

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, EDUCATION & EARLY HELP SERVICES

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	31 JANUARY 2018	AGENDA ITEM:	9
TITLE:	LEARNING FROM READING BOROUGH COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND NEXT STEPS IN ADDRESSING CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION		
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview on the significant improvements that have been delivered in addressing the risk of Child Sexual exploitation (CSE) in Reading. It is proposed that the learning from the revised approach to CSE should form the basis of a strategic and operational methodology to address risks posed by the emerging criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable people from 'County lines' activity in Reading.
- 1.2 Reading Borough Council Children's Services were rated inadequate by Ofsted in summer 2016. Improvement activity relating to missing children and Child Sexual Exploitation were identified as part of the broader learning and Improvement requirements for Children's Services. Early improvements were made to operational processes; however a police operation relating to peer on peer sexual exploitation during the summer of 2017 prompted a full review of the existing operational and strategic approach to CSE conducted throughout the summer and autumn 2017.
- 1.3 The revised approach has proved to be successful in addressing the local risk and management of child sexual exploitation and missing children and is increasingly understood by practitioners and partners. It is therefore deemed appropriate to adopt this methodology to address new and emerging child and adolescent risk through other means of criminal exploitation.

## 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the shift, both operationally and strategically, in responding to the local risk of sexual exploitation for Reading's children and vulnerable adults be acknowledged;
- 2.2 That the application of the strategic and operational infrastructure to achieve the best response in the prevention and management of exploitation be endorsed;
- 2.3 That the continued support to prevention and early intervention activity in mitigating and managing a Reading response to the criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults be approved;
- 2.4 That the nature of criminal exploitation is an ever changing environment be recognised and thereby continuous learning and adaptation of practice and process to best safeguard Reading's children be supported.

## 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The definition of Child Sexual (capitalise all or none)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.
- 3.2 The approach adopted in addressing CSE in Reading is based upon the 'Child Sexual Exploitation Definition and Guide' 2017. This advice is non-statutory, and assists practitioners, local leaders and decision makers who work with children and families to identify child sexual exploitation and take appropriate action in response. This includes the management, disruption and prosecution of perpetrators.
- 3.3 At the point of the Ofsted Inspection summer 2016 Reading Borough Council's approach to CSE was underdeveloped and lacked the professional curiosity required to keep children safe and to learn collectively as a partnership how the risks should best be addressed in Reading. The collective response to CSE was process rather than event driven. The result of this was that we (and partners) were unable to ascertain the full nature or scale of the CSE risk in Reading. The data set was incomplete and did not capture the underlying risk/trends pertaining to CSE in Reading. Challenge and scrutiny functions were weak.
- 3.4 There were concerns across the children's workforce regarding the knowledge and understanding of risk as well as the application and consistent use of tools.
- 3.5 Significant activity has been undertaken across the partnership to address the system and practice weaknesses in managing the risk of CSE. Experts bringing

experience of learning from other Local Authorities have added insight and credibility to local experience and re-shaped the established direction.

- 3.6 The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has reviewed the Terms of Reference of its CSE sub-group and revised their strategy in order to better address CSE. The sub-group is now chaired by the Deputy Borough Commander from Thames Valley Police. CSE remains a priority for the LSCB as defined by the new LSCB Chair (December 2017.)
- 3.7 The approach to victims of CSE has been amended to ensure that they receive tailored individual support plans and risk assessments addressing strengths and vulnerabilities with a view primarily to safeguarding the child, whilst gathering intelligence and identifying perpetrators of exploitation.
- 3.8 The Chief Executive of Reading Borough Council routinely chairs multi-agency briefings with senior police personnel to identify and address strategic issues and to drive corporate commitment to raising awareness and improving outcomes for children at risk of CSE.
- 3.9 An experienced CSE consultant was employed by RBC (in the summer and autumn of 2017) to drive a partnership approach with all key stakeholders including police, health and education. This work raised the CSE profile and awareness across Reading and established strategic and operational partnerships to supplement the work of the LSCB. (These approaches will be utilised to address other emerging issues of adolescent risk - see below The Proposal)
- 3.10 A retrospective review of CSE cases in Reading combined with learning from current cases over the summer of 2017 provided an opportunity to learn and adapt local process to meet the requirements of local risk.
- 3.11 The creation of the Children's Single Point of Access (SPoA) combined with the learning from a local police operation facilitated the revision of a number of operational pathways to address CSE and Missing Children. This has resulted in daily meetings to address 'missing' children as a shared priority for police and children's services.
- 3.12 Specialist CSE practitioners have been added to the SPoA. It is intended that this specialist unit will in time be phased out as the pathways, knowledge and understanding become business as usual for professionals across the whole partnership.
- 3.14 There are currently (January 2018) 8 children who are looked after by the Local Authority who are identified as victims of CSE. The cost to the Local Authority of their placements is currently £13,429/week (This equates to an annual Children Looked After placement cost of £688k for CSE alone). There are an additional 65 children who are identified as 'at risk' of CSE and their cases are managed across Early Help and Statutory Social Care teams. In January 2017 only 12 children were identified as engaged in or at risk of CSE. This increase represents a 600% increase in identification and delivery of services to children in the past 12 months.

## 4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Recent evidence in Reading suggests that the criminal exploitation of children reaches beyond that of CSE. The recent escalation of youth violence and the use of weapons points to an emerging 'County Lines' issue in Reading.
- 4.2 County Lines is a police term for describing child (and vulnerable adult) criminal exploitation to move drugs and money. It is a cross cutting issue involving, drugs, violence, sexual and criminal exploitation, modern slavery and missing persons.
- 4.3 County lines activity and the associated violence and exploitation has a devastating impact on young and vulnerable people and their communities. Like CSE county lines exploitation;
  - a) can affect any child or young person or vulnerable adult over 18 years
  - b) can still be exploitation even if it appears consensual
  - c) can involve force and/or enticements often accompanied by violence or the threat of violence
  - d) can be perpetrated by individual or group of males or females who are young or old
  - e) is typified by some form of power imbalance
- 4.4 The local and national picture on County Lines continues to develop. What is known is that county lines groups are able to adapt their practice. The full scale of child involvement is not yet known or understood. 65% of regions nationally report the criminal exploitation of children and 85% of all activity references the use of knives. (National Crime Agency; County Lines Violence, Exploitation & Drug Supply 2017; National Briefing November 2017)
- 4.5 There are significant gaps around the known level of exploitation of children both locally and nationally. There is no consistent or proactive way of identifying if a vulnerable person/child has entered another police force area or Local Authority area. Safeguarding opportunities rely on the child being subject to a stop check or being present when warrants or safeguarding visits are conducted. The risk to the child in this instance is that it could be too late to adequately protect the child and harm may already have occurred once the child is known and identified. Elements of the criminal exploitation picture will be held on a range of different partner agencies systems, therefore there is scope for increased intelligence sharing and coordination to improve the collaborative response.
- 4.6 Reading Borough Council must continue to work collaboratively with key stakeholders in identifying and addressing risk. Data and intelligence should be shared appropriately and proportionately. Awareness must be raised across all agencies in collaboration with the LSCB. Both the operational and strategic management groups established in response to CSE should be adapted to address the emerging and broadening criminal exploitation risk to Reading's children and vulnerable adults.

- 4.7 Like CSE the approach to County lines is not statutory. The delivery of preventative and early disruptive activity is reliant upon the provision of early intervention and preventative intervention with children and young people across a wide spectrum.
- 4.8 The activity relating to missing persons should be maintained and should be delivered with rigour as it affords the most tangible early indicator of risk at present. Daily missing meetings should be maintained and appropriately serviced. Return Home Interviews for all children must be routinely carried out in line with guidance and information appropriately utilised to mitigate the risk of exploitation.
- 4.9 Reading Borough Council should continue to learn from the emerging national picture on Criminal exploitation of Children. Reading Children's Services should also be open to learning from local evidence, learning from feedback from children supported by statistical evidence from police, health, education and the community and voluntary sector.

## **5 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

- 5.1 This report is in line with the overall direction of the Council by meeting the following Corporate Plan priorities:
- a. Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable;
  - b. Providing the best start in life through education, early help and healthy living.

## **6 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 6.1 In order to provide the best opportunity to prevent harm to children and vulnerable persons through all forms of criminal exploitation Reading's Children's Services should work with existing and emerging networks including key partner bodies including the LSCB and the Community Safety Partnership.

## **7 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 An Impact Assessment is not relevant to the preparation of this report.

## **8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Whilst there are no legal implications in relation to this report, it is important to note that under Children's Services Legislation, we are required under a general duty of the Children's Act 2004 to address the quality of services and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

## **9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no financial implications as a direct result of this report.
- 9.2 Consideration as to the ability of Reading Borough Council to respond to the risk of criminal exploitation will be determined as the full impact of budget saving

proposals are fully known and the impact of prevention and early intervention activity better understood.

## 10 BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers review of the effectiveness of the local safeguarding board. August 2016

<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/reading>

10.2 Child sexual exploitation Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/591903/CSE\\_Guidance\\_Core\\_Document\\_13.02.2017.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591903/CSE_Guidance_Core_Document_13.02.2017.pdf)

10.3 County Lines Violence, Exploitation & Drug Supply 2017

<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/832-county-lines-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2017/file>