

Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People in the West Midlands

Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation across the West Midlands Metropolitan Region

Assessment: July - September 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 Operational Groups meeting regularly to assess priorities and progress. This is the fifth of our quarterly assessments and covers the period of July to September 2016.

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. 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. 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?

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 922 children identified as at risk of or experiencing CSE, this compares to a total of 995 at Q2 2016/17 (not including the 90 who were awaiting risk assessment). This is a decrease of 7% on last quarter and is the first time we have seen a reduction in the overall numbers. There can be

limited inferences made of this at this stage as it could be an anomaly, this figure will need to be monitored next quarter. All Local Authorities have had new referrals during this quarter. Three Local Authorities have had a reduction in overall numbers, three have had an increase and one has remained static.

- 327 young people out of the total of 922 were newly identified over the last quarter and this is a 20% increase from Q1 2015/16. Every Local Authority has received new referrals and only in two areas have they been at a lesser number. It would appear that the reduction last quarter has not continued. There is always going to be some normal fluctuation within the percentages.
- There has been some movement between risk levels with at least 172 children showing a reduction in level of risk as opposed to 153 at Q1 2016/17, this is a 12% increase. 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 meetings and delivered by commissioned services is working to reduce risk. We continue to see overall more new referrals than risk reductions, which supports our hypothesis that children require long term intervention once identified. What we have seen in Q2 is a reduction in the overall number of children identified despite the number of referrals rising by 20%, this could be due to cases closing for other reasons such as; turning 18, moving out of area or other data cleansing activity.

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.

- 48 children have had risk factors identified but are currently subject of assessment to determine category of risk; they will be receiving a relevant service to meet their immediate needs.
- 87 of the children identified were at the highest level of risk (serious – entrenched in sexual exploitation). The number has decreased this quarter and is 9% of the total which is a continued reduction from 11% in Q1 2016/17. 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 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 and risk reduction. This is the fifth Q that we have seen this slight but evidently downwards trend.

N.B the caveat here is that we do not know the reasons for reduction or whether there is then a subsequent increase of re-referral. There is always going to be a margin for error within these categories based on the children awaiting risk assessment.

- We have the recorded ethnicity of 904 of the cohort. The reason for the unknowns is not provided for the purpose of this data set but 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 904 the significant majority of children identified were White British (66%). The second largest cohort was mixed (unspecified) (10%). White Other, Black Caribbean and Pakistani all came in at 4%. This is remaining fairly consistent which suggests that we are still not sufficiently identifying CSE risk in some communities.

- Only 18% of the cohort is male; this is the highest it has been to date and increase from 15% at Q1 2016/17. 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. We still need to understand why there are generally 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.
- 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 that the underlying vulnerabilities and risk indicators have been identified early and appropriate safeguards and interventions to reduce the risk have been implemented. This 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 14 – 17; the same as Q1 2016/17. Despite some slight variation those middle teenage years continue to be the most commonly occurring on a recurring basis. The largest number of children fell within the 15, year old, female, "at risk" category with 125 children. The largest numbers of males (at 35) were in the 15 year old, "at risk" category. For "significant risk" the most commonly identified age is 15 and 16 for male and 15 for female. For "serious risk" it is aged 15 for female and 16 for male, although these numbers are significantly smaller. 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.
- 66% 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.

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

- For this dataset, missing data was received from 5 out of 7 Local Authorities but one collected in such a format that I could not compare/combine it with the other 4. From the available missing data from those 4 authorities, it would seem that of all of the children who have had missing episodes 20% are identified as being at risk of CSE. Using the same data from the same 5 LAs it would appear that only 19% of our CSE cohort have had a missing episode. This has increased from 12% in Q1 2015/16. This does appear to be quite a fluctuating number and does not give a true regional picture given the minimal missing data available.
- Despite an increase in the number of children identified as at risk of CSE following 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 missing². Greater Manchester's "Its Not Okay" campaign suggests that 95% of their CSE cohort have been missing at least once. 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.
- 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.
- In all cases the current identified cohort "at risk" of CSE makes up no more than 0.3% of the child population of the authority area, this has decreased significantly from last quarter as more up to date population statistics have been used.

Offenders:

- West Midlands Police have investigated 62 suspected CSE offenders since Q1 2016/17, of those 52 were identified in Q2. Of those 2 are female. West Midlands Police are now recording offender data to allow a running cumulative total of offenders across the reporting year as well as per quarter. There are challenges around the reporting of suspected offenders, who may be recorded for crimes

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"

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 54 complex investigations on-going that relate to 53 victims and one organised crime group.

- There are numerous caveats around the accuracy 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.
- 57% of the cohort are recorded as “Asian”, 17% as “White”, 12% “Black”, 3% as mixed and 10% as “other”
- Over the last 3 months a variety of ‘pursue’ methods have been utilised to tackle the offenders of CSE. In relation to prosecution, 12 charges have been achieved, 4 arrests have been made and 1 case is currently awaiting CPS decision. There have been two Sexual Risk orders achieved which are the most commonly used Civil option and 15 Child Abduction Warning Notices have been served, these are vital disruption tactics and form part of the wider evidence base against a perpetrator. 3 child disruption notices have been served.

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. With the increase of online activity 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.
- There are some locations that are more frequently identified than others and since Q1 2016/17 approximately 110 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 have taken over from Hotels as the most commonly represented however hotels are second, followed closely by public spaces and fast food outlets.

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.

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. 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 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 down over a short time period then things are getting better?

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 West Midlands metropolitan region. It is possible that the work undertaken to date alongside high profile media campaigns is beginning to yield some success in reducing numbers. However it is more likely that it is due to natural flux and fluidity in the numbers as children move up and down the risk categories, in and out of areas or reach adulthood; it will remain to be seen whether the downward trend observed this quarter will be continued. The expectation is that it will begin to rise again.

We want to identify those who are vulnerable earlier and ensure they receive the required support to prevent any form of violence, exploitation or abuse and therefore it is not a negative if our numbers rise. 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.

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. 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

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 and Implementation Officer report 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.
- **Prevention** – we are currently working with a group of voluntary sector providers to develop a resource to use with young people to challenge the unacceptable attitudes and beliefs that can fuel violence and exploitation. Solihull LA is trialling a screening tool for under 12s to ensure that those children in primary school who may be showing some very early vulnerabilities, different to those of older children, are identified and protective action is taken.
- **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.
- **Protection** – There is an ongoing Court case at the moment against a number of adult male defendants. The victims are receiving a high level of ongoing support from Police, Local Authority and voluntary sector. There are, and have been, a number of other cases heard in court across the region regarding CSE 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 are reviewing and revising our regional disruption toolkit in a bid to support practitioners to relentlessly pursue offenders. This will be re-launched at a regional event in November.

- **Campaign** – throughout August the See Me Hear Me campaign had high profile outdoor advertising campaigns on the back of toilet doors in New Street Station, on the M6 and we used targeted digital advertising to target young people and ask them to think about identifying their friends who may be at risk. This, combined with a visible social media presence has been an extremely successful campaign and led to significantly increased traffic to the See Me Hear Me website www.seeme-hearme.org.uk. Twitter –‘SEEMEHEARMEWM’ Facebook – 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

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