

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 6<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2017

REFERENCE FROM HEALTHY LIVING AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE: 9<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2017

“ CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (DSS) –

The Scrutiny Committee was advised of the current situation regarding the approach taken to tackling Child Sexual Exploitation in the Vale of Glamorgan. For this item the Committee was joined by the Principal Officer, Safeguarding and Performance.

As a background summary, the report stated that sexual exploitation of a child under the age of 18 was illegal under Section 65(1) of the Children Act 2004.

Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involved abusive situations, contexts and relationships where they received “something” (e.g. affection, gifts, money, food, accommodation, alcohol, cigarettes, drugs) as a result of them performing, and / or another or others performing on them, sexual activities.

The main characteristics of child sexual exploitation (CSE) could be summarised as follows:

- perpetrator/s manipulating children and young people into sexual activities
- the perpetrator/s exercising some power over the victim
- the perpetrator/s often using violence and / or intimidation
- the perpetrator/s exchanging material and / or emotional gifts such as money or affection for sexual favours
- the victim was vulnerable in one or more ways
- the victim may be unable to see or acknowledge that she / he was being groomed or abused
- the victim may appear to agree to the relationship or to the abusive behaviour.

Councils play a crucial, statutory role in safeguarding children, including tackling CSE. However, they could not do this alone. It needed the co-operation of the wider community and partner agencies. Councils could use their links with Police, schools, health professionals, and community and faith groups to highlight the signs and ensure people knew where to turn if they had concerns. CSE was a difficult and unpleasant subject to discuss but having these conversations was crucial to effective action. Members would be aware of the independent report by Professor Alexis Jay into the handling of CSE by Social Services and Police in Rotherham between 1997 and 2013. It was highly critical of "collective failures" of political and officer leadership.

CSE was a key priority area for the Cardiff and Vale RSCB this year. It had established a specific sub-group, led by the South Wales Police and including representatives from the NHS, probation and social services to address operational issues. National developments continued under the new Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse launched by the UK Home Office and led by Barnardo's. The Centre would become the authoritative source of research and knowledge on tackling child sexual abuse and exploitation, and harmful sexual behaviour.

To date, there had been only one major case in the Vale of Glamorgan where multiple abuse was suspected – this was historical abuse and the investigation took place over a period of years. It involved a significant number of alleged victims, most of whom were resident in other Local Authority areas and all of whom were now adults. Several regional learning events had taken place following a Practice Review. Children potentially at risk and those who may have been abused were safe. The RSCB had carried out a Child Practice Review to see what lessons could be learned. Two senior managers from the Vale of Glamorgan were members of the Child Practice Review Panel.

On the evidence currently available, most children who had been the subject of CSE strategy meetings since the Council started collecting local data had not been victims of organised abuse. The Council could not be at all complacent and considerable efforts were being made to tackle CSE in its area. The Cardiff and Vale LSCB had established a sub-group, led by the South Wales Police and included representatives from the NHS, probation and Social Services, to address operational issues. There was also a pan-Wales group established by the Children's Commissioner, which was looking at areas requiring national policy and leadership.

At a local level, the Council complied fully with the All Wales Child Protection Procedures in addressing cases of suspected CSE. Where children / young people were considered to be at risk of CSE, an assessment of risk using the Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF) tool was undertaken. Assessments with risk scores under 11 were discussed with the Principal Officer working in this Council and preventative measures were considered. Risk scores of 11 and upwards progressed to a CSE multi-agency strategy meeting. Cases which were seen to indicate "significant risk" were referred automatically to the Directorate's Principal Officer Safeguarding (Children) who convenes and chairs a multi-agency strategy meeting under the All Wales Child Protection Procedures.

To ensure that the Council was giving due consideration to children or young people about whom there were concerns but where there was not a "significant risk" score on SERAF, the Council now had in place a process whereby any agency or professional body may refer a case for consideration about whether there were agreed CSE concerns. If this was the case, the ensuing assessment would consider these issues and the case was referred to the Principal Officer who considered the level of intervention required. This might range from the provision of support services to proceeding with a strategy meeting involving relevant professionals. In addition, the new processes allowed the Council to capture more effectively data about the number of children where there were sexual exploitation concerns.

There had been 24 initial CSE strategy meetings between April 2016 and March 2017 relating to 23 children, one child having been closed and then re-referred. There were nine review meetings for nine children carried over from March 2016 with ongoing work identified; the number of review meetings in the period April 2016 to March 2017 was 38 relating to 22 children. Of the 24 children referred during April 2016 and March 2017, four were boys. The age range of the children was 12 to 17, most common were 14 to 16. The response to each young person included:

- consideration of any criminal matters by South Wales Police
- assessment;
- consideration of the need to use child protection procedures; and
- support to be provided by Social Services and voluntary organisations as these children were regarded as being particularly vulnerable.

Where ongoing concerns had been identified, review strategy meetings took place for each young person. As stated, most alleged victims were aged 14 to 16 and they shared common characteristics such as poor attendance at school, low self-esteem, self-harm / suicidal thoughts and inappropriate use of the internet and mobile phones. Suspects were usually male and aged 19 to 40.

The South Wales Police had established a CSE team in each of their Basic Command Units. They were staffed by a Detective Sergeant and two Detective Constables dealing specifically with children and young people who were at risk of CSE. In this role, the officers attended all the CSE strategy meetings in the Vale and Bridgend (both areas being part of the same Basic Command Unit). The Officers were now based in Bridgend with the Missing Persons Team. Additionally there was a worker from Barnardo's who was on attachment with the team who undertook visits to all children who went missing, where there were CSE concerns.

The CSE Taskforce meetings established in May 2015 had been expanded. Those in attendance were the Detective Sargent CSE team, Vale Safeguarding staff, Education, the Practitioner Manager for the Social Services Duty Team, a Youth Service representative, a Youth Offending Team representative, Probation, the Looked After Children Nurse, the Safeguarding Nurse, a representative of the 15 Plus Team in Children's Services, a Licensing Officer, if there were relevant concerns, and Llamau. The meetings took place every other month in the Vale and on a monthly basis in the Bridgend area (because of the higher numbers of children identified in that area).

The South Wales Police received a grant enabling them to employ workers from Barnardo's to "de-brief" children and young people who had been missing and where there were CSE concerns. The workers looked to try and establish where the children and young people had been when missing and with whom they had been associating. The worker had also undertaken sessional work with identified young people for up to six sessions working specifically to raise their awareness of the risks and their vulnerability of being exploited. The CSE team to which the Barnardo's worker was attached had since joined with the Missing Persons team and were, as stated previously, now situated in Bridgend.

One of the challenges for professionals working with children and young people who were most vulnerable was helping them to acknowledge that they were at risk of being exploited. Schools in the area were delivering a programme to children which was designed to raise awareness, especially regarding online abuse which involved their peers. Safeguarding training of both teaching staff and School Governors ensured that they were aware of concerns relating to CSE as well as safeguarding in general.

The RSCB had been working to produce a new CSE strategy which would consolidate emerging best practice. Both Local Authorities had developed separate strategies, to reflect differences in referral processes, while sharing their knowledge and experience, and both were operational. Welsh Assembly Government had also commissioned work by Barnardo's to undertake a review of the present CSE guidance and procedures. The remit of the person designated to undertake the review was that she would make contact with every Authority in Wales and meet with those responsible specifically for the management of CSE work along with partner agencies, both statutory and the private sector. The person concerned had already met with the relevant people in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan and indicated at that time that the work was on a definite time schedule for completion.

The Chairman, in referring to the multi-agency approach, queried which organisation would lead on cases. The Principal Officer, Safeguarding and Performance stated that as an example, in a case with a criminal act, the Police would be involved. If the victim was under 18 then Social Services would be contacted so that an assessment could be undertaken. Therefore, a joint approach would be adopted. She added that all referrals would come to her, through her role as Chair of all Multi-Agency Strategy Meetings. This meant that there was one main point of contact to co-ordinate all agencies involved. The process also allowed for agencies to share information such as those children at risk and "hot spot" areas.

A Committee Member queried concerns with Looked After Children. The Principal Officer advised that of the one case in the Vale, 13 of the children were looked after, although none were looked after at the time of the investigation. These children had become looked after in order to safeguard them from risk and not necessarily because they had been targeted. The Principal Officer also alluded to those children that were regarded as 'risk takers' and those who could be exploited because of their life experiences.

With regard to the role of schools and School Governors, the Principal Officer stated that there were two important aspects, the first relating to training and the second around raising awareness within schools. It was important to ensure that different ages were introduced to issues at the most appropriate stage. In addition, the Principal Officer also referred to the role of the Senior Youth Worker, as they worked closely with children and would raise concern around a particular child. This role was now full time and so they would be managing youth engagement and awareness raising, with a particular emphasis on child to child sexual behaviour, which had been of recent prevalence in the news.

In reply to a query regarding the increase in the number of vulnerable children that were homeless in Cardiff, the Principal Officer advised that this came under the

jurisdiction of Cardiff Council. They would have their own dedicated officers, although both Cardiff and the Vale had a joint Safeguarding Board and both would use the same procedures.

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T the report be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) To inform Elected Members about how the Council is carrying out its duties to identify, reduce and eradicate the risk of Child Sexual Exploitation within the Local Authority area.”

Attached as Appendix – [Report to Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee: 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2017](#)