Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation across the West Midlands Metropolitan Region

Assessment: January - March 2016

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 fourth of our quarterly assessments and covers the period of January to March 2016.

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 884 children identified as being at risk of CSE, this compares to a total of 754 at Q3, 720 children at Q1 and 614 at Q2. This is an increase of 16.5% on last quarter. All Local Authorities apart from one 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. This was the expected trajectory as awareness raising work is ongoing and staff continue to receive training around identification.

- Only a proportion of these (296) are newly identified over the last quarter but this is a 26% increase from Q3 which shows a continued increase in identification of new cases. 5 out of the 7 Local Authorities have shown an increase in the number of newly identified cases. There has also been some movement between risk levels with at least 125 children showing a reduction in level of risk as opposed to 80 at Q3. There have been a significant number of risk reductions in Q4 with 125 children showing a reduction in risk level, this is a 56% increase on Q3. Without the qualitative data it is not possible to say what the reason for risk reduction is. As with Q3 we saw significantly more new referrals than risk reductions but the percentage increase on new referrals was lower than risk reductions, if that trend continues the disparity between pace of new identification and risk reduction may reduce, it is too early to determine that from this Qs data.

  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.

- 121 of those children identified were at the highest level of risk (serious), which requires detailed intervention plans. The number has increased this quarter but is 14% of the total which is a continued (albeit slight) reduction from 21% in Q2 and 15% in Q3. 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, this is the third Q that we have seen this trend although it is far less significant between Q3 and Q4 as it was between Q2 and Q3.

- The significant majority of children identified were White British (66%). The second largest cohort was mixed (unspecified) (6%) and Black Caribbean (4%). This is similar to Q3 findings with the percentage for White British only increasing from 65% to 66% and mixed (unspecified) remaining the same however Black Caribbean has moved into the third most represented whilst in Q3 it was Pakistani.

- Only 13% of the cohort is male which is a similar percentage for the third quarter, but a slight decrease from 14% at Q3. We still need to understand why there are significantly lower numbers of young males being identified. Barnardos[1] 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

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

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 five 9 year old children, 2 males who are "serious" and "significant" and 3 females who are "at risk". This is an increase from, 3 in the last Q and supports the anecdotal concern that risks are presenting earlier than we have been previously identifying them and supports the need for awareness raising and prevention work in primary schools.

- In this quarter the most frequently occurring age range across all three risk levels is 15 – 17 as opposed to 14 -16 in the last quarter however in this data set we have more 13 year olds than 14 year olds. However despite some slight variation those middle teenage years continue to be the most commonly occurring on a recurring basis. 56% of our cohort are "at risk" which would suggest we are identifying early but we should focus on any lessons we can learn from those 15 – 17 year olds who were identified as "significant" and "serious" risk about how we could have identified them earlier to prevent escalation.

- For this dataset missing data was received from 6 out of 7 Local Authorities but one collected in such a format that I could not compare/combine it with the other 5. From the available missing data it would seem that of all our children who have missing episodes only 15% are identified as being at risk of CSE. This is a reduction from Q2 & 3. Using the same data from the same 5 LAs it would appear that only 19% of our CSE cohort have had a missing episode.

- Barnardos (in 2011) identified that 50% of sexually exploited young people they worked with in 2009/10 went missing on a regular basis and the links between missing, CSE and gang involvement are well documented with figures suggesting that as many as 70% of children who are sexually exploited go missing[2]. Some young people go missing because of the sexual exploitation and other are at risk of being groomed or targeted for exploitation because of their missing episodes. There are a number of hypothesis that could contribute to the much less significant correlation we are noting in the West Midlands; missing children at risk of CSE may still be have been classified as absent therefore episodes are not being identified in missing figures, carers are not reporting children missing on some or all occasions, children are not being correctly identified as at risk of CSE after their missing episode. These issues will be explored in the regional missing and absent workshop to ensure a consistent and effective response to missing children. This figure will be monitored.

- 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

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[2] R.Sturrock & L.Holmes (July 2015) "Running the Risks" Catch 22; OCC inquiry into gangs and groups; E.Smeaton (July2013) "Running from Hate to What you think is Love"

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.

- This quantitative return is unable to tell us any detail about the way in which a child has been exploited for example on street/online, peer to peer, organised group/gang or boy/girlfriend model. Anecdotally and through discussions with CMOG chairs and CSE co-ordinators it is identified that online grooming and exploitation through the use of social media, gaming and other online forums is prevalent and growing.

- The Local Authorities that have established CSE teams continue have higher percentages of identified young people according to population of 0 – 17 year olds, this now includes the LA whose CSE team was fairly newly established in Q3 but is now more embedded. All Local Authorities have had a significant increase in overall numbers except one which has had a significant reduction. In all cases the current identified cohort "at risk" of CSE makes up no more than 0.6% of the child population of the authority area. This is an increase again from Q3, which highlights on going 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 262 suspected CSE offenders, of whom 45 were newly identified in Q4. The data does not show the associations between victims and offenders but ideally we would want to see that as we are improving identification of victims we are improving in our identification and pursuit of offenders, a reduction in numbers would not suggest this but far more detail about investigations, associations and outcomes would be required to undertake any comprehensive analysis. There are currently 12 large investigations on-going.

- Ethnicity data currently available suggests that no ethnicity is notably absent but is not sufficiently detailed to give a clear analysis of ethnicity profile within the offender cohort. The number of unknown could alter the profile from the numbers that are available.

- Over the last 3 months a variety of 'pursue' methods have been utilised. 33 charges have been achieved, 5 arrests have been made, 5 cases are currently awaiting CPS decision.

Locations:

- Child Exploitation and Missing Operational Groups (CMOGs) continue to use a multi- agency approach to gathering intelligence and directing disruption tactics. There are now clear examples of where information and intelligence sharing between partner agencies and the Police has led to direct action to protect a child and disrupt offenders.

- Wolverhampton has established a Care Home Providers forum and each care home has a SPOC from WMP to aid information and intelligence sharing. Initial feedback is that this is effective and other areas are considering implementation of such a forum.

- Coventry have been able to secure a Public Space Protection Order, following a period of public consultation, which sends a clear message that the City will not tolerate CSE. This evidences that range of disruptive action that can be used to tackle CSE in our communities.

- We continue to gather intelligence around locations of concern, where young people who frequent them may be at increased risk of CSE. Public spaces such as transport hubs and parks continue to be the most commonly identified with other locations of concern continuing to be; local businesses, licensed premises, shops, fast food outlets, hotels, snooker clubs, gyms and particular taxi firms as well as residential properties. There is a recognition between professionals that the "internet" is not a physical location but that the online world does pose a risk and is of concern.

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 now have 9 months of data and have seen numbers continue to rise, the rate differs between LAs. 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.

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 but ultimately we want to see a long term trend of those at highest risk reducing. We are seeing a percentage reduction, albeit very slight this quarter, and will continue to track whether this is sustained and look behind the numbers to understand what is working to reduce this risk.

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. There are some good examples of community work taking place but we need to ensure that this is embedded, sustainable and consistent across the WM.

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. Each LA also has a strategic CSE sub group that ensures action plans and strategies and are effective and having the relevant impact on operational practice.
- **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** – this quarter we have engaged young people in a regional event to support with the development of resources to tackle the underlying attitudes and beliefs displayed by young people within relationships that can fuel violence and exploitation. We continue to develop resources for and deliver training to taxi drivers, hotels and other licensed premises across the region. We are co-ordinating and supporting those delivering awareness raising in the local communities. All areas are progressing their training delivery to taxi drivers who are in a unique position to be our eyes and ears and contribute to the detection of

this hidden crime. Coventry have delivered to over 1200 drivers, nearly all of those who hold licences in the City, this is now mandatory training for them. Solihull have started roll out and have sessions booked to deliver to over 2000 drivers; Wolverhampton and Dudley have also started roll out.

- **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, work with young men, the impact of pornography and continue to work with some of our most high risk young people. There is a forum to ensure this good practice is shared. We have a number of new resources that have been developed in conjunction with our voluntary sector colleagues including "Choose to End it" from Walsall Street Teams which was launched on CSE awareness day and gives the 'voice of choice' to children and community members.
- **Protection** – MASH (multi agency safeguarding hubs) ensure that where concerns are identified about a child information is shared and plans put in place to safeguard them at the earliest opportunity. The regional screening tool supports frontline professionals to quickly identify the potential CSE concerns and alert the relevant services to ensure an appropriate assessment of risk is made. Protection and support is offered through a variety of multi agency, statutory arrangements according to the need of the child; MASH, MASE meetings, early help, child in need, child protection and LAC reviews/care plans.
- **Justice** – Police are working hard to secure Sexual Risk Orders and other civil interventions against suspected perpetrators. We engage with licensing to close venues or amend licence conditions and there are a number of on-going criminal investigations but we are engaging with the CPS to ensure that we get as many cases as possible through to prosecution.
- **Campaign** – www.seeme-hearme.org.uk website, radio, bus advertising, targeted digital advertising. We have an active social media presence on facebook and twitter. Using targeted digital advertising because the social media and the internet is the young persons primary means of communication. In February 2016 we ran a successful radio advertising campaign on prime time on Free Radio across the West Midlands met. This increases traffic to the website which stood at 27,000 visits between April 2015 and December 2015. CSE awareness day took place on 18th March, we supported the national NWG campaign and the support and engagement was overwhelming. There were a number of awareness raising activities that took place across the region with some positive media interest and #helpinghands was trending on twitter.

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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