

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

## Cabinet

9 October 2014

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| <b>SUBJECT:</b>                      | <b>Child Sexual Exploitation</b>       |
| <b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>              | <b>All Wards</b>                       |
| <b>REPORT OF:</b>                    | <b>Director of Children's Services</b> |
| <b>RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b> | <b>Councillor Tony Smith</b>           |
| <b>KEY DECISION</b>                  | <b>No</b>                              |

### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is written following the enquiry into Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council by Professor Alexis Jay, published in August 2014. It is an outline of the issues arising from the Rotherham Enquiry. It provides details of work that is already taking place to address Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in Wirral, and future work that is planned.
- 1.2 Child sexual exploitation is tackled effectively when there is clear and committed leadership and where safeguarding professionals cooperate together. In Wirral direction is provided through the Local Safeguarding Children Board and a regional approach to strategic partnership working. This report sets out a plan of action, delivered with key partner agencies, to identify and support young people at risk of CSE. It explains the range of responses and services that are provided and how greater engagement of the community will support early identification of the risks.

### 2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The report by Professor Alexis Jay estimates that 1,400 children were sexually exploited in Rotherham between 1997 and 2013. Professor Jay's report describes the level of abuse as 'appalling' and says it included the rape of girls as young as 11 by large numbers of male perpetrators.

In response to the report Alan Wood, the president of the Association of Director's of Children's Services, has stated that:

"The publication of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham this week must serve as a call to action for all safeguarding partners to ensure that the voices of children, young people and their families raising similar concerns in the future are both heard, believed and acted upon and that the necessary help and support is provided when they need it most".

Professor Jay's report made 15 recommendations which included:

- Undertaking and reviewing risk assessments on vulnerable children.
- Protecting children who are looked after, particularly those placed out of borough and those likely to be exposed to CSE.
- Local Authorities to ensure outreach work is available to young people who might not access services.
- Ensuring responses to CSE are properly resourced and communicated.
- Agencies working together to respond to CSE including ensuring long term and therapeutic support is available to victims.
- Engagement between authorities and minority ethnic communities.

The full recommendations can be found in Professor Jay's report and all of which have been considered in developing an action plan for Wirral.

Within Professor Jay's Report, reference is made to the former Director of Public Prosecutions, Keir Starmer, who revised the Crown Prosecution Services guidance on child sexual exploitation in October 2013. The guidance was revised to include a list of stereotypical assumptions previously thought to undermine the credibility of young victims. These included:

- "The victim invited sex by the way they dressed or acted."
- "The victim used alcohol or drugs and was therefore sexually available."
- "The victim didn't scream, fight or protest so they must have been consenting."
- "The victim didn't complain immediately, so it cant have been a sexual assault."
- "The victim is in a relationship with the alleged offender and is therefore also a willing partner."
- "A victim should remember events consistently."
- "Children can consent to their own sexual exploitation."
- "CSE is only a problem in certain ethnic /cultural communities."
- "Only girls and young women are victims of child sexual abuse."
- "Children from BME backgrounds are not abused."
- "There will be physical evidence of abuse."

All of these assumptions have been referred to at some point in historic files read by the authors of the Rotherham report, and usually cited as reasons given by the Police or Crown Prosecution Service for not pursuing suspected perpetrators. This list of stereotypes will be used as a reference point to challenge perceptions of CSE, and responses and behaviours across the Council, partnerships and in the community. This will be done by using this checklist to underpin and inform training, supervision of professionals and case file auditing, to ensure cultural issues are addressed.

The Association of Independent LSCB Chairs have also issued a response to the Rotherham CSE report based on work undertaken by LSCB's across the country to respond to CSE. Their research points to a number of essential factors to enable an effective response to CSE. These include:

- Organisations being alert to the reality of the sexual exploitation of young people.

- Police and children's services having active strategies to disrupt criminal networks.
- Organisations being aware that challenging behaviour by young people shouldn't be discounted as bad behaviour, and may be a cry for help.
- Local leaders being aware and ready to hear the reality of life for vulnerable young people and to ensure professionals are free to voice their concerns – which will be heard and respected.
- Acknowledging that combating CSE requires the active involvement of the whole community and service agencies.
- All child safeguarding education and training should contain a comprehensive section on sexual exploitation, recognising that it has profound health consequences, so that health professionals are supported to respond appropriately to victims.

### **3.0 Key Strategic Partnerships**

Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWBs) are responsible for linking the NHS, public health and social care with a wide range of partners. HWBs provide the platform for ensuring commissioned services meet the needs of their local populations. The HWB's decision on whether to prioritise child sexual exploitation should be an informed one, based on a local understanding of the issue. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board, Safeguarding Adults Protection Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) have a draft protocol in place to describe how they work strategically together to address safeguarding priorities in the area. This protocol will be considered at the next meeting of the HWB when the joint approach to tackling CSE will be confirmed.

Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) play a key part in promoting a good response to child sexual exploitation through their co-ordination and monitoring of single and multi-agency safeguarding activity, convening a sub group as appropriate and having a child sexual exploitation strategy, which also links to safeguarding of children missing from care or home and trafficked children. This approach is adopted in Wirral.

Services are needed that provide a range of interventions to young people who have experienced child sexual exploitation, or to adults who later disclose their childhood experiences. These interventions should range from signposting for support, to long term therapeutic interventions. Current service provision will be reviewed in consultation with young people.

A good response to child sexual exploitation requires a multi-agency approach because each agency has specific responsibilities and expertise to offer. The Child Sexual Exploitation sub group of the LSCB provides leadership of this multi-agency approach and leads on the delivery of the CSE action plan.

### **4.0 The Current Position in Wirral Council**

In Wirral the prevention of Child Sexual Exploitation is a priority action area for the WSCB, all activity is currently being reviewed in the light of the Jay Report and it's recommendations. This is enabling all partners to test their own responses to vulnerable children, young people and their families, and the effectiveness of our

multi agency systems to detect and respond quickly to each and every instance of child sexual exploitation.

In 2012 the Board established a multi-agency strategic CSE sub group including partners from social care, the local authority, police, health agencies, education, public health and the Response service. The sub group works to an action plan linked to an agreed Merseyside protocol for responding to CSE. An important part of the work undertaken is to raise awareness of the risks of CSE.

Prior to this sub group there was a partnership group, reporting to the Area Child Protection Committee and then the LSCB that met to respond to a local report written in 2004 in relation to young runaways and children at risk of sexual exploitation. There was an action plan from the report that the group was responsible for implementing.

In Wirral, there are at any one time between 15 and 30 children who are being considered as at risk of CSE. This does not mean they all require a social work assessment , but it does mean that there needs to be a Multi Agency Child Sexual Exploitation (MACSE) meeting to share relevant intelligence and information to determine how to respond to each child's circumstances. This approach is part of an agreed protocol between Liverpool, St. Helens, Sefton, Wirral and Knowsley and Merseyside Police. The protocol, launched in May 2014 supports the work to identify and provide an assured response to children at risk of CSE. There is a further action going forward to ensure the protocol is embedded fully in practice.

When children are identified as at risk of CSE, they are referred to the MACSE meeting. These meetings have representation from Children's Services, the Police, Health and Catch 22. Catch 22 provide 1:1 support and direct work with children referred. The meeting enables intelligence to be gathered about where there is a risk of CSE , who may be at risk and who they may be at risk from. The information helps inform the Police regarding action against potential or actual offenders as well as addressing local areas or groups who require a more coordinated strategy to reduce risks.

Children may be referred for preventive services and support or a social work assessment. Children would then be subject to a plan to address the presenting safeguarding concerns.

There is an action plan which sets out a range of interventions at a strategic multi agency level, a number of which have already been completed. The CSE sub group has reviewed this action plan and continues to work on evidencing the impact of each of the actions taken. It has also reviewed the referral pathway to ensure that it is clear to professionals how they refer children who they are concerned may be at risk of CSE.

There is a regional group for CSE led by an Independent Chair of a Local Safeguarding Children's Board. The group has met recently for the first time to agree terms of reference and begin a self assessment of readiness to deal with issues of CSE across the region, in the light of the Rotherham enquiry. It takes account of previous reports and research, and tools provided by the National Working Group who advise Government on the issue of CSE.

## **5.0 Actions developed in response to the Recommendations from the Rotherham Enquiry**

An assessment of Wirral's partnership actions to date has been undertaken against the content and recommendations of the Jay Report. The actions detailed below have been or are being implemented to strengthen our strategies and approaches to further ensure our ability and capacity too respond to each and every instance of Child Sexual Exploitation.

- Practice guidance has been written to support the Regional CSE Protocol. Briefings will be given during October particularly on how CSE is recognised and responded to across agencies and professionals.
- "Chelsea's Choice", is a theatrical production which provides excellent awareness for, parents, professionals and young people on the issue of CSE. This will be presented at venues around Wirral everyday for a week during the autumn. Dates are being set and schools being approached to stage the play and workshop, which will follow.
- Meetings will take place this autumn with Head teachers of Primary and Secondary schools where they will be provided with the materials they need to raise awareness in their schools with staff and pupils.
- A group of key professionals will meet to look at what services we have and what we can do together to better identify and respond to these young people. The meetings will involve the Director and Strategic Director.
- A meeting of leaders of young people's involvement and participation services has been arranged to put in place a set of focus groups with young people to better understand their needs and what works to protect and safeguard them, particularly where there may be resource issues.
- A "problem profile" on CSE will be written, based on all the known intelligence/relevant data held across different agencies to inform strategic decision making and local practice development. It requires collective ownership across all partners to support its development and a committed/effective analyst to review and identify key findings and intelligence gaps. A meeting is in place to progress completing this work by the end of October this year.
- Thematic multi agency audits of cases will be undertaken in the coming weeks, where children have been harmed or at have been at risk of harm from CSE. Children's voices will be central to the audit and risk assessments will be reviewed on vulnerable children. The audits will include current cases and cases where there have previously been concerns in relation to CSE. There will also be a focus on children looked after who are placed out of borough.
- A meeting of the three party leaders is scheduled to take place at the end of October 2014 to discuss the findings of the Jay report and the response in Wirral. Following this, regular meetings of the Safeguarding Reference Group will be scheduled to ensure clear political oversight.

- Training for members on CSE is being delivered in November 2014.
- Wirral's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is now operational. The development of a MASH facilitates early information sharing; healthcare professionals are often in possession of key information, along with the Police and Social Care. It is vital that all representatives are involved to develop the most effective response.
- The promotion of services available to young people is being strengthened following focused work that is planned with young people.
- Partner agencies are undertaking an audit of the 'readiness' of their organisation to respond to CSE; this will be monitored through the CSE sub group and additional actions will be incorporated in the current plan.
- Engaging community groups such as taxi drivers and 'night time' economy workers to identify and offer support to vulnerable young people is already taking place, with further work scheduled.
- Improved engagement of minority ethnic communities through community leaders and the minority ethnic achievement service will be developed, and included more specifically in the action plan.

## **6.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 6.1 Without a coordinated multi agency strategy, children may not be appropriately safeguarded from CSE.
- 6.2 There are risks of claims against the Council if there are cases that emerge from the past where it is found the Council has not met its duties.

## **7.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 7.1 Not applicable.

## **8.0 CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 There is consultation planned with young people on the services currently in place and how they can be improved.

## **9.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS**

- 9.1 None.

## **10.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

- 10.1 The sector could provide important links for young people to access support. The hidden nature of child sexual exploitation means that engaging with voluntary or specialist groups at a local level may be the key to developing intelligence and understanding of the problem.

## **11.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

11.1 There will be costs to funding some of the promotional work that is part of the Wirral Safeguarding Children's Board's Action Plan. £4000 from the LSCB budget is planned to be spent on training and awareness raising.

## **12.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 There could be a finding against the Council if there is a successful claim made that the council failed in its duties.

## **13.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

13.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

(a) Yes and impact review can be found via the following link:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-april-2014/eias-families-wellbeing>

## **14.0 CARBON REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

14.1 None.

## **15.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

15.1 Consideration needs to be made as to how to address community safety needs, where the intelligence on CSE highlights particular areas where it is occurring

## **16.0 RECOMMENDATION/S**

16.1 To consider the report and to endorse the action plan.

## **17.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

17.1 To ensure members are briefed on the Rotherham enquiry findings and their implications for work on CSE in Wirral

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## **APPENDICES**

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS/REFERENCE MATERIAL**

1. The Rotherham Enquiry. Professor Alexis Jay : August 2014

2. "If only someone had listened": Office of the Children's Commissioners enquiry into child sexual exploitation; November 2013

3. Health Working Group Report on Child Sexual Exploitation: An independent group chaired by the Department of Health focusing on:

Improving the outcomes for children by promoting effective engagement of health services and staff ; January 2014

#### **BRIEFING NOTES HISTORY**

| <b>Briefing Note</b> | <b>Date</b> |
|----------------------|-------------|
|                      |             |

#### **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

| <b>Council Meeting</b> | <b>Date</b> |
|------------------------|-------------|
|                        |             |