



## **Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation across the West Midlands Metropolitan Region**

### **Assessment: April – June 2017**

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 Operational Groups meeting regularly to assess priorities and progress. This is the ninth of our quarterly assessments and covers the period of April to June 2017.

### **What is CSE?**

CSE is a form of sexual abuse where children received something (accommodation, drugs, affection, gifts, money, drugs) in ‘exchange’ for sexual activity or perhaps for the financial or social/economic advantage of the offender. It is child abuse, involving the child being forced, coerced or intimidated; sexual activity with a child under 16 is unlawful in any case. Often the victim is groomed into believing the abuser cares for them, but children cannot consent to their own abuse. Perpetrator’s exploit 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, abuse can take place on and offline through the use of technology. Offences can include; rape, sexual assault, trafficking and child abduction.

### **What does this snapshot tell us?**

NB: It must be noted that there are robust systems in place to accurately record and report on the numbers of “significant” and “serious” risk children as they currently receive a statutory response. Those young people identified as “at risk” may not require a statutory response and may be receiving appropriate alternative support services in accordance with their level of need. Work is on-going to develop recording and reporting capability for this cohort therefore whilst the numbers give an important and relevant insight into the impact of awareness raising activity and scale; direct comparisons between Local Authorities are unlikely to be accurate.

#### Young People at Risk:

- There are currently a total of 1185 children identified as at risk of or experiencing CSE, this compares to a total of 1059 at Q4 2016/17 (not including the 90 who were currently subject of assessment, awaiting MASE or assessed as ‘no current CSE risk’). This is an increase of 12% on Q4. Six Local Authorities have had an increase in overall numbers, one had a decrease.

- At least 337 young people out of the total of 1185 were newly identified over the last quarter and this is a 13% increase from 297 Q4 2016/17. All Local Authorities have had new referrals during this quarter, three had an increase in the number of new referrals and three had a decrease (one was incomparable). There is always going to be some normal fluctuation within the percentages but there is a general trend of new referrals slowing.
- There has been some movement between risk levels. From the 6 LAs who were able to report at least 101 children showed a reduction in level of risk as opposed to 90 at Q4 2016/17. Without the qualitative data it is not possible to say what the reason for risk reduction is but some Local Authorities have identified that the support co-ordinated via MASE and other safeguarding meetings such as complex strategy meetings and delivered by commissioned services is working to reduce risk, this includes use of LA and secure accommodation. We continue to see overall more new referrals than risk reductions, which supports our hypothesis that children require long term intervention once identified.

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 CSE risk level. We do not know the reasons for reduction or whether there is then a subsequent increase or re-referral, risk is dynamic.

- 90 children have been identified and; have had risk factors identified but are currently subject of assessment to determine category of risk; have had an assessment concluded but await MASE meeting to confirm decision or have been assessed as 'No Current CSE risk'. They will be receiving a relevant service to meet their immediate or ongoing needs.
- 50 of the children identified were at the highest level of harm (serious risk – entrenched in sexual exploitation). The number has decreased this quarter and is 4% of the total which is a continued reduction from 5% in Q4 2016/17. A key performance indicator for successful interventions is the reduction in number of young people at this threshold, while the numbers of children identified as 'at risk' increase. This would demonstrate effective intervention to safeguard young people at 'serious' risk, and also indicate that risks are being identified earlier and at a lower level allowing for swift intervention to reduce risk and prevent harm. This is the eighth Q that we have seen this slight but evidently downwards trend.
- 77% of our cohort are "at risk", this is a 5% increase on Q4. 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.
- We have the recorded ethnicity of 1227 of the cohort (this includes a number of those awaiting assessment). There are some unknowns and the reason for this not being provided for the purpose of this data set is likely to be; for new referrals where it has yet to be obtained, where ethnicity has been requested and refused

or inputting errors. Of those the significant majority of children identified were White British (62%), this remains similar to previous quarters. The second largest cohort was mixed (unspecified, this is a combination of a number of mixed ethnicities) (11%). Black Caribbean and white other came in at 5%. There are regional variations within this data and local areas must assure themselves that it is representative of the demographic in their area.

- Again only 18% of the cohort is male; this is the same for the third Q. There is significant variation between the Local Authorities with some sitting at the average, others significantly below and one significantly higher - this area also has a specialist support service for males which may indicate the effectiveness of this service in raising awareness of male victims with professionals. Barnardos<sup>1</sup> 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.
- The age range this quarter's cohort starts at is 8 and goes up to post 18. The youngest child is in the "at risk" category which is positive as it means the underlying vulnerabilities and risk indicators have been identified early and appropriate safeguards and interventions have been implemented. This supports the need for awareness raising and prevention work in primary schools with staff, parents & carers as well as children.
- In this quarter the most frequently occurring age range across all three risk levels is 15 – 17. Despite some slight variation those middle teenage years continue to be the most common on a recurring basis. The largest number of children fell within the 15, year old, female, "at risk" category with 186 children. The largest numbers of males (at 45) were in the 16 year old, "at risk" category. For "significant risk" the most commonly identified age is 15 for male and 16 for female. For "serious risk" it is aged 17 for female, although the numbers at aged 13, 15 and 16 are very close. The fact that the majority of our risk sits within the middle teenage years, at the point transition to adulthood should be considered, our ongoing work around rising 18s and transition is vital to ensure that the needs to these children continue to be met.
- For this dataset, missing data was received from 5 out of 7 Local Authorities. From the available missing data from those 5 authorities, it would seem there is a more significant correlation between those children who go missing being at risk of CSE than there is those children who are at risk of CSE going missing. Seeming to provide support for missing episodes to be a strong indicator of a child who is at risk of or being exploited. However the relationship between missing and CSE is complex, there is limited evidence of causality, suffice to say

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

that research tells us that a child who is missing is likely to be exposed to increased risk including those who wish to and may sexually exploit them, amongst others. Data quality and the parameters of reporting impact on ability to give clear analysis of this.

- 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<sup>2</sup>. Correlation varies dependent on source. What is important is that locally themes are monitored and understood to develop and action appropriate preventative and safeguarding strategies for young people.
- 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. Apps such as periscope and snapchat continue to be identified as platforms being exploited by perpetrators to groom and abuse children. We are also continuing to identify cases where offenders are connected to other forms of crime e.g drugs and gang related activity.

#### Offenders:

- West Midlands Police have identified 35 suspected CSE offenders during Q1 2017/18 (148 in total since Q1 2016/17). Of those 3 are female. There are challenges around the reporting of suspected offenders, who may be recorded for crimes that have no direct reference to CSE, although are part of wider disruptive and pursuit activity in relation to CSE investigations. As we improve identification of victims we expect to see improvement in our identification and pursuit of offenders, this way of recording will facilitate easier analysis. There are currently over 9 investigations on-going that relate to at least 85 victims and 2 organised crime groups, involving over 40 offenders.
- There are numerous caveats around the accuracy and quality of ethnicity data and therefore serious limitations around any inferences that can be drawn. Ethnicity data is often allocated based on judgement of the Officer and may or may not have been verified by the suspect, the categories are wide and do not differentiate between sub groups of ethnicity. We are also referring to suspected offenders, not all of whom will be charged or convicted of any offence. Of the 35 identified this Q; 9 are White, 3 are Black and 24 are Asian.
- Over the last 3 months a variety of 'pursue' methods have been utilised to tackle the offenders of CSE. We have had; 1 conviction, 3 charges, 4 cases await CPS decision, 15 have been arrested, and 12 Child Abduction Warning Notices have

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<sup>2</sup> R.Sturrock & L.Holmes (July 2015) "Running the Risks" Catch 22; OCC inquiry into gangs and groups;  
E.Smeaton (July 2013) "Running from Hate to What you think is Love"

been served, these are vital disruption tactics and form part of the wider evidence base against a perpetrator. Due to the way in which this data is often hidden this is only a snapshot of the wide ranging disruptive and investigative activity that is ongoing.

- There have been 15 NRM referrals submitted for suspected victims of trafficking for the purposes of exploitation. This is an important tool for safeguarding children being harmed through exploitation.

#### Locations:

- Any location could be vulnerable to the potential for CSE activity, anywhere there are children or anywhere hidden and inconspicuous. This is why it is so important to raise awareness within the community of signs and warning indicators to look out for. Locations might also be used differently i.e the targeting of a victim and the abuse may take place at different locations. With the increase of online abuse and grooming, historically safer places can now contain risk as children may have significant unrestricted time with internet enabled mobile, computer and gaming devices for example in education settings and their own homes.
- During Q1 2017/18 at least 50 locations across the West Midlands metropolitan region have been identified to be considered for disruptive action as a result of intelligence or information about activity relating to CSE. Residential properties, hotels, public spaces and fast food outlets continue to be represented as locations generating intelligence and information relating to CSE.

NB. Location information is sensitive and any detail that may be identifiable will not be disclosed to ensure that on-going pursue or investigative action by Police and partner agencies is not compromised.

- 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. CMOGs are identifying networks of children to safeguard and offenders to disrupt and pursue, they are sharing information with neighbouring CMOGs to ensure partnership working, investigation and that offenders are not simply displaced to offend somewhere else.
- For example one CMOG identified that they were seeing an unusual increase in the number of locations being identified as cause for concern, this led to a complex strategy meeting being called that involved mapping victims, locations and perpetrators and the planning of LA and Police driven disruption that will now be taken back to CMOG for monitoring.

#### **What is different this quarter?**

- Although there is some variation in the numbers, the data is still fairly consistent with what was reported last quarter. There may be an element of plateau. This

will be monitored alongside ongoing work to engage with communities we believe may continue to be underrepresented within the data. This will be supported by a targeted communications campaign over the next financial year.

- We now have over 12 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 although challenges remain and it is evident that data quality continues to be a variable in the analysis. This data does give some indication of themes and trends but the numbers will only ever provide a snapshot, the risk is dynamic and fluid and there will be constant change.

### **So if the numbers are increasing does that mean it is getting worse?**

No. Numbers are increasing but this is a fairly steady incline and there is an element of plateau. We are seeing an encouraging trend of numbers of those in the 'at risk category' increasing and those entrenched in exploitation reducing. As with any form of child abuse; whilst the aim would be for total eradication we must be realistic and be vigilant against those who are intent on causing harm and who become more sophisticated as we become more efficient at preventing their efforts to exploit and abuse children. We continue on our journey to prevent CSE and have ongoing goals but in the meantime we have achieved some significant successful pursue outcomes across the region and are working hard to keep children safe before they experience abuse.

The numbers and overall trends will be monitored alongside ongoing work to engage with communities we believe may continue to be underrepresented within the data.

### **What about the variations across the region?**

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. There are robust systems in place to accurately record and report on the numbers of "significant" and "serious" risk children as they currently receive a statutory response. Those young people identified as "at risk" may not require a statutory response and may be receiving appropriate alternative support services in accordance with their level of need. Work is on-going to develop recording and reporting capability for this cohort therefore whilst the numbers give an important and relevant insight into the impact of awareness raising activity and scale; direct comparisons between Local Authorities are unlikely to be accurate.

Further to this local areas differ in demographic and need and this assessment is just one small element of high level data that is used to inform strategic plans. Areas are not directly comparable. Strategic plans are governed and implemented locally according to comprehensive needs assessment whilst being cognisant of regional data.

## **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 hidden nature of CSE, the extent of the harm experienced by victims, 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 reports into the Preventing Violence Against Vulnerable People Board chaired by Solihull LA Chief Executive Nick Page and Assistant Chief Constable Alex Murray 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. They have recently revised their Terms of Reference and developed a series of performance outcomes.
- **Prevention** – The See Me Hear Me campaign is being developed for a further year which will develop further it's digital advertising capability and combine with a visible social media presence to target awareness messages to young people, community and professionals.
- **Protection** – There have been some high profile court cases where successful convictions have been achieved for sexual and trafficking offences. Sexual Risk Orders and Public Space Protection Orders are amongst those being used to protect children. We are currently working on developing our regional response to missing children.
- **Pursue** – we reviewed and re-launched our disruption toolkit in November and it can be found here; <http://www.seeme-hearme.org.uk/assets/cse-distruption-toolkit-final.pdf>
- [www.seeme-hearme.org.uk](http://www.seeme-hearme.org.uk)      Twitter: '@SEEMEHEARMEWM'      Facebook: [www.facebook.com/SeeMeHearMeWM](https://www.facebook.com/SeeMeHearMeWM)

## **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 contact West Midlands Police on 101, Say Something (call or text 24/7 on 166000) or any of the services listed on [www.seeme-hearme.org.uk](http://www.seeme-hearme.org.uk)

**July 2017**