



## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

### SCRUTINY PANEL 1 Child Sexual Exploitation

8 September 2016

#### BRIEFING NOTE: BACKGROUND DATA

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 At its inaugural scoping meeting, Scrutiny Panel 1 (Child Sexual Exploitation) agreed that it would receive details of background research reports to inform its evidence base.

1.2 The research papers for consideration by the Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 8 September 2016 are:

1.2.1 **Barnado's "*Its not on the radar*"**

#### **Executive Summary**

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) can affect all children – including those with disabilities – regardless of gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or economic background. Nevertheless, public and professional perception often stereotypes victims of CSE as white girls from disadvantaged backgrounds who are assumed to be heterosexual. While some victims and children at risk do meet this description, assumptions can prevent the identification of other children who do not fit the stereotype

In 2015, a series of four round tables was held with experts in the fields of CSE and diversity to discuss how the two areas connect. The roundtables focused on:

- boys and young men
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning (LGBTQ) young people
- disability<sup>1</sup>
- ethnicity and faith.

Bringing together the findings of the roundtable events and additional research, *'It's not on the radar'* explores how perceptions of sexual exploitation can affect the identification of and response to CSE.<sup>2</sup>

Understanding CSE and the different methods that perpetrators use to exploit must be considered in parallel with the fact that children are not defined by one aspect of their identity. A victim of sexual exploitation may have multiple identities and, for example, be male, gay, come from a faith group that does not tolerate homosexuality and have a disability. What makes a young person vulnerable to sexual exploitation is very individual, and while an identity alone may not result in vulnerability, all aspects of a child's identity must be considered when identifying and raising awareness of CSE.

Due to the complex identities of individuals, there are many themes that cut across all four areas. For example:

- A young person's chronological age may be different from their developmental age, or apparently at odds with their experience of relationships, for example if they have a learning disability or come out as LGBT in their late teens or early twenties.
- Young people and professionals may normalise abuse experienced through CSE, either because of lack of knowledge about CSE or because it is viewed as 'normal' for, or by, the network or group the young person has been exploited in.
- The lack of sex and relationships education affects all young people, regardless of their identity, although some children – such as those with learning disabilities or those who are LGBTQ – are less likely to receive any, or relevant, sex and relationships education

There are a number of factors that are relevant to particular 'groups' of children and young people addressed in this report. The roundtable events identified the following key findings:

### **Boys and young men:**

- Societal values regarding masculinity and perceptions of males as perpetrators are seen to mask the fact that boys and young men can be victims too.
- Males seem to find it particularly hard to disclose abuse.
- Fear of being labelled gay, particularly in communities where there is homophobia, can prevent disclosure.
- There is too little recognition of the fact that a male can be both a victim and a perpetrator.

- Boys can be sexually exploited by peers, particularly in gang situations.
- Research has found that male and female CSE victims share certain common traits but also exhibit significant differences in terms of, for example, disability and youth offending rates.<sup>3</sup>
- It might be assumed that young men engaging in sex are doing so because they are highly sexualised, gay or bisexual, and not because they are being exploited

### **Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning (LGBTQ) young people:**

- LGBTQ young people may feel isolated and believe there will be a lack of acceptance by other people regarding their sexuality and gender identity. They may seek support via adult-orientated groups, online or, in the case of boys and young men, in public sex environments such as 'cottages' or 'cruising grounds'.
- There is little in the way of educational resources or general information that provides advice to LGBTQ young people about what a healthy relationship is.
- Professionals should only share information about a young person's sexuality and gender identity if the young person has agreed that they can do this. Agreement should also be reached on those individuals with whom this information may be shared.
- Possible sexual exploitation in lesbian and trans relationships should be given equal consideration as sexual exploitation within male gay relationships
- LGBT communities might be reluctant to talk about or acknowledge CSE for fear of exacerbating homo/bi/transphobia

### **Ethnicity and faith:**

- Community and faith groups are not homogenous and there can be a diversity of cultural and religious practices within communities.
- Victims of sexual exploitation come from all ethnic backgrounds, regardless of how conservative or 'protected' children may appear.
- Cultural and religious views and practices, particularly those that prize a female's virginity or a male's heterosexuality, may prevent victims from speaking out due to a fear of retribution or rejection from families.
- Access to communities should be via a broad range of stakeholders, rather than solely through male religious leaders, and particularly through those with child-centred perspectives.
- Working with groups that are committed to child protection and to opposing violence and abuse, such as women's organisations and others not often associated with CSE, could enable better identification of victims.

## **Disabilities:**

- Children and young people with a disability are three times more likely to be abused than children without a disability.<sup>4</sup> Within this group, children with behaviour or conduct disorders are particularly vulnerable
- Children and young people with disabilities are often over-protected and not informed about sex and relationships.
- The transition from children's services into independent living is a particularly vulnerable time for young people with disabilities.
- Learning difficulties or delayed development may be a consequence of trauma or sexual abuse.
- A lack of diagnosis and assessment for learning disabilities can result in a child's behaviour being misunderstood, and exclusion from school. This can lead to the child being vulnerable to CSE.
- The true scale of sexual exploitation is unknown, and it is recognised that that while not all children and young people will be victims, all must be given the confidence and resilience to identify risky relationships and develop healthy ones. No child is ever to blame for their abuse, regardless of their actions, and adults must be aware of the issue and confident to identify and respond, regardless of the sexuality and gender identity, ethnicity, faith or disability of the child concerned.

1.2.2 A copy of the [full report](#) can be accessed.

### **1.2.3 HM Government – Tackling CSE**

1.2.3.1 In March 2015, HM Government published the above briefing paper. This report sets out how the government is dealing with child sexual exploitation and responding to the failures that have been identified

1.2.3.2 In August 2014, Professor Alexis Jay published a review of CSE in Rotherham. It showed that organised CSE had been happening on a huge scale over a number of years. Local Agencies had dismissed concerns or put in place an inadequate response. Louise Casey produced a report on 4 February 2015 that detailed that since the Jay report, many in the Council and its partners had continued to deny the scale of the problem and not enough action had been taken to stop the abuse.

1.2.3.3 The actions in the report are reported to create a step change in the Government's response. Highlights include:

- A new whistleblowing national portal for child abuse related reports that will help to bring CSE to light and will be able to spot patterns of failure across the country.
- A new national taskforce, and a centre of expertise will support areas that are struggling to get it right.
- The Government will eradicate the culture of denial, its actions include consulting on an extension to the new 'wilful neglect' offence to children's social care, education and elected members.
- To help tackle offenders the Government has given child sexual abuse the status of a national threat in the Strategic Policing Requirement so that this is prioritised by every Police Force.
- To support survivors the Government gave an additional £7 million in 2014 and in 2015/16 to organisations which support those who have experienced sexual abuse.

1.2.3.4 A copy of the [full report](#) can be accessed.

### **1.2.3.5 Local Government Association – Tackling CSE – A resource pack for Councils (2015)**

1.2.3.5.1 The Local Government Association (LGA) reports that recent events have shown that all areas need to be prepared to respond to this challenge robustly, and there are many good examples of effective work to be found around the country. The case studies in its report and online are reported to showcase some of the work that is already underway to improve local practice. These cover initiatives such as community engagement, regional work across local authority boundaries, building effective multi-agency partnerships and commissioning independent audits of local work.

1.2.3.6 Alongside these case studies, the LGA reports that its 2015 resource pack contains a range of materials that councils may find useful when planning work locally. This includes an overview of key learning from recent reports and inquiries, a myth busting guide to common stereotypes around CSE, and advice for councillors on how to assess the effectiveness of local practice. Further resources, including training tools and advice on working with the media are available online, and will be updated regularly.

1.2.3.7 The LGA highlights that tackling child sexual exploitation must be a priority for everyone, and the resources available in its 2015 report

highlight the very real difference that councils and their partners can make in preventing this awful crime – and the crucial role of Councillors within this. This resource aims to help Councils implement effective responses to child sexual exploitation within their own organisation, with their local partners and their communities.

1.2.3.8 The LGA states that recognising that councils will have different approaches and circumstances, it does not set out a 'one-size-fits-all' resource that all councils should follow. It is reported that the Guide brings together and shares a set of resources, both new and existing, in order to provide Councils with ideas and materials that can be adapted to suit local needs. It includes briefings, communications support, training materials and case studies

1.2.3.9 A copy of the [Resource Pack](#) can be accessed.

1.2.3.10 Details of further research papers will be presented to future meetings.

## **2 RECOMMENDATION**

2.1 That the information provided in this briefing note informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

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