

11 November 2014		ITEM: 8
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Child Sexual Exploitation and the Jay report – implications for Thurrock		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Nicky Pace Interim Head of Care & Targeted Outcomes		
Accountable Head of Service: Andrew Carter – Head of Care & Targeted Outcomes		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton – Director of Children's Services		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings of Professor Jay enquiry into child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham. Her report highlighted serious failings in the council and other agencies, especially the police, over a number of years with regard to the safeguarding of children, and also serious failings of corporate governance, leadership, culture and the operation of the overview and scrutiny function.

This report reflects an early review of the service delivery in Thurrock in relation to CSE and the actions being taken to address any identified gaps.

1. Recommendations

1.1 For the overview and scrutiny committee to note the contents of this report.

1.2 To recall the action plan to future O&S meetings for updates on implementation.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 There has been a growing awareness of the involvement and targeting of children and young people in society. With the increased use of the internet 'stranger danger' is no longer the stereotypical person waiting at the school gates in a white van, it is now a sophisticated international issue and often linked with organised crime. Paedophiles hunt children on the web and now an image of a child can be spread to thousands of users without the child knowing. The Jay report into Rotherham is one of many that have highlighted the risks posed to young people through sexual exploitation. The report into

paedophile rings in Derby city, Oxfordshire and Rochdale to name but a few and the recent report from the Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups have all highlighted the issues.

2.2 Sexual exploitation and grooming

2.2.1 What is child sexual exploitation? In 2008 the national working group network developed the following definition, which is commonly used in government guidance and policy:

2.2.2 'The sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (eg food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of performing, and /or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition, for example by persuading them to post sexual images on the internet/ mobile phone without any immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and /or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social / economic and /or emotional vulnerability. '

2.2.3 The process of 'grooming' by paedophiles has been well documented in national reports and research. Many of the children are already vulnerable when grooming began. The perpetrators often targets children's residential units and residential services for care leavers. It was not unusual for children in residential services and schools to introduce other children to the perpetrators.

2.2.4 Many of the children have troubled family backgrounds, with a history of domestic violence, parental addiction, and in some cases serious mental health problems. A significant number of the victims in Rotherham had a history of child neglect and/or sexual abuse when they were younger. Some had a desperate need for attention and affection. In Rotherham schools raised the alert over the years about children as young as 11, 12 and 13 being picked up outside schools by cars and taxis, given presents and mobile phones and taken to meet large numbers of unknown males in Rotherham, other local towns and cities, and further afield. Typically, children were courted by a young man whom they believed to be their boyfriend. Over a period of time, the child would be introduced to older men who cultivated them and supplied them with gifts, free alcohol and sometimes drugs. Children were initially flattered by the attention paid to them, and impressed by the apparent wealth and sophistication of those grooming them.

2.2.5 Many young people are convinced that they were special in the affections of a perpetrator, despite all the evidence that many other children were being

groomed and abused by the same person. Some victims are never able to accept that they had been groomed and abused by one or more sexual predators. A key objective of the perpetrators was to isolate victims from family and friends as part of the grooming process. Over time, methods of grooming have changed as mobile technology has advanced. Mobile phones, social networking sites and mobile apps have become common ways of identifying and targeting vulnerable children and young people and we know that much younger children are being targeted in this way. Unguarded use of text and video messaging and social networking sites, can mean that children can unwittingly place themselves in a position where they could be targeted, sometimes in a matter of days or hours, by sexual predators from all over the world. In a small number of cases, this can lead to direct physical contact, rape and sexual abuse with one or more perpetrators. Grooming can move from online to personal contact very quickly indeed. One of the most worrying features is the ease with which young children aged from about 8-10 years can be targeted and exploited in this way without their families being aware of the dangers associated with internet use.

2.2.6 The Jay report

The Jay report into child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham has received considerable media attention and makes chilling reading. This Independent Inquiry was commissioned by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council in October 2013. Its remit, covered the period 1997- 2013 and it believed that during this period 1400 children and young people had been sexual exploited. This abuse is not confined to the past but continues to this day. In just over a third of cases, children affected by sexual exploitation were previously known to services because of child protection and neglect. These children and young people suffered the most appalling abuse. They were raped by multiple perpetrators, trafficked to other towns and cities in the north of England, abducted, beaten, and intimidated. There were examples of children who had been doused in petrol and threatened with being set alight, threatened with guns, made to witness brutally violent rapes and threatened they would be next if they told anyone; girls as young as 11 were raped by large numbers of male perpetrators.

2.2.7 The collective failures of political and officer leadership were clearly laid out in the report. From as early as 1997 there was growing evidence that child sexual exploitation was a serious problem in Rotherham. It would appear that within social care, the scale and seriousness of the problem was underplayed by senior managers. At an operational level, the Police gave no priority to CSE, treating many child victims with contempt and failing to act on their abuse as a crime. Further stark evidence came in 2002, 2003 and 2006 with three reports known to the Police and the Council, which could not have been clearer in their description of the situation in Rotherham. The first of these reports was effectively suppressed because some senior officers disbelieved the data it contained. The other two reports set out the links between child sexual exploitation and drugs, guns and criminality in the Borough. These reports were ignored and no action was taken to deal with the issues that were identified in them.

- 2.2.8 It would appear that senior officers in the Police and children's social care continued to think the extent of the problem, as described by those working with the young people (predominantly women) was exaggerated. At an operational level, staff appeared to be overwhelmed by the numbers involved. The report suggests that there were improvements in the response of management from about 2007 onwards but by 2009, the children's social care service was acutely understaffed and over stretched, struggling to cope with demand. Seminars for elected members and senior officers in 2004-05 presented the abuse in the most explicit terms. After these events, nobody could say 'we didn't know'. In 2005, the Council Leader chaired a group to take forward the issues, but there is no record of its meetings or conclusions, apart from one minute. This led Professor Jay to conclude that there was a closed, often macho culture which led to accusations of a 'cover up'. She also reported totally inappropriate use of language by some elected members and officers, which appeared to have gone unchallenged.
- 2.2.9 By far the majority of perpetrators were described as 'Asian' by victims, yet throughout the entire period, councillors did not engage directly with the Pakistani-heritage community to discuss how best they could jointly address the issue. Some councillors seemed to think it was a one-off problem, which they hoped would go away. Several staff described their nervousness about identifying the ethnic origins of perpetrators for fear of being thought racist; others remembered clear direction from their managers not to do so. The issue of race, 'Asian men, white girls' which was reported in the media was over simplistic, as it did not account for the abuse of Asian women and girls in their own communities who for many reasons may not have come forward. There is growing evidence of Somalian and Eastern European gangs who are involved in organised crime, gun running, drugs as well as sexual exploitation. However, one of the key features in Rotherham was a resistance to acknowledging the ethnic makeup of the perpetrators and the failure to engage with the communities.
- 2.2.10 In December 2009, the Minister of State for Children and Families put the Council's children's safeguarding services into intervention, following an extremely critical Ofsted report. The Council was removed from intervention thirteen months later.
- 2.2.11 The Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and its predecessor oversaw the development of good inter-agency policies and procedures applicable to CSE. The weakness in their approach was that members of the Safeguarding Board rarely checked whether these were being implemented or whether they were working. The challenge and scrutiny function of the Safeguarding Board and of the Council itself was lacking over several years at a time when it was most required.
- 2.2.12 The Jay report highlighted many improvements in the last four years by both the Council and the Police in Rotherham, but it recognises the growing demands and financial constraints of both police and social care to respond continues to be challenging.

2.2.13 The Jay report made 15 recommendations to improve the response to victims of CSE in Rotherham. One of the key areas was the lack of ongoing treatment and therapeutic support for the victims.

2.2.14 As a direct response to the issues raised in this response, the Government have commissioned Louise Casey with a team to review the response to CSE in Rotherham. Alongside this, OFSTED have undertaken an in-depth CSE inspection (including a further ten of these across the country) as well as an inspection of safeguarding. Teresa May has also asked all police forces to review their current and past response to CSE (see below and attached letters?).

2.2.15 Thurrock response

The sexual exploitation of children and young people is completely unacceptable, regardless of race and culture. It is the collective responsibility of all agencies to identify those children at risk of CSE and ensure that swift and appropriate actions are taken to prevent them from becoming sexually exploited and to safeguard them from further risk of harm. A recent Children's Commissioner Report sets out recommendations and minimum standards that we need to ensure are in place to support tackling CSE. I am pleased to report that the majority of those recommendations are already in place in Thurrock. Our approach and response to CSE takes into account the Children's commissioner report and also Working Together 2013 and its previous editions, the supplementary guidance published in 2009 and the legislation framework of the Criminal Justice System. It is an integral part of our current LSCB Business Plan and Children's and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP) and is one of the elements of the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (VAWG) adopted across the Borough. The LSCB is committed to combating the sexual exploitation of children through effective and coordinated multi agency and partnership working. The Children's Safeguarding Board are working closely with the Children and Young People's Partnership Board (CYPP) and adult safeguarding to ensure that children and young people who have been subjected to child sexual exploitation will receive seamless support as they progress from childhood to adulthood.

2.2.16 We have worked in partnership with our colleagues in Southend and Essex to develop a strategy and approach to meet the emerging needs across Essex as well as in Thurrock. The Southend, Essex and Thurrock CSE Strategic Group was established in 2012 and is chaired by the public protection lead for Essex Police. The Strategic Group, which includes representatives from agencies across the three authorities, is coordinating the multi-agency response to cases of CSE in Southend, Essex and Thurrock. There is also a local multiagency 'missing' panel which meets monthly that looks at all children and young people who have been reported missing from home, care or education and identifies any risk factors which may indicate that the child is being sexually exploited. Thurrock has had a Missing protocol in place from 21012. Cases are regularly reviewed by this forum. The work of this panel led to an investigation known as Operation Steelband.

2.2.17 We also have a multi-agency work stream that focuses on exploitation of children on line, which includes feedback from a young person's group. We have successfully rolled out through the LSCB a 'walking on line' roadshow which has targeted years 5,6 and 7 and reached in the region of 5,500 children. The focus has been warning them of the dangers of the internet and the 'dark web' but more importantly teaching them how to keep themselves safe. A number of roadshows are also being held for parents across Thurrock to raise awareness and help parents keep their children safer.

2.2.18 We have rolled out a multi agency e-learning basic awareness course on across agencies from the LSCB, to ensure that all staff coming into contact with children and young people are aware of the signs and Champion training – symptoms and what they need to do in the event of any concerns. The LSCB through the interagency training group have made initial provision for 1,500 on-line licences to be available for this training. CSE Champion training is being provided to enable additional knowledge and awareness to be available to support front line staff. A champion will be an individual such as the safeguarding lead at a school, team leader or GP practice. In addition to completing the e-learning course they will attend a day session explaining the Thurrock approach to CSE in more detail including a risk assessment toolkit and intelligence pathway. This training is being implemented from March 2014 following the initial completion of on line training. All partners represented on the LSCB will nominate a lead professional for CSE, who will act as the single point of contact for all matters relating to child sexual exploitation for their individual agency. They will complete the on line course and attend a half day lead champion session.

2.2.19 To aid front line practitioners and managers in determining the best response to a child or young person who may be at risk of CSE, the Strategic Group has agreed a common risk assessment toolkit to aid identification of the risk a young person or child may face. The newly established MASH carries out a risk assessment of every referral for CSE , since its implementation in July three young people have been identified as at risk of sexual exploitation.

2.2.20 A close relationship has been developed with licensing , specifically of taxis and budget hotels in the borough. This raised awareness across the service has led to one taxi driver having his licence revoked following concerns.

2.2.21 Essex Police have agreed to be the lead agency in collating CSE intelligence. There is no specific offence of CSE and its pathways are very varied so all intelligence received associated with CSE will be tagged "Operation Care". This will enable analytical work to be conducted and produced to aid identification of linked offences or intelligence that will support a better understanding of the scale of the problem.

2.2.22 As a direct response to the Jay report, Thurrock's LSCB, children's services, alongside the police and health are reviewing all cases where there has been

any concerns about CSE and reviewing any recent operations and cases, as well as looking at historic cases from the last 5 years.

2.2.23 We believe that our response and approach is sufficiently flexible to respond to and learn from the experience of other areas, reviews and future guidance. We recognise there is more to be done and this is highlighted in future actions at the end of this report to ensure that we are confident that we have a robust response to CSE in the local area. We are not complacent about addressing this difficult issue.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 In appendix 1 the areas for future work and gaps in our response in Thurrock are outlined. However, this is an initial analysis and it will need to be developed further following the review of historic cases.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 For the overview and scrutiny committee to note the contents of this report.

4.2 To recall the action plan to future O&S meetings for updates on implementation.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 In consultation with other agencies including the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and Licensing.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The Jay report highlights a number of implications for corporate ownership and governance. It highlights the importance of a robust scrutiny role where challenge of the organisational culture is an open one.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
Finance Manager – Children's Services

Increasing awareness raising may lead to increasing demand for services to investigate and support children and young people subject to CSE, which may put additional pressure on the children's social care budget. Any major operations that need ring fenced resource may not be able to be met from existing resources.

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor for Children's Safeguarding

There may be a necessity to take protective action of any children and young people who may have been subjected to CSE.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
**Community Development and Equalities
Manager**

This report highlights the necessity to develop strong links with developing communities, to understand the issues faced and address any developing areas of concern directly.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

This report highlights that CSE is not just an issue for Children's social care but wider issues such as licensing, public health (including sexual health) need to be aware of and addressing issues of CSE.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Professor Jay report into CSE in Metropolitan Borough of Rotherham

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 – action plan

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Children's Services