



Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People in the West Midlands

Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation across the West Midlands Metropolitan Region

Assessment: October - December 2015

The West Midlands Metropolitan Region are committed to issuing regular snapshots of the nature and scale of child sexual exploitation (CSE) across the West Midlands, based on data from the seven Local Authorities within the West Midlands Police boundary, in conjunction with the police, working together as seven CSE Operations Groups meeting regularly to assess priorities and progress. This is the third of our quarterly assessments and covers the period of October to December 2015.

What is CSE?

CSE is a form of abuse where children received something (accommodation, drugs, affection, gifts, money, drugs) in 'exchange' for sexual activity. It is child abuse, involving the child being forced, coerced or intimidated, and sexual activity with a child under 16 is unlawful in any case. Often the victim is groomed into believing the abuser cares for them. The perpetrator is exploiting them through abuse of power, and many victims worry they won't be believed. There are many different methods and approaches to sexually exploit children and young people, which can be undertaken by an individual, peers, groups and gangs. While there is no specific criminal offence of 'CSE', common offences can include rape and other forms of sexual assault, trafficking and child abduction.

What does this snapshot tell us?

Young People at Risk:

- There are currently a total of 754 children identified as being at risk of CSE, this compares to a total of 720 children at Q1 and 614 at Q2. All Local Authorities apart from two have had an increase in their overall numbers. This is not a negative increase as it means that young people who are at risk are identified and in receipt of a service.
- Only a proportion of these (223) are newly identified over the last quarter but all Local Authorities apart from one have shown an increase in the number of newly

identified cases. There has also been some movement between risk levels with at least 80 children showing a reduction in level of risk. The difference in pace at which new children are identified, and current cases begin to show a level of risk reduction supports the hypothesis that long term intervention is required in order to reduce the risk levels of young people abused through CSE.

N.B It is important to note that where cases are closed it is not always possible to reflect within this data set whether this was due to other factors such as; turning 18 or moving out of area. Therefore the number may be slightly higher but we are only counting those children where we are clear that there has been a reduction in risk level.

- 116 of those children identified were at the highest level of risk (serious), which requires detailed intervention plans. The number has decreased from 133 to 116 this is now 15% of the overall number which is a reduction from 21% in Q2. A key performance indicator for successful interventions is the reduction in number of young people at the highest level of risk, while the numbers of children identified at the lowest level of risk increases. This would demonstrate early identification of risk and effective intervention to safeguard young people from CSE. Before we can say with confidence that we are providing effective interventions, we would need to see a sustained trend over a number of quarterly assessments.
- The significant majority of children identified were White British (65%). The second largest cohort was mixed (unspecified) (6%) and Pakistani (5%) which was heavily impacted by the ethnicity data of one LA. This remains consistent with the findings from last quarter.
- Only 14% of the cohort is male which is a similar percentage to last quarter, an increase of just 1%. We still need to understand why there are significantly lower numbers of young males being identified. Barnardos¹ found that there were some particularly prominent routes for young males into CSE and that whilst they were less likely to be identified initially; when they were identified the risks were likely to be particularly high. They also found that professionals tended to show a less protective attitude to young boys than young girls and that there were specific issues around disclosure in line with social attitudes and gender stereotypes. We need to ensure that this knowledge is embedded into practice and that young males are being appropriately identified. There is an ongoing workstream to support this work and we must be conscious of the link between gangs, crime and CSE.
- The age range the cohort starts at is 9 and goes up to post 18. There are three 9 year old children, a male and a female who have been identified as “significant risk” and a female identified as “at risk”. The most prevalent age group remains 14 to 16, closely followed by 17 year olds. The number drops dramatically for 18 and 18+. Part of the reason for this could be that cases close to children’s social

¹ Barnardos (2014). *Hidden in Plain Sight : A scoping study into the sexual exploitation on boys and young men in the UK – Policy Briefing.*

care at 18 and may not be accepted by Adult services unless they have been looked after and move to the leaving care team, which is not representative of the majority of “at risk” young people.

- Interestingly the 14 - 16 age category is the most frequently occurring across all three risk levels which would suggest that we can still improve our early identification for younger children. For example, those young people being identified as “significant” and “serious” risk at 14 could potentially have been identified as “at risk” much earlier. There is some positive news in relation to early identification as 59% of the children are in the “at risk” category, mostly occurring in the 14 – 17 age brackets, but we can continue to build on this good work.
- From the available missing data, which is from four of the seven Local Authorities, it is evident that episodes of missing (from home or care) continue to indicate an increased risk of CSE with 24% of the young people who have had reported missing episodes being identified as “at risk” of CSE. This is fairly consistent with the 27% reported in Q2. From additional data provided by a fourth authority on average over Q3 43% of missing children who had a return interview were already known to MASE and therefore at the either “significant risk” or “serious risk” of CSE (this is not included in the overall figure due to a different method of calculation in this Q).
- A review of the social care status shows that most young people identified as being at risk of CSE are receiving a service or intervention dependent on their level of need, with Early Help, Child in Need, Child Protection and Looked After Children care plans being used. From the data provided for the purpose of the regional return we are unable to distinguish the reason for a child becoming LAC and whether this was pre or post being identified as at risk of CSE.
- There appears to be a growing trend of young people being targeted or exploited online and more needs to be done to understand this type of offending and how to effectively record and capture the prevalence.
- The three Local Authorities that have established CSE teams continue have higher percentages of identified young people according to population of 0 – 17 year olds. All areas have had an increase including the LA which is in the early days of its new CSE team and this will be a point to track in Q4. In all cases the current identified cohort “at risk” of CSE makes up no more than 0.5% of the child population of the authority area. This is an increase from Q2s 0.2%, which further highlights the improvements in identification of young people at risk of CSE.
- A breakdown of the numbers across the seven local authority areas is set out in the enclosed table.

Offenders:

- West Midlands Police are currently aware of 292 suspected CSE offenders, of whom 54 were newly identified in Q3. There are currently 19 large investigations
- Q3.assessment report – PC – Jan2016 – v4.

on-going, including an investigation relating to at least one organised crime group.

- Asian males are over represented in the suspected offender cohort, just under twice as many as the sum total of the other ethnic groups. This is also taking into account ethnicity of the population according to the 2011 census data. No ethnicity is significantly absent. However the ethnicities are not broken down into sub categories for Asian, Black or White and this has an impact on the scope of analysis that can be made.
- Over the last 3 months a variety of 'pursue' methods have been utilised. 25 Child Abduction Warning Notices have been issued, 1 custodial sentence was achieved and 11 are on bail awaiting decision from the CPS. Other civil interventions used have included a Notice of Threat to Personal Safety and three offenders currently being considered for Risk of Sexual Harm Orders.
- The Police are making use of the range of civil powers available to them and are applying for an interim Sexual Harm Order as a protective measure whilst the suspect is on bail. Another case saw WMP successfully pursue breach proceedings against an offender who breached the conditions of a Sexual Harm Order. The offender is currently on remand awaiting trial for the breach and other sexual offences.

Locations:

- Child Exploitation and Missing Operational Groups (CMOGs) continue to use a multi- agency approach to gathering intelligence and directing disruption tactics.
- We continue to gather intelligence around locations of concern, where young people who frequent them may be at increased risk of CSE. Public spaces and local businesses such as; licensed premises, shops, parks and bus stations have been identified as locations of concern but others are; fast food outlets, hotels and particular taxi firms as well as residential properties.

What is different from the Assessment published in October 2015?

Although there is some variation in the numbers, the data is still fairly consistent with what was reported last quarter. We are still expecting the overall figure to rise as has been the case this quarter, and we will monitor whether this is a continuing trend. We continue to train and raise awareness with professionals and the community. Recording and tracking of cases is becoming increasingly accurate and we will continue on this journey considering how we look behind the numbers to understand the experiences of these children and how to best meet their needs. However at this stage the picture remains fairly consistent.

So if the numbers have gone up over a short time period then things are getting worse?

No, because ultimately we want to see increased reporting and identification of young people earlier and a reduction in the number of those at highest risk due to increased understanding of what is an effective intervention. The picture is a fluid one as there will be constant changes in the cohort of young people as they move up and down the risk categories, in and out of areas or reach adulthood. However it is a positive picture that a significant number of the cohort are in the lowest category of risk, this needs to be tracked over time but suggests that we are beginning to identify and respond early. We know that it can take a long time for children to identify as a victim, disclose and begin their recovery and therefore whilst we want to see a long term trend of those at highest risk reducing, we do not expect this to be apparent at this early stage of the quarterly assessments.

CMOGs are working hard to disrupt offender activity and identify themes and trends, and agencies are working hard to safeguard and protect young people, but we still have some way to go with our communities to tackle the underlying attitudes and beliefs that contribute to CSE which will eventually result in a sustainable reduction in prevalence of this problem within our society.

What about the variations across the region?

These will continue to be assessed by us regionally and locally. We are very clear that all parts of our region are facing this threat and need to work together to combat it. Many perpetrators of CSE operate beyond local boundaries and some victims get trafficked across the region and beyond. We recognise there is more to do in particular in ensuring a consistent level of response to episodes of children going missing and to information sharing cross borders and there are work streams looking at this particular issue and how to improve.

Why concentrate so much on CSE when there are much bigger numbers of children at risk of familial abuse and neglect?

It is true that the overall numbers of children at risk of CSE are relatively small compared to wider problems of abuse and neglect. But we are absolutely clear that the horrendous nature of CSE, and public concerns about the growing threat of online activity and inappropriate sexual "norms" for young people, makes this work an absolute priority.

So what have you actually done to combat this threat?

- **Regional Accountability** – The regional CSE co-ordinator and implementation officer report into the Preventing Violence Against Vulnerable People Board chaired by Solihull LA Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Constable Carl Foulkes to support Safeguarding Boards' leadership of local arrangements because this is a "cross-border" threat.
- **Operations Groups (CMOGs)** - are central in tracking and pursuing offenders and supporting victims, driven by a core team of; a senior police investigator and key decision-makers from Children's Services, NHS, voluntary & community sector, youth services, probation, licensing and others.

- **Prevention** – developing resource materials for schools, taxi drivers, hotels and other licensed premises, communities and young people that focus on early intervention around healthy relationships, gender equality and staying safe. We are planning a young person's event to seek the views of young people in developing a prevention resource. Beginning to co-ordinate and support those delivering awareness raising in the local communities.
- **Voluntary Sector** – Key voluntary sector partners are engaged in specific projects in some of the local areas to target; the night time economy, engaging with the BME community and working with young men. There is a forum to ensure this good practice is shared.
- **Protection** – Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs, including dedicated CSE teams and joint Safeguarding Board training
- **Justice** – Securing Sexual Risk Orders and other civil interventions against suspected perpetrators. Using licensing to close venues or amend licence conditions. On-going criminal investigations.
- **Campaign** – www.seeme-hearme.org.uk website, radio and bus advertising, BAIT/ Anybody's Child / Jasmin's story <http://www.seeme-hearme.org.uk/videos/> taxi postcards, hotel resources

And what happens next?

We have a regional CSE co-ordinator and implementation officer in post who will continue to work with each of the individual LAs, Police and partners to support the full implementation of the framework and highlight emerging regional trends and issues. This will then allow for a period of review and evaluation of our impact, of which these quarterly assessments will form an important part.

We are continuing to work on the quality and accuracy of our data sets to give us a good and comprehensive understanding of our victims and offenders which will support us to intervene early and prevent young people becoming victims of CSE and challenge the attitudes and values that lead to offending behaviour.

Who do I contact if I have any concerns about a child or young person at risk of CSE?

You should expect an immediate and supportive response from any of the professional agencies involved in this work - whether a teacher, GP, social worker or youth worker. But if you don't know anyone to contact please get hold of West Midlands Police on 101, Barnardo's on 0121 359 5333 or any of the services listed on www.seeme-hearme.org.uk

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