderland. Sessions were delivered to:

- 780 practitioners
- 30 foster carers and adoptive parents
- 220 taxi drivers
- 15 licencees
- 30 elected members

It should be noted that training to taxi drivers was voluntary though mandatory for all home to school contracts. This will be reviewed in 2018.

- 4.3 The City Council's Chief Executive has supported continued corporate awareness raising since the transfer of children's services to Together For Children in April 2017 and all key frontline staff and managers across Council Directorates are currently undertaking the Safeguarding Board on-line training in relation to child sexual exploitation. Training for members will be offered again in 2018 in recognition of the corporate parenting role of members.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 Members are recommended to note the contents of this report.

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