

Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People in the West Midlands

Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation across the West Midlands Metropolitan Region

Assessment: January – March 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 seventh of our quarterly assessments and covers the period of January to March 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 1059 children identified as at risk of or experiencing CSE, this compares to a total of 954 at Q3 2016/17 (not including the 51 who were currently subject of assessment). This is an increase of 11% on Q3,

growing from a 3% increase at Q2. Six Local Authorities have had an increase in overall numbers, one had a decrease.

- At least 297 young people out of the total of 1020 were newly identified over the last quarter and this is a 9% decrease from 327 Q3 2016/17. All Local Authorities have had new referrals during this quarter, four had an increase in the number of new referrals and three had a decrease. 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 with at least 90 children showing a reduction in level of risk as opposed to 147 at Q3 2016/17, one LA has been unable to report this number this Q. 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 and delivered by commissioned services is working to reduce risk, this includes use of LA 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 of re-referral, risk is dynamic.

- 51 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.
- 52 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 5% of the total which is a continued reduction from 7% in Q3 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 seventh Q that we have seen this slight but evidently downwards trend.
- 72% of our cohort are “at risk”, this is a 1% decrease on Q3, but the first time we have seen a decrease. This may be due to normal flux in the data, or the beginning of a plateau but will be monitored. 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 1080 of the cohort (this includes some 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 (66%), this remains similar to 67% in Q3. The second largest cohort was mixed (unspecified) (7%). Black Caribbean came in at 5%. 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 same as Q3 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. 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 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.
- In this quarter the most frequently occurring age range across all three risk levels is 14 – 16; the same as Q1, 2 and 3 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 147 children. The largest numbers of males (at 38) were in the 15 year old, "at risk" category. For "significant risk" the most commonly identified age is 15 and 16 for male and female. For "serious risk" it is aged 16 for female, 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.
- 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 that of all of the children who have had missing episodes 43% are identified as being at risk of CSE. Using the same data from the same 5 LAs it would appear that only 23% of our CSE cohort have had a missing episode. Regionally this would appear to

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

support a tentative hypothesis that more children who go missing are at increased risk of experiencing exploitation than children who are at risk of exploitation are to go missing. However this does appear to be quite a fluctuating number and does not give a true regional picture given the minimal missing data available and the significant variation between LA's.

- 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.

Offenders:

- West Midlands Police have identified 28 suspected CSE offenders during Q4 (113 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 70 investigations on-going that relate to at least 70 victims.
- 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

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"

differentiate between sub groups of ethnicity. It is only recorded for 33 of the cohort and therefore there is no quality analysis to be drawn on this occasion.

- Over the last 3 months a variety of 'pursue' methods have been utilised to tackle the offenders of CSE. In relation to prosecution, 1 charge has been achieved with 3 more awaiting CPS decision. There have been 13 Child Abduction Warning Notices have been served, these are vital disruption tactics and form part of the wider evidence base against a perpetrator.
- There have been 20 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.
- There are some locations that are more frequently identified than others and during Q3 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.

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 will there will be constant change.

So if the numbers are staying the same does that mean we are not doing enough to tackle the problem?

No. Although the numbers are fairly stable and there may be 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?

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 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** – we are currently working with a group of voluntary sector providers to share best practice and identify gaps in delivery and how we can respond to them as well as considering resources for aimed at challenging the unacceptable attitudes and behaviours that fuel violence and exploitation. We are also running the See Me Hear Me campaign 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 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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