

12 February 2019		ITEM: 12
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Update Report On Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Claire Pascoe, Child Exploitation and Missing Children Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children and Families		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report sets out the actions being taken by Thurrock Social Care and our response to CSE and associated exploitative harms. Thurrock Children's Social Care continues to take steps to identify and tackle exploitation in the Borough. Most effective outcomes are achieved via collaboration with a range of partners in identifying potential victims, and prevention of further harm; equally, in the identification, disruption and prosecution of perpetrators. The Local Government Association's *'Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation, A resource pack for councils'*, 2014, is attached to this report.

To set the context of this report, the definitions of the harms referred to here, are as follows:

Child Sexual Exploitation: 'CSE is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and / or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.' (Department for Education, 2017)

- *Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE): 'Child Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18.'*
- *Missing: 'Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the'*

person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another’.

(Essex Police, 2017)

- Trafficking: *“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the ... recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons ... for the purpose of exploitation”.* (Modern Slavery Act, 2015)

1. Recommendations

1.1 The Committee are asked to note the work being carried out by Children’s Social Care to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Previous reports have been presented to Elected Members about the progress and impact of steps taken by Children’s Social Care and partner agencies to tackle, disrupt and address Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), and Missing Children.

2.2 Children’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee have requested a further update on progress within Thurrock pertaining to CSE and Missing Children.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 This update report on CSE and Missing Children will highlight the key strategic, operational, technological, partnership and practice developments relating to the inter-related areas of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Child Exploitation (CE), Missing Children and Child Trafficking, as led and progressed by Thurrock Council.

3.2 Key Achievements:

Thurrock Council have taken significant steps to identify and tackle Child Sexual, and wider Exploitation. Given exploitation and perpetrators are not contained by geographical boundaries, the steps outlined are both those taken internally, and more broadly across the professional partnership in Thurrock, and across the SET (Southend, Essex and Thurrock). Not exhaustively, these include the following:

3.2.1 Ofsted 2018 Focused Visit:

The Focused Visit letter made reference to CSE, and indeed, CE: Positively, Ofsted reported:

‘Social workers are alert to concerns about child sexual exploitation; they use specific assessment tools appropriately to assess and manage risks. Oversight and review of these arrangements by frontline and senior managers is effective, managing and protecting children at an individual level and informing strategic planning’.

3.2.2 Awareness Raising Training Within the Council and Local Community:

Thurrock Social Care in collaboration with partners, have responsively and intensively invested in training and awareness-raising. All training sessions aim to maximise opportunities to identify vulnerabilities and risks associated with CSE, CE and Trafficking, focusing equally, upon perpetrators, and using the multi-agency group to galvanise collaboration and provision of services to children. All training is bespoke, and includes advice on gathering evidence, local and national help and support and the pathways via which professionals and possible victims can share their concerns, make referrals and report abuse. (Department for Education, 2017).

- 3.2.3 Coordinated by the CSE CE and Missing Children Manager, bespoke CSE, Missing and Trafficking awareness training has been written and delivered in collaboration with Essex Police, Open Door and South Essex Rape Incest Crisis Centre (SERICC). Training has been provided to: Social and Support Workers: 343; Adult Social Care: 47; Thurrock Foster Carers: 91; Essex College students; 25; Thurrock Housing staff: 201; Independent Fostering Association Providers and Residential Staff: 71; Thurrock GPs: 27; Music Service Staff: 25; Hotel industry staff: 10; Thurrock currently Licenced Taxi Operators, Drivers and Passenger Assistants: 345 out of 362 have been trained: 13 of the remaining Taxi Drivers 16 are due to undertake the training in March, with the 3, due to sign up. Adherence to this being a condition of Thurrock Taxi Drivers being licensed can be evidenced in there being one driver who was not permitted to automatically renew until he had completed the training.
- 3.2.4 Impact in practice of the training, can be illustrated in a disclosure to the CSE CE and Missing Children Manager by a Thurrock Licenced Taxi driver immediately following a training session. The training, the driver said, helped him understand the significance and gravity of what he had seen. With the support of the CSE CE and Missing Children Manager and in collaboration with Essex Police CSE Triage Team, the driver made a comprehensive disclosure to Essex Police, which resulted in the matter becoming a live criminal investigation.
- 3.2.5 In response to the impact and prevalence of gang-associated trafficking and exploitation nationally (Home Office, 2017) and locally, focused Trafficking and Modern Slavery Training was co-written, with the Essex Police Trafficking Lead, and delivered by the CSE CE and Missing Children Manager to 66 Thurrock Social Workers in the last quarter of 2018, as part of the Practice Development Programme.

Words repeatedly used in response to all of these training sessions include: "Shocking", "Powerful", "Informative", "Enlightening", "Relevant" and "Insightful"

- 3.2.6 **'I Didn't Know' CSE Campaign, 2018:** In order to better equip adult and child residents of Thurrock in spotting indicators of online abuse and youth-

produced sexual imagery, and to know how to report this, given the increase internationally and nationally, (NSPCC, 2019) and locally (Essex Police, 2017) of online grooming and exploitation, the March 2018, the '*I Didn't Know*' Child Sexual Exploitation campaign focused specifically, upon online CSE and youth-produced sexual imagery. It primarily focused towards parents / carers and children and young people.

3.2.7 **'#BeAVoice for Victims of Trafficking and Modern Slavery' Campaign**

The Thurrock CSE CE and Missing Children Manager, in collaboration with Essex Police and equivalent partners in Southend and Essex launched this Campaign in October 2018. It coincided with Anti-Slavery Day. The campaign aimed to raise the awareness of professionals, parents, young people and public, of the indicators of this harm, and reporting pathways.

3.2.8 **Development of the Missing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU):**

To clarify and strengthen the collective professional response to missing children, The MoU seeks to improve the quality and timeliness of information sharing between carers and providers with Essex Police relating to children at risk of going missing from care, being trafficked, who are gang associated and at risk, or who have been and / or are victims of CSE. This document has been sent by the Thurrock Commissioning team to accommodation providers used by Thurrock Social Care. Expectations around preparing for a child going missing, searching for a missing fostered children, reporting to Police and support of the child upon return, is now included in the contracts of Thurrock Foster Carers.

3.3 **The Thurrock Picture:**

3.3.1 **CSE:** The CSE report run from Liquid Logic, our children's information system, on 14th January, 2019, identified 28 Thurrock children currently assessed to be at High risk of CSE, including 1 boy assessed as being exploited. Of the 28 children, 16 are girls, and 12 are boys. The average age of the 16 girls is 15.3 months. The girls' legal statuses comprised: 8 Looked After Children: 4 girls supported under Child Protection Plans and 4 girls being supported under Child in Need Plans. The average age of the 12 boys is slightly older, at 16.9 years. Their legal statuses comprised: 5 Looked After Children, 1 boy supported under a Child Protection Plan and 6 boys supported under Child in Need Plans.

3.3.2 Given the widely-publicised 'invisibility' of boys as being at risk of CSE in professional perception, it is positive to see that this unconscious bias against boys is not immediately apparent in Thurrock, with boys being potential victims of CSE and wider criminal exploitation, being 'on the radar' (Barnardos, 2016).

3.3.3 The models of CSE currently most apparent in Thurrock, appear not to reflect the models illustrated in Rotherham and Telford, which is primarily the Organised / Trafficking model of CSE; rather, the models appear to remain, primarily, the 'Boyfriend' model and Gang model of CSE. While children can

be moved through a range of different CSE models, the 'Boyfriend' model of CSE is typified by perpetrators, who can be of similar age, and who target children posing as 'boyfriends / girlfriends', showering the child with attention, 'love' and gifts, activating the child's attachment system. Initiating a sexual relationship with the child, the child is effectively told that they owe the perpetrators money for cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, car rides etc. and that sexual activities are one way of repaying the 'debt' (PACE UK, 2017).

- 3.3.4 The gang model of CSE is used variously, to exert power and control over children to initiate children into gangs; exchange sexual activity for status / protection; used to entrap rival gang members by exploiting girls and young women, often related to or associated with them, and inflict sexual assault as a weapon in conflict. The majority of CSE within gangs is committed by teenage boys and men in their twenties (Berelowitz et al. 2012). The SET CSE Strategic Board is researching risk assessment tools which take account of wider exploitative contexts including but also beyond CSE, such as grooming / threatening children into 'running drugs' (being groomed, and exploited).
- 3.3.5 **Missing children:** The Risk Assessment Group, (RAG), a sub-group of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, and operational arm of the Strategic Multi Agency Child Exploitation, chaired by the Service Manager for Looked After Children, meets every 2 weeks. It is attended by a range of statutory and voluntary partners. All of the children who have been reported and accepted as missing to the Police, are discussed at the Risk Assessment Group, regardless of length of time missing, or apparent circumstance. There is no minimum time for a child to be missing before they are reported to the Police. Therefore, the times children have been reported as missing before they are found, can range from minutes upwards. A trigger for presentation to the RAG is their experienced 3 missing episodes in three months, or having had a high risk missing episode. Also presented are those children assessed to be at high risk of CSE, and Child Exploitation in the context of gangs. The Risk Assessment Group facilitates challenge, oversight and development of plans to reduce the vulnerability of children, and equally, identify opportunities to target / investigate possible / perpetrators.
- 3.3.6 Open Door are commissioned by Thurrock Children's Social Care to undertake Return Home Interviews for children who go missing from home or care, regardless of whether or not they are receiving a service from Social Care, or length of time missing. Open Door report some of the reasons children go missing from home or care to be attributable in part to children having been placed out of area and 'running to' their parents, friends and extended family members.
- 3.3.7 **Multi Agency Child Exploitation Group (MACE):** With strategic responsibility for developments in Thurrock around Child Exploitation and Missing Children and overseeing the RAG, the LSCB's MACE Group, is attended by 13 statutory, criminal justice and voluntary agencies.

- 3.3.8 **Trafficking:** Awareness of indicators of child trafficking, both as an offence in itself, and as part of wider exploitative contexts, is reflected in 8 children having been referred by Thurrock Children's Social Care to the National Crime Agencies' National Referral Mechanism (NRM) in 2017: end of year statistic for 2018 are yet to be published. Referrals to the NRM are made by Social Workers when they suspect the children they are supporting may be at risk of, or experiencing trafficking for the purpose of Sexual, and / or Criminal Exploitation.
- 3.3.9 The types of concerns leading to referrals to the NRM primarily include children who have been located in different counties, at addresses to which they have no connection, in possession of Class A drugs. Referrals have included instances where a child has been assessed likely to be victim of sexual, as well as criminal exploitation by gangs or groups. The NRM process encourages multi-agency collaboration which enhances a multi-agency safeguarding response.
- 3.3.10 **CSE, Missing, Gangs and Trafficking themed audits:** Children's Social Care Managers completed thematic audits in December 2017 to benchmark understanding and practice. This themed audit was repeated in August 2018 when strengths and areas for organisational improvement in response to CSE, Missing Children, Child Trafficking and children groomed and exploited within the context of Gangs, was undertaken. The audits reflected some areas of strength, and equally, areas both operationally and strategically, areas which need to be developed, which Senior Managers are addressing.

3.4 **Future Plans:**

- 3.4.1 Thurrock Social Care's approach to safeguarding children vulnerable to CSE has been tenacious and persistent. Commitment to understanding, and proactively responding to the developing nature and scale of Exploitation in the Borough, in light of learning from research and inquiries combined with evolving local trends, is unswerving. Following on from the 2017-2018 '*CSE, Missing Children and Trafficking Action Plan*', Key highlights of the 2019-2020 Action Plan will include:
- 3.4.2 **Reducing time between missing children being found and referral for Return Home Interviews:** We will establish and embed within the Thurrock Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, dedicated administrative resource to coordinate and ensure consistently timely referrals of children who have been missing and are found, to Open Door so that Return Home Interviews can be completed.
- 3.4.3 **Listening to survivors:** To strengthen Thurrock's response to survivors of sexual exploitation, the independent South Essex Rape Incest Crisis Centre (SERICC) in collaboration with the ASCB and LSCB, will be asked to coordinate the direct consultation with victims of CSE, to inform Social Care and wider partnership strategic and operational planning and approach.

- 3.4.4 **Training:** CSE, CCE, Missing Children and Trafficking training has been offered to Thurrock Councillors. Further training is planned for 2019.
- 3.4.5 Training will continue to be offered by the CSE CE and Missing Children Manager to Thurrock Children's, Adult and Housing Service staff, Members and key partners outlined above, to widen and embed awareness of indicators of exploitation and reporting pathways.
- 3.4.6 An online training package is being finalised for Taxi Drivers. This will ensure Taxi Drivers are aware of indicators of exploitation and trafficking, and Thurrock expectations in relation to these harms from the outset.
- 3.4.7 Further training with the Hotel Industry, developing further, the Borough-wide response to exploitation will take place.
- 3.5 **Continuing to test professional response in practice:** A further audit with the theme of CSE and Child Exploitation in the context of Gangs, is scheduled for July 2019.
- 3.6 **Embedding the revised SET CSE Risk and Vulnerability Assessment:** The revised CSE Risk and Vulnerability Assessment co-written by the CSE CE and Missing Manager, her counterparts, Essex Police, National Working Group and University of Essex will be embedded within Liquid Logic to enable further, local analysis and informed response. It intentionally includes the different models of CSE to enable us to better understand the profile of CSE being perpetrated in Thurrock.
- 3.7 **Operation Goldcrest:** Essex SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre) and Mountain Healthcare, in partnership with Essex Police, Thurrock Social Care (SC), Health and SERICC (South Essex Rape Incest Crisis Centre) are piloting a project targeting young people at risk of and/or currently victims of child sexual exploitation (CSE). The operation will be for those children who decline to engage with statutory services. Thurrock Social Care is the Pilot authority for the SET. The target age range for this pilot is children aged 13 to 18. The pilot is planned to run for 12 to 18 months and if successful, it is envisaged it will be rolled out throughout Essex, and potentially nationally.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To further enhance our collective understanding of and response to CSE, CE and Trafficking profile in the Borough, and ensure our response is informed by the experiences of victims.

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

None

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

6.1 Ensuring that children and young people are safe and free from exploitation is a central part of the statutory duties of the Council.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall**
Management Accountant

There are no additional financial implications at this stage; however any costs associated with this report need to be met from existing resources.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Legal

Section 17 Children Act 1989 imposes a general duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**
Team Manager – Community Development and Equalities

The needs and protected characteristics of children are considered and supported throughout the delivery of the services outlined in this report to ensure that the Council continues to uphold Equality Act 2010 duties and responsibilities.

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

None.

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):

<https://www.local.gov.uk/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation-resource-pack-councils>

9. Appendices to the report

None.

Report Author:

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Thurrock Children's Social Care