

## **AVON AND SOMERSET POLICE AND CRIME PANEL**

**15 MARCH 2017**

### **CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (CSE): OVERVIEW OF APPROACH AND PROGRESS**

#### **PURPOSE**

This report sets out an overview of the approach in Avon and Somerset to tackling Child Sexual Exploitation, progress and challenges, and invites Panel Members to consider how they can support and scrutinise activity at a local level.

#### **OVERVIEW**

In recent years, both the prevalence of the sexual exploitation of children and the inadequacies of agency responses to address it have been exposed by a series of high profile cases nationally. Many children are targeted for sexual exploitation across all of our communities in a variety of contexts. A significant proportion of those children have pre-existing vulnerabilities, are repeatedly victimised and those targeted frequently suffer lasting and serious harm as a result of their victimisation.

The vast majority of victimised children will not report their abuse either to parents or authorities for a variety of increasingly well understood reasons. Many sexually exploited children do not quickly recognise their targeting as abuse. In the early stages, many will derive enjoyment from the attention and affection that they perceive the perpetrator to be showing them. When they do begin to understand the true motivation of their abusers, they often blame themselves for what is happening and perpetrators use a variety of tactics to maintain their hold over victims, prevent identification of victimisation by safeguarding agencies and facilitate continuation of the abuse. Victims and perpetrators do, however, frequently come to the attention of the police as well as health and social care service providers.

Children who have been victimised through CSE are disproportionately likely to:

- Abuse drugs and/or alcohol
- Be missing from care and/or education
- Become pregnant and/or suffer STIs
- Suffer mental ill-health (and exhibit self-harm or have suicidal ideations)
- Be further victimised through domestic abuse and other sexual and violent assault
- Be involved in crime and anti-social behaviour

Taking effective action to prevent children being sexually exploited can not only greatly enhance the life outcomes of vulnerable children; it can also avoid the need for long-term resource intensive interventions from all public services. Identifying and intervening to stop the abuse of vulnerable children not only limits the harm caused to the victims but stops the offending of perpetrators by holding them to account through the criminal justice system or, at the very least, disrupting their abuse.

The extent of CSE has been largely hidden for so long for a number of reasons. Those targeted are usually older children between 12 and 17. It is generally acknowledged that child protection and safeguarding processes are primarily configured to respond to younger children suffering harm from within their circle of family or carers. Children have increasing agency as they near adulthood and victims have frequently been viewed by professionals as ‘making choices’ without sufficient understanding of how limited those choices really are. Although victims of other forms of sexual abuse tend to be regarded as powerless and vulnerable children being targeted by predatory paedophiles, those being sexually exploited are often seen as promiscuous, out of control trouble-makers who are at least partly responsible for their own victimisation. Traditionally, policing responses are predominantly victim led and with most victims not

reporting and sometimes denying their abuse, those responses can be ineffective. UK culture is tolerant of the sexualisation of children, pornographic imagery is easily accessible to many children and a plethora of online social media platforms and messaging systems provide opportunities for CSE to flourish.

There has been considerable focus by all organisations with responsibility for safeguarding children on tackling CSE. All 5 local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs) within Avon and Somerset have established sub-committees specifically overseeing multi-agency responses to CSE. Each has devised a CSE Strategy to address the problem from perspectives of (1) prevention, primarily through awareness raising, (2) protection of children being targeted and (3) pursuing and confronting the exploitative activities of perpetrators. There has been considerable training and awareness raising activity and the number of children identified, both as at heightened risk and being targeted, has increased significantly. There are currently 9 major or complex CSE police investigations underway across the force area and a number of serious perpetrators have been recently convicted and given long sentences of imprisonment.

## Definition

HM Government: "*Child sexual exploitation 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.*" (2017)

A number of models of CSE have been identified, although all the above applies to every type:

- **Imbalance of power:** Teacher/group leader/religious leader/physical strength/position of trust and/or authority;
- **Boyfriend/Girlfriend:** Young person believes that they are in a physical and/or emotional relationship;
- **Peer on peer:** Recruited, groomed and/or exploited by young people. May be mistaken for exploration - "exploration without consent is exploitation";
- **Online (virtual):** Groomed online by the use of social media, chat rooms or online gaming. Exploitation takes place online without physical contact;
- **Online (physical):** Groomed online with the aim of physically meeting a young person offline for sexual exploitation;
- **Groups:** Young people are trafficked within the UK by criminal networks and commercially sexually exploited;
- **Gangs:** Young people recruited into postcode-type gangs coerced into criminal activity and sexual exploitation.

## National Context

In August 2014, Professor Alexis Jay published the report of her review into the organised sexual exploitation of a large number of children in Rotherham over a long period. Tackling CSE became a priority for both the Department for Education and the Home Office and The Government published its expectations of organisations with responsibility for safeguarding children, "*Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation*" in March 2015. Considerable research has been carried out into CSE and a National CSE Response Unit has been established providing support and guidance to local practitioners. Local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs) across the country have been working on improving their responses. This has led to a large increase in the identification of children at risk of or being targeted for CSE.

## **Local Context**

The recently published Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Plan places tackling CSE at the heart of local policing priorities for the coming Year. Protecting the vulnerable from harm is Priority 1 with specific reference to the need to improve services for victims of CSE.

## **AVON AND SOMERSET APPROACH**

All police officers and members of police staff have a statutory obligation to perform their duties with the need to promote and safeguard the welfare of children and to co-operate with local authorities in doing so central to their policing approach. Additionally, some police investigators receive additional training to equip them to effectively investigate concerns of child abuse in line with approved professional practice published by the College of Policing and within stipulated multi-agency safeguarding and child protection procedures. In most forces, these officers become specialists, working within dedicated child abuse investigation teams and some forces have additionally established CSE teams, sometimes co-located with partner agencies, focussing specifically on investigating child sexual exploitation.

Any member of Avon and Somerset police staff having a concern about the welfare of a child is expected to share that concern with the Safeguarding Coordination Units where the multi-agency responses required to safeguard the children concerned will be overseen. The force has moved away from the use of specialist investigative teams but has a cohort of staff who have undergone the '*specialist child abuse investigators development programme*' and to whom the most serious child abuse investigations are allocated. This approach has been designed to enable the force to manage the fast-increasing proportion of investigatory work that involves abuse of children or the vulnerable. Recognising the proactive approach necessary to tackle CSE effectively, a pilot operation (Topaz) has been established for six months in Bristol in which specialist leadership and direction is provided to CSE investigations to maximise the potential for positive outcomes. If judged successful, this approach may be adopted force-wide.

## **Constabulary / Partnership Working – LSCBs**

LSCBs have the statutory role of ensuring that organisations with responsibility for safeguarding children work together in a manner that is both well-coordinated and effective. LSCBs are strategic rather than operational but establish the thresholds, policies and procedures that provide a framework within which organisations fulfil their operational safeguarding responsibilities. They audit practice to quality assure responses and conduct serious case reviews when a child dies or suffers serious abuse or neglect. They then oversee a continuous process of practice improvement. Avon and Somerset has 5 LSCBs covering the local authority areas. In 2016, Bristol's LSCB published a serious case review following the serious sexual exploitation of a number of girls by a group of men. The review report made 7 key findings providing a number of opportunities for improvement of multi-agency practice responses in future CSE cases.

## **The West of England CSE Victim Identification and Support Service**

The West of England CSE Service is a collaboration between Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Wiltshire Police, Barnardo's, the seven local authorities within these police areas and the Home Office Policing Innovation Fund. This service was born of a recognition that most children suffering or at heightened risk of sexual exploitation were not being identified as such and therefore not provided with support. Nationally, it is recognised that children suffering CSE benefit from building consistent and positive relationships with trusted people who can help them to understand, escape and survive their abuse.

The West of England CSE Service received funding of just over £2 million over two years, 56% of which was provided by the Home Office. This money directly funded a senior responsible officer, service administrator, 15 full-time equivalent specialist CSE support workers and a specialist CSE training officer.

Across Avon and Somerset, the specialist CSE support has been provided by Barnardo's BASE. The specialist training officer has also been provided by Barnardo's and has worked across the entire project area. To date, the specialist support workers have worked with more than 300 chronically sexually exploited children. Specialist CSE training awareness has been delivered to nearly 5000 professionals across the children's workforce. The number of children who have been identified as having been victimised or targeted for sexual exploitation and subject of safeguarding activity has increased sharply during the period of the project. There are more CSE police investigations ongoing within Avon and Somerset now than there have ever been hitherto. A 'CSE Network' process has been established within the force area which focuses on complex CSE cases ensuring that the right links have been made, that appropriate action is being taken to identify suspects and that proactive and effective steps are being taken to confront those who perpetrate CSE proportionate to the level of threat, harm and risk they pose.

In November 2016, multi agency informed CSE profiles were published in relation to each of the 5 local authority areas of Avon and Somerset (and an integrated version for the force). The 'Police Foundation' was commissioned to produce these documents using an underspend of the Service, triangulating and analysing personalised data provided by police, children's social care and health organisations across the area. Although it is acknowledged that available CSE data remains incomplete, these profiles provide the best information currently available about the nature and prevalence of known CSE within the force area.

The West of England CSE service has a two-tier governance structure. The Senior Governance Group comprises directors of children's services for each of the seven local authorities involved, senior police officers and representatives of the police and crime commissioners for the two forces, Barnardo's and the Home Office. The Operational Group, which has provided leadership and direction to the service, comprises the chairs of all seven LSCB subgroups and other members as agreed necessary.

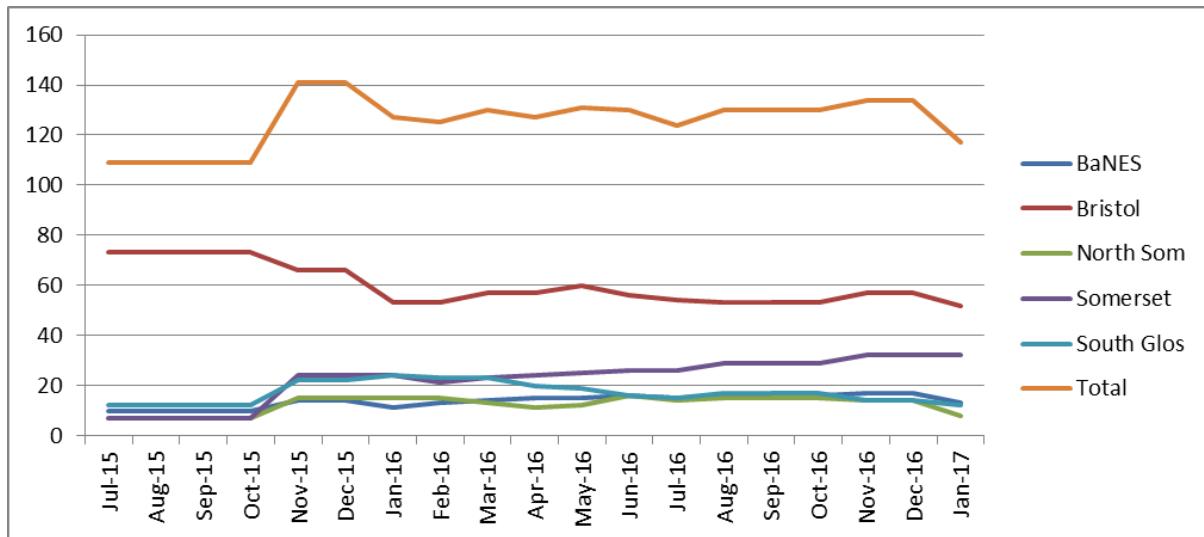
A national and regional structure has been established in order to provide consistent and effective police leadership and coordination to forces in England and Wales that will support them in working with partner organisations to tackle CSE. A regional coordinator and analyst lead a south-west group that feeds into a national CSE working group. Avon and Somerset Constabulary coordinates the south-west regional Communication Strategy raising awareness of CSE across our communities. The force Corporate Communications department has designed and disseminated a range of posters, leaflets and other resources to raise awareness among all those who come into contact with vulnerable children.

## **PERFORMANCE HEADLINES AND PROGRESS**

The capture of reliable CSE specific data presents a challenge for all organisations. Most safeguarding organisations do not have a flagging system for CSE affected children or cases in which CSE features. CSE is not one crime type with many offences being committed in the course of the sexual exploitation of children. Avon and Somerset use a force CSE label that can be applied to recorded incidents. However, the label is used primarily to prompt staff to 'think CSE' appropriately and so its application is relatively arbitrary. In order to drive CSE performance improvement, there has been a focus on the recording of reliable data over the last two years. Although the below information must be viewed with some caution, it does illustrate the developing picture in relation to CSE coming to the attention of the force.

Prior to the West of England CSE Service, Barnardo's BASE had been providing specialist support to affected children in Bristol for 20 years and some South Gloucestershire children also accessed that service. There was no specialist CSE support service anywhere else in the force area. The below chart illustrates the number of children supported through this service but Barnardo's have also accessed other charitable funding that allows them to support additional children in the force area. The evaluation of the West of England Service is yet to be completed. However the interim evaluation report published at the end of year 1 of the project provided compelling evidence that children provided with specialist support rated it highly and showed positive progress in key risk areas (e.g. missing person episodes, stable and secure accommodation and substance misuse).

## Number of children receiving specialist CSE support through the West of England CSE Service in Avon and Somerset



### CSE Recorded in Avon and Somerset - Occurrences (Crimes) with CSE Force Label

	2013	2014	2015	2016
January	0	25 (9)	26 (2)	24 (19)
February	0	30 (11)	52 (22)	21 (16)
March	0	29 (11)	44 (19)	20 (16)
April	11 (1)	28 (12)	28 (13)	35 (23)
May	17 (8)	26 (8)	47 (29)	34 (29)
June	22 (7)	26 (5)	52 (28)	18 (13)
July	31 (15)	22 (12)	53 (25)	24 (20)
August	24 (12)	16 (4)	32 (15)	20 (12)
September	25 (11)	23 (6)	33 (22)	52 (26)
October	22 (9)	25 (9)	44 (36)	29 (17)
November	30 (13)	23 (3)	33 (29)	35 (11)
December	28 (15)	33 (12)	36 (30)	25 (7)
<b>TOTAL per Year</b>	<b>210 (91)</b>	<b>306 (96)</b>	<b>480 (270)</b>	<b>337 (209)</b>

Positive Outcomes From Police Investigations				
	2013	2014	2015	2016
Recorded Crimes	91	96	270	209
Positive Outcomes	33	36	32	21
<b>RATE</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>10%</b>

After a sharp rise in recorded occurrences and crimes from 2013 to 2015, there was an apparent significant reduction in 2016 (although January and February 2016 have shown further sharp rises – 59 and 51). The reasons for this have been investigated and it appears that the reduction is explained by less use of the CSE tag rather than any actual drop in recording of CSE occurrences. It is likely that a change in incident and crime recording software in September 2015 included changes to the tagging process that may have resulted in staff initially having less confidence in how to apply the tag. The rate of positive outcomes has declined significantly. This is likely to reflect the additional challenges in achieving positive

outcomes in CSE cases in which the victim will not support police investigation or prosecution. Disruption activity that may stop abuse is not currently recorded as a positive outcome. This is being addressed through process changes and has seen significant improvements in 2017 figures.

## **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Tackling CSE effectively is challenging but success promises to bring rewards in terms of the well-being of our communities, demand on policing and social and health care service providers and the public purse.

Agencies must proactively and quickly respond to protect children targeted for CSE who are not reporting a crime and are often resistant to interventions to stop serious harm and criminality. Those targeting vulnerable children must be identified and their abusive activities stopped or disrupted, often without the testimony or support of victims. Much exploitation occurs between peers and victims are often used to recruit others to be exploited. The line between victim and perpetrator can be a blurred one.

All professionals working with children must acclimatise to engaging and involving older children with increasing agency in safeguarding work to enhance their welfare. However, whilst doing so, they must explicitly acknowledge that exploited children are not responsible for their own victimisation, understand their lack of informed choice and respond actively to stop abuse when it is suspected.

## **FUTURE SERVICE**

Dedicated Home Office funding for the West of England Service will cease at the end of this financial year. However, the Avon and Somerset collaboration will continue and the local authorities and Police and Crime Commissioner have undertaken to increase their contributions to minimise the fiscal shortfall to a 15% reduction to current funding. A joint commissioning group, led by the OPCC, has been established in order to take forward the learning from the West of England Service and look to commission ongoing specialist support for victims of CSE and the professionals who support them. Barnardo's will be grant funded to provide an interim service for the first half of next financial year with a new commissioned service taking over following a competitive tendering process on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017. This service will be commissioned for a period finishing 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

## **WHAT CAN PANEL MEMBERS DO IN THEIR ROLE**

CSE is child sexual abuse but effective responses require all safeguarding practitioners to adjust their focus to harm being caused to older children from outside the family circle and those known to them. This requires a change from traditional organisational safeguarding culture. Children's Partnerships, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Overview and Scrutiny Committees all have an important part to play in supporting those engaged in early help, child in need and child protection activity to adapt practice to effectively prevent, confront and stop the exploitation of children. Higher quality data will be required if reliable assurance can be provided that constantly developing responses are becoming truly effective.

The multi-agency CSE profiles have been designed to be published without restriction and to contribute to joint strategic needs assessments informing service configuration and commissioning decision making. It is suggested that wide dissemination of these documents, currently restricted by LSCBs, would provide a valuable awareness-raising opportunity for the children's workforce within local communities.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That Panel Members consider and discuss progress in tackling Child Sexual Exploitation as outlined in the report.