

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Child Sexual Exploitation

December 2016



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INTRODUCTION

The topic of child sexual exploitation has been in the media spotlight for the last few years due to many high profile cases. Many of the investigations into child sexual exploitation identified significant failings in local authorities and other public bodies across the country. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee wanted to review the council's own policies and procedures to ensure they were robust and fit for purpose.

A task group was established and met five times between August and November 2016. This report details information about the witnesses with whom the task group met; the information the task group received and the conclusions that the task group reached. It also includes a list of recommendations that the task group wishes to put forward to the Executive Cabinet for their consideration and implementation.

I would like to thank my fellow members of the task group for their dedication and contributions to what has been a challenging and difficult review to undertake due to the nature of the topic. The evidence put forward by the witnesses at times was distressing for the task group to hear, particularly when case studies were disclosed.

I would also like to thank those partners and officers of the council who gave presentations and information at the meetings. Their contribution allowed the task group to gain a greater understanding of the topic, and the important role that the council, working in partnership with other agencies, has in the early identification and prevention of this type of child abuse.



Councillor Roy Lees – Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group

Membership of the Task Group

The following members serviced on the task group -

- Councillor Roy Lees (Chair)
- Councillor John Dalton
- Councillor Mark Jarnell
- Councillor Hasina Khan
- Councillor Margaret Lees
- Councillor Sheila Long
- Councillor Alistair Morwood
- Councillor Kim Snape
- Councillor Richard Toon

Officer Support:

Lead Officers

Louise Elo Head of Early Intervention and Support

Democratic Services

Cathryn Filbin Democratic and Member Services Officer

Scoping the review

At its first meeting the task group received a presentation from officers of the Early Intervention and Support directorate. The purpose of the presentation was to identify the council's role and responsibility in regards to the prevention and identification of Child Sexual Exploitation. Review was subsequently scoped as follows -

Objectives:

1. To understand the definition and issues surrounding Child Sexual Exploitation;
2. To gain an understanding of the Council's policies and procedures and how they complement those of our partners;
3. Identify those services that were most likely to receive intelligence about service users who were potentially at risk or those perpetrating the abuse and understand the reporting mechanisms officers use to report such intelligence.

Desired Outcomes

1. An understanding of the Council's policies and procedures and how they complement those of our partners;
2. To make recommendations on any changes to the Council's process and procedures to ensure they are as robust as possible;
3. An understanding of the role of the Councillor in the future management and control of services;
4. For all Councillors to undertake on-line Child Sexual Exploitation and Safeguarding training.

Terms of reference

1. To understand the Council's requirements in protection of those children and young people who are being/or at risk of being sexually exploited.
2. To identify key services that have the potential to receive intelligence about those children and young people who were being sexual exploited or at risk of being so, and possible perpetrators of the exploitation either directly or indirectly.
3. To ensure that the Council's policies and procedures are robust and ensure that any gaps identified were adequately addressed.
4. To ensure all Councillors are made aware of their responsibilities when it comes to identifying and reporting Child Sexual Exploitation.

Witnesses

The following witnesses met with the task group and shared information –

Partners

Detective Inspector Steve Ryder, Deter Team, Lancashire Police
Hayley Bentley, Rebecca Gardiner and Sarah Ainsworth, Child Sexual Exploitation Intensive Support Officers, Children's Society
Natalie Fairhurst, Safeguarding and Intervention Manager, Parklands Academy

Chorley Council Officers

Louise Elo, Head of Early Intervention and Support
Rachel Austen, Intervention and Prevention Officer
Chris Moister, Head of Legal, Democratic and HR Services
Graeme Walmsley, Senior HR & OD Consultant

Websites

The Children's Society - <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/>

The Safe and Sound Group (Fighting CSE) -
<http://safeandsoundgroup.org.uk/about/about-safe-and-sound/>

NSPCC - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexualexploitation/legislation-policy-guidance/>

Department for Education (Keeping Children safe in Education) –
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/550511/Keeping_children_safe_in_education.pdf

HM Government (Working Together to Safeguard Children) –
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419595/Working_Together_to_Safeguard_Children.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Cabinet is asked to consider implementing the following recommendations:

- 1. That the Council should raise awareness with elected members and officers,**
 - by continuing to support campaigns raising awareness of CSE and other safeguarding issues;**
 - by continuing to deliver training programmes to elected members and officers of the council in regards to CSE; and**
 - by working with partners to produce an appropriate package of training specifically relating to CSE to be delivered to the targeted officers who already receive safeguarding training.**
- 2. Ensure both members and officers have an understanding of the partnership approach adopted and the key early intervention opportunities, whereby every contact with a child or young person matters.**
- 3. Ensure both members and officers have an understanding of the referral pathway in place for suspected cases of CSE or where there is a potential risk of CSE taking place.**
- 4. That the Licensing and Public Safety Committee be requested to extend the CSE training beyond the taxi trade to the wider licensing community. To ensure a successful roll out, a distinct and comprehensive action plan should be first drawn up to include resource implications.**
- 5. The council should work with, and support partners in producing appropriate material/delivering events to raise CSE awareness amongst parents and guardians.**
- 6. That a representative from Parklands Academy and a primary school be invited to put forward recommendations to the Chorley and South Ribble Community Safety Partnership.**
- 7. The council should improve links with all schools to ensure that the list of relevant contacts for each school is accurate and kept up to date.**
- 8. In raising awareness about CSE, elected members be informed about those circumstances where CSE exists or where there is a potential for CSE to develop, so that they can ensure they follow personal safety guidance in carrying out their ward councillor role. This matter to be referred to the Member Support Working Group for their consideration and guidance.**

9. **The council should support and help develop a CSE awareness campaign with partnership agencies and the public using social media.**
10. **The Council should continue to raise awareness within the community, for example, by developing best practice toolkits used by fellow local authorities for voluntary community and faith sector organisations and licensees (taxi's and others).**

BACKGROUND

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and as such it was suggested that this task group review should be based on the council's roles and responsibilities to safeguarding which would include child sexual exploitation.

However, the task group established that the topic of safeguarding would become a far reaching review and would require a significant amount of time being allocated to it to ensure the review was conducted thoroughly, as the term 'safeguarding' encompasses many different topic areas, all of which require the same attention. However, it is important to stress that the task group did agree that safeguarding as a whole should be considered for a future review.

On this occasion, it was agreed the focus of the review should be on the topic of child sexual exploitation.

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (CSE)?

The term explains what happens when abusers encourage children and young people under 18 into exploitative situations, contexts and relationships. These often involve the young person being given such things as food, accommodation, drugs, affection, gifts or money in return for performing sexual activities.

CSE can occur through the use of technology without the child/young person's immediate recognition e.g. being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phone without immediate payment/gain.

In all cases those exploiting children/young people have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources.

Frequently CSE is associated with physical and/or mental abuse. Violence, coercion and intimidations are common. Involvement in exploitative relationships are characterised in the main, by the child/young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and or emotional vulnerability.

CSE can affect any child or young person under the age of 18 regardless of their social or religious background or their ethnicity. It is important that victims are supported and treated with respect and sensitivity. They must also feel safe in the knowledge that any disclosures will be kept confidential.

Perpetrators can be an adult or another young person regardless of gender or ethnicity and can be visible in everyday life.

It is imperative that the child or young person's welfare is of paramount concern. Therefore if there is the slightest suspicion that CSE is taking place, those suspicions should be reported to the appropriate authorities as a matter of urgency.

WITNESSES

The task group was keen to gain an understanding of what other organisations did to safeguard children and young people from CSE. For that purpose interviews were set up with representatives from Lancashire Police, The Children's Society and Parklands Academy.

Police perspective

Detective Inspector Steve Ryder from the Deter team gave an overview of the work that Lancashire Police were doing to detect and prevent CSE.

Lancashire Police has three teams dealing with different areas of Lancashire

- Awaken (Blackpool, Fylde, Lancaster, Morecambe and Wyre)
- Engage (Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn, Ribble Valley, Pendle and Rossendale), and
- Deter (Preston, Chorley, South Ribble, West Lancashire)

Since April, the Deter team had received 271 referrals. The referrals range from incidents of children posting naked pictures of themselves online to rape. All referrals would be investigated, but not all investigations would result in a prosecution as it was dependent on individual cases. The welfare of the victim was the team's main priority. If a child or young person was in danger of abuse, the Deter team would remove the individual from that situation even if it compromised an investigation.

The Task Group received disturbing (anonymised) examples of case studies that were under current investigation in Lancashire. In each case, the young people involved did not consider themselves as victims. When this happens, the offender can be remanded in prison while further evidence is gathered and the victim given the support they needed to come to terms with what had happened and recognise it as abuse.

The police led a multi-agency response to prevent CSE. Organisations from across all sectors met regularly to discuss cases and share intelligence about possible victims and offenders of abuse as it was important that support was offered by the most appropriate agency, which could differ from case to case.

The Deter team also work with other partners including PACE (Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation) as it was recognised families of those abused needed support during such a difficult time.

Other work carried out by the police included a trial which had taken place with taxi drivers receiving literature on CSE and how to prevent it which they could keep, and distribute. Due to its success, it was intended that the trial be rolled out to other licence holders.

The Task Group wanted to know how the police tackled CSE from an enforcement point of view. Detective Inspector Ryder explained that

- All referrals are investigated.
- The police gather intelligence about possible victims or offenders
- They place offenders on the Sex Offenders Register
- Representatives from the Deter team join partners such as Environmental Health on unannounced visits to suspected food establishments.
- The team visit swimming pools and the sites of other leisure activities to educate staff and for surveillance purposes
- Facebook and other social media sites are scrutinised for signs of potential grooming.
- Issuing of Community Protection Warning (CPW)/Community Protection Notice (CPN) to those people who harbour children who may have absconded from home without the child's parents/guardians knowing.

The task group were keen to find out what the council could do better in the prevention of CSE. Detective Inspector Ryder explained that education was key to fighting this type of abuse and the task group were asked if elected members could be encouraged to go out in to their community and highlight the dangers. CSE can affect any young person regardless of background or ethnicity. Members are also asked to refer any suspicions they, or their constituents, have without hesitation to the Deter team, even if those suspicions are proved unfounded.

Charitable service perspective

Hayley Bentley, Rebecca Gardiner and Sarah Ainsworth from The Children's Society attended and gave an overview of the work that The Children's Society carried out to support young people who had been subject to CSE.

The task group were informed that the Society had identified issues relating to CSE over 13 years ago; this was a long time before any other organisation recognised it as being a problem.

Street Safe is a pilot project set up by the Society which is aimed at delivering help and support to those young people who had been subjected to CSE between the ages of 16 to 18. This age group was targeted specifically as they were not protected by children safeguarding laws, due to them being over the age of consent, but were not yet considered an adult.

The Street Safe initiative included –

- 1-2-1 direct work
- Group work
- Targeted work
- Awareness raising and training
- Participation
- Consultancy

Street Safe consisted of six case workers, and a manager. The society had charitable status and was funded by donations and grants. Two case workers represented the society on each of the three specialist CSE multi-agency teams across Lancashire Constabulary (Awaken/Deter/Engage) set up to share information on high risk cases.

As part of the project, caseworkers work with individuals offering them the support they need for as long as is required. The timescale spans from the initial referral, support for court hearings, and beyond. Each caseworker is able to support young people in all aspects of their life and not just focus on CSE support. At the first meeting the young person would be advised that if a safeguarding issue was disclosed, the relevant agency would need to be informed, otherwise the service was completely confidential.

The direct work was extremely time intensive, and to this end each caseworker usually dealt with a maximum of 12 cases at any one time, with meetings taking place wherever the young person felt most comfortable.

The pathway for the young person's referral to the Street Safe project was via a variety of different means which included the police, social workers, teachers, parents and self-referrals

Education perspective

Natalie Fairhurst, the Safeguarding and Intervention Manager for Parklands Academy gave an insight in to the work done in regards to raising awareness of CSE in schools and the help and support offered to those who had suffered CSE.

The task group were informed that Parklands Academy had a comprehensive approach to tackling CSE, which included –

- A term of Personal, Social Health and Economic lessons, was dedicated to CSE, including the dangers of sexting
- Targeted sessions with vulnerable groups
- Feeling safe sessions
- Workshops for both pupils and parents (Chelsea's Choice)
- Safer internet sessions
- Work in partnership with the Deter team, Children's Society and other relevant partners
- Work with partners to deliver training to staff
- Regular meetings with other schools
- Liaise with other schools
- Ensure all schools policies were reviewed annually
- To act as a supportive body, and work with pupils to reassure them that they had not done anything wrong.

For those families who were hard to reach, staff would use a variety of methods to get in contact with parents or guardians, which included house visits. Community drop-ins also taking place at a local supermarket for those parents/guardians who wanted to meet on neutral ground. It was important for the Academy to make their pupils feel cared for and protected, and that they could confide in any member of staff without fear of ridicule or not being believed.

The task group was also informed that every high school had a legal requirement to have a safeguarding designated person and a back-up designated person, although their general day to day role could be different in each high school.

DISCLOSURE AND BARRING SERVICE (DBS) CHECKS

To demonstrate how seriously safeguarding is regarded by elected members and the council, the task group felt that it would be good practice for elected members to undertake a DBS check and commissioned a report which looked at the legal requirements to enable disclosure applications to be made.

However, information contained within the report indicated that for a disclosure application to be accepted, the applicant needs to demonstrate they meet the strict criteria for a disclosure check to be carried out. In terms of elected members, it was considered that in their role as a councillor they would not meet the criteria and as such it would not be lawful to apply for disclosures through the DBS. An alternative provision does exist through Disclosure Scotland, though this would not provide as much information or level of check, and is unlikely to be recognised as being comparable to a DBS Disclosure certificate.

In conclusion, the task group agreed not to put forward a recommendation for elected members to undertake a DBS check as the applications would likely fall outside the legislative framework relating to DBS disclosures. In respect of the basic disclosure applications' through Disclosure Scotland; due to the disclosures only providing details of unspent convictions, which elected members are legally obliged to disclose anyway, it was felt that applications made through Disclosure Scotland would be of no value. In addition, there would also be no mechanism to enforce elected members to complete applications.

THE COUNCIL'S ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As previously mentioned in this report, safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

At its penultimate meeting, the task group was given an overview of the council's roles and responsibilities.

- As part of a partnership approach (Community Safety Partnership, Lancashire Children and Young People's Trust, Lancashire Safeguarding Children and Young People's Trust Board) the council is a major contributor to plans and protocols.
- Raise awareness about CSE with elected members and officers
- Raising awareness about CSE in the community (targeted delivery)
- Supporting national and local initiatives
- Ensure relevant officers of the council undertake regular training on CSE prevention
- Ensuring that the reporting pathway for suspected CSE cases is widely known.

In addition, the council had introduced a requirement that those people applying for/or renewing a taxi drivers licence had to undergo regular CSE training as part of the application/renewal process.

Officers from the Early Intervention and Support Directorate had also undergone train the trainer courses which would allow them to train other members of staff on a regular basis.

The task group was informed that as a representative of the Chorley and South Ribble Community Safety Partnership Task and Finish Group on CSE, the Early Intervention and Prevention Officer also played an important role liaising with other partners trying to raise awareness with parents and guardians as well as the children and young people.

At this meeting, it was reported that the council's safeguarding policies and procedures had been recently audited by the council's own audit team who recommended a number of actions to take place.

CONCLUSION

The Task Group is encouraged with the work already undertaken by the council to raise awareness of this type of child abuse. However, it was felt that the council could play a bigger role in raising awareness with elected members, officers of the council, other organisations, and individuals. It is felt that the recommendations recorded earlier in the report will keep CSE awareness at the forefront of people's minds and that the checks and balances suggested will ensure that the council does not become complacent about its responsibilities and role in the community.