

Report on Child Sexual Exploitation in Southend on Sea

Introduction:

The purpose of this report is to review the current strength of the Southend response to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) as highlighted in the recent report by Professor Jay into events in Rotherham. This report has been commissioned by Rob Tinlin as Chief Executive of Southend on Sea Borough Council, with the aim of identifying the following:

1. Identifying progress to date and the current strengths of the Southend response to CSE, seeking assurance that this work is being effectively managed and is being held to account by the LSCB.
2. Identifying any problem areas or ongoing challenges which need to be addressed
3. Identifying what solutions and recommendations can be made to address these challenges.
4. Identifying any resource requirements

Context of our work on CSE:

National Context

At national level there have been a number of reports and reviews on the issue of CSE. These include the Jay report on Rotherham Council, the Reviews of Oxfordshire and Rochdale events, and some Serious Case Reviews. In addition, the Office of the Children's' Commissioner has undertaken extensive research into CSE and has issued both calls for information and reports summarising information, practice guidance and lessons learned to date. The Southend LSCB has kept all of these reports under review and has drawn on them in order to develop its action plans and to support the issuing of guidance to professionals on the matter of CSE. Across the country the particular pattern of how CSE has shown itself, and its prevalence, has varied considerably, although it is assumed that there is still considerable under reporting and numbers of identified cases continue to grow.

The key characteristics of CSE which have been identified include the organized and co-ordinated nature of much of the CSE, its links with the night time economy, the grooming of victims so that they either do not see themselves as victims, or, if they do, the intimidation and threats which are used to prevent CSE victims from being willing or able to report the abuse to the authorities; and the prevalence of organized groups of CSE perpetrators coming from black, minority or ethnic groups. Research, and the experience

of other LSCBs and their partners nationally, also identifies a strong link between children and young people who go missing from home or care and those who are at risk of CSE.

Missed opportunities by professionals to intervene to prevent the exploitation of young people have been identified as being caused by professionals being insufficiently enquiring, not seeing their behaviour as abuse (eg by defining them as prostitutes as was the case in Rotherham) and also by them being labeled as criminals eg because of their use of drugs or alcohol or as out of parental/carers control when going missing

Local Context

Southend has an increasingly diverse population, with the black, minority and ethnic population rising from c. 6% to c. 13%. Southend agencies and their staff will need to incorporate the messages from Rotherham and other areas regarding balancing cultural awareness and being free to express concerns regarding potential CSE within all sectors of the population.

The LSCB has incorporated the learning from Rotherham and other areas into its training materials and operational protocols, and continues to keep all new information about CSE under scrutiny.

From February 2012 Southend LSCB established a working group on CSE which includes the SET partners (Southend Essex and Thurrock, with whom we share procures in safeguarding). The group is chaired by Essex Police and a CSE action plan has been put in place which focuses on the development of protocols and guidance, a risk assessment tool, and the training of practitioners in the recognition of CSE. A copy is attached to this report for information.

The implementation of the action plan via the Southend SVAB and LSCB is largely complete. The working group has developed its remit to include co-ordinating activity of all the partners around the issue of CSE. The working group also co-ordinates the sharing of information regarding missing children and vulnerable adults and those identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation to ensure that they and their families receive good support. The LSCB has provided online training for 450 practitioners working with children and young people and has provided training for CSE champions who are identified by all statutory partners, secondary schools, children's homes, private foster carers and private and community organisations. A CSE Champions Forum has been established to support this group in their work.

Current Practices and how well they are working

Currently, when a practitioner identifies that a child or young person may be at risk of CSE they complete a risk assessment tool with their CSE champion. The toolkit enables the practitioner to identify the level of risk posed to the child or young person and the most appropriate pathway to seek a multi agency response to support them and their family.

At the same time practitioners are asked to complete a CSE information sharing form, to provide intelligence to Essex Police to assist in the identification of victims and perpetrators.

Information regarding children and young people identified as being at risk of CSE, or who regularly go missing from home or care is shared on a multi agency basis at the Southend and CSE and Missing Group to ensure all are being appropriately supported.

All Children and Young People who go missing from home or care are now offered a return home interview by an independent worker. Emerging trends from the outcomes of these interviews are addressed by the CSE and Missing Group

Awareness raising work is being undertaken in schools and with the community in addition to targeted professionals and organizations such as licensing officers, the hotel trade etc. who play a key role in helping to identify and disrupt CSE activity

Over 90 CSE champions and GP Leads have been identified and provided with training, with ongoing support and training provided through quarterly CSE Champions Forum meetings

SBC Regulatory Services use a range of powers to support the prevention, identification and disruption of CSE including:

- Licence Conditions for premises –including specific provisions for preventing harm to children. Able to use regulatory powers to prevent use of licensed premises to groom and exploit young people
- Extensive CCTV coverage in the Town Centre and surrounding areas (plus the ability to deploy mobile cameras) – 24 hour operation of cameras and an Out of Hours Call centre which manages any calls received. Specific links to Police with the CCTV set up. Has been used to improve CCTV coverage of an identified CSE ‘hotspot’ to disrupt activity of perpetrators
- SOS Bus in place in town centre. This is part of the night time economy measures. Volunteers and staff have received CSE awareness training and are able to identify and support young people at risk of CSE
- Emergency call points located in many key premises in the town centre enabling any person to raise concerns with the Police etc. Enables young people at risk of exploitation to seek assistance
- Behave or Be Banned (BOBB) which enables premises to bar individuals. Can be used to disrupt activities of perpetrators bringing young people into licensed premises

- Purple Flag – a number of coordinated activities across many Council and external partner services to provide a safe and vibrant town centre ‘offer’.
- Licensing of taxis / Private Hire vehicles / drivers – vetting of drivers on application and regularly via DBS. Promoting new Vehicle Conditions to control any in-car CCTV to ensure access to images is only possible via Police / Council. Taxis have been used in other areas to transport young people for the purpose of sexual exploitation.
- Trading Standards – promote Challenge 25 for sale of alcohol. Prevents the purchase of alcohol by younger perpetrators of CSE.
- A number of town centre partnerships in place where information is shared and issues raised for targeting resources. Ensures that where CSE activity and perpetrators are identified this is shared between partners to ensure coordinated approach

Southend LSCB has to date been unable to obtain data from Essex Police regarding the number and quality of CSE information sharing forms received from Southend practitioners so has been unable to assess the effectiveness of this process.

A number of children at risk of CSE are being supported throughout the Southend staged intervention model, and the LSCB is developing its performance information to evidence outcomes for these young people. However, not all aspects of the current arrangements are working well, and whilst it is felt that Southend has put in place some of the elements needed for an effective CSE response, this report offers the opportunity to review and analyse what still needs to be done to ensure we move forward in providing an effective response. One of the main concerns is the low number of referrals to date leading to the suggestion that we are currently, like many parts of the UK, likely to be suffering under reporting of CSE, mainly because as highlighted in the reports to date, there is under reporting by victims and professionals are not able to get beneath the surface of presenting issues in order to uncover CSE.

A response to CSE in Southend must therefore work at a wide range of levels in order to be effective, and whilst at the present time the basic referral pathways and procedures are in place, there is more which needs doing to fully address CSE “in the round”.

We recommend that the LSCB and its partners identify appropriate, accessible, channels for practitioners and the public to raise concerns regarding potential CSE activity

Analysis of Southend situation

i) Leadership Culture and Political will

The Rotherham events highlight that whilst practitioners were in some cases effectively raising concerns about CSE, the leadership and culture at the top of key organisations such as the Local Authority and the Police, were not conducive to effectively addressing the issues. The two key aspects highlighted were fear of disturbing community relations (as the perpetrators were from an Asian background) and failure to offer effective leadership or a suitable climate to listen to victims and act accordingly. The leadership and political climate in Southend does not resemble that in Rotherham- there is strong and effective leadership in the Council and in Essex Police, a corporate approach and good partnership working. Nevertheless, elected members and some senior officers of the council and its partners have not had any dedicated CSE training and it is therefore recommended that this is redressed.

We recommend that safeguarding children training is organized for all elected members and senior officers of the Council and its partners, including CSE. All political groups leaders should be asked to make attendance at this a priority for their Members.

ii) Partnership Approaches

Across the partnership there is a need to strengthen operationally links and working practices as well as improving data flows around CSE. There is a need to improve recognition by practitioners especially, by means of a more enquiring approach, and to improve their confidence in investigating and responding to CSE. Every partner to the LSCB needs to have its own plan in this respect, and the LSCB should co-ordinate these.

We therefore recommend that all LSCB partners should have a defined CSE plan which are overseen in their development by the LSCB

Reviews of cases, such as that for Rotherham, indicate that historically CSE cases have not always been identified and addressed effectively

We therefore recommend that, as proposed by the SET LSCB group and Essex Police, partners review cases on a multi agency basis from the last 5 years, which may have been missed opportunities to identify CSE

III) The Police

There is a strong lead on CSE at a senior level in the Police and a very senior police officer has chaired the SET CSE Group. At present there are a few of areas of concern in relation to Essex Police's response to CSE. Most notably, the three key individuals within Public Protection who have led the police

response to CSE have all moved to new positions outside of the Public Protection function, and it is felt that this poses a risk to the continuity of the CSE work.

The LSCB is not currently assured that referrals to Southend of medium or low risk CSE victims are being directed correctly by Essex Police using the Southend Integrated Locality Framework. In addition, police internal information sharing where cases are allocated between or across different police teams has been problematic in some cases.

The LSCB will be seeking assurance regarding the degree to which front line police officers have been trained in CSE awareness and can therefore identify cases and respond appropriately.

The provision of performance information and mapping of intelligence from police activity across Southend in order to better identify the venues, perpetrators, patterns and networks, which will form the basic intelligence background to police and partner work in Southend is currently inconsistent.

We recommend therefore that a project officer is appointed by Southend Council to work on these and other issues in order to improve the operational response and interface around CSE, with the police and other partners, and also to drive forward the development of services responding to CSE as described elsewhere in this report. In order to undertake this role the project officer should be able to communicate directly with chief officers of partner organizations. We recommend that this role is at least at Service Manager Level.

iv) The Courts

There is an identified need to work with the Courts and CPS to improve both the scheduling and the victims experience when they are acting as witnesses. The recent CSE case which has been investigated in Southend was due to be heard at Southend Court and was deferred at short notice due to scheduling issues and the unavailability of a suitable judge. For victims of CSE giving evidence is a highly stressful and distressing experience and everything possible should be done to ensure this is minimised.

We recommend therefore that a significant piece of work is undertaken with the Court Service to improve the way CSE cases are heard and to support vulnerable witnesses. It needs to be identified who can lead this work as the LSCB has no HMCTS interface. The proposed project officer can then support this work. HMCTS should also be requested to identify a representative to the Community Safety Partnership

v) Health

Many potential sources of referral lie within the health system, for example sexual health clinics, the hospital including accident and emergency services, GPs and primary care staff and school nurses. There is a need to improve reporting of suspected CSE cases and a need to educate health professionals as well as to take steps to improve the voice of children and young people in these health services. Some of these areas could be included in the remit of the proposed project worker, and the overall health plan will be part of the LSCB CSE implementation process.

The LSCB will be seeking assurance regarding the degree to which front line health workers have received CSE awareness training, and can therefore identify and respond to cases appropriately

We recommend that the Director for Public Health and Director for Children's Services consider what CSE services should be included the 0-18 (25) commissioning of health care.

We also recommend that a series of workshops for GPs and other frontline primary health staff, to raise awareness of CSE, should be commissioned

vi) The Community

It is important that the local community understands where to report CSE concerns and how to get a service. It is also important that local communities understand that CSE will not be tolerated, that perpetrators will be prosecuted and that victims will be supported. The Rotherham report outlines how perpetrators felt confident to continue with abuse as there were no convictions being made.

Getting messages out to the local community and other front line staff, including licensing officers, streetscene workers, parks staff and door supervisors, can be enhanced by working through some of the third sector organisations and SAVS, and through the use of the LSCB Community Sub Group. However at present such efforts are impeded by the LSCB website which is not well constructed and has been identified as needing some resources to make it more fit for purpose.

We recommend that resources are identified to improve the LSCB website as a matter of urgency

A further need is to develop the type of community profiling which will create a more intelligence led approach to CSE, allowing for police approaches such as disruption and prevention. This should combine any relevant information about areas such as licensing, the hotel trade, taxis, and take away addresses, if these have been seen to play a local role in CSE, as they have elsewhere. In addition information derived from previous CSE cases, analysis

of missing return interviews and other relevant sources (eg the MASH once fully established) should enable a local profile to be created, led by the police, to support CSE work.

We recommend that it becomes a requirement that the Police undertake this report on an annual basis supported by partnership intelligence

vii) Children's Social Care

The Jay report outlines how in Rotherham there was a good service for CSE victims provided by "Risky Business" which was an arm of the Local Authority, but this did not interface well with the rest of the Local Authority and partnership services. The key features of Risky Business which made it effective were the degree of engagement understanding and trust which it was able to generate with victims. The backdrop was that child protection services in Rotherham were not working well and were under great pressure.

The situation in Southend is not as it was in Rotherham. Southend has well performing safeguarding services and an effective early help offer. Nevertheless we feel that there is a question as to whether a dedicated multi-agency service is called for in respect of CSE victims. This is because there are some unique features needed by this group which include the need to be proactive in uncovering the abuse, and in particular that they may not recognize themselves as being victims; the need to support victims through the court process; and to ensure that appropriate therapeutic support is provided to assist victims in recovering. There is a question about whether such victims will be comfortable using the "front door" of children's social care or whether a more dedicated, more easily accessible front door and more tailored response are appropriate. It is not felt that we can offer the answer to this question at present.

We recommend that the project officer is charged with investigating these and other issues, referring to experience elsewhere such as Oxford and Rochdale as well as local experience, to make recommendations in due course about the effective shape and location of a more comprehensive CSE service for Southend.

In respect of Looked After Children, who have been identified by the research as being particularly at risk of CSE through a mixture of their often disturbed past and the ability of CSE perpetrators to target children's homes, it is reassuring that in Southend numbers of LAC who go missing (often a sign of possible CSE) are low. In addition Children's Services have instigated thorough checks and liaison with local children's homes and are implementing new DFE guidance which outlines how Local Authorities are to check on the children and young people placed within their LA area by other LA's. There is

a project running currently to address these areas and this will be reported back to the LSCB in due course.

In respect of current cases of children within children's social care managers are not confident that in all cases the risk of CSE will have been given sufficient consideration during assessment.

We recommend therefore that all current cases open to CSC of children between the ages of 11 and 18 years are reviewed with a view to the evaluation of potential CSE risks.

vii) MASH

Southend has an embryonic MASH currently operating to triage domestic abuse allegations, but this is under review at present with an external team of peer reviewers who are specialist in the MASH process. It is anticipated that the MASH will become more embedded in the general referral process for safeguarding and that it will be located at the front door of this service. As such the MASH will assist in intelligence gathering and identification of CSE and data derived from the MASH should support the intelligence gathering process suggested earlier in this report.

viii) Schools

Schools have an important role to play in prevention through the modules being delivered as part of PHSE which cover relationships sexual advice etc. In addition experience elsewhere has shown that friends are often instrumental in identifying when a young person is being exploited (especially where they do not perceive that to be the case themselves) so encouraging and supporting schools in this approach is important.

Work is currently being undertaken with schools to support them in the development of the PHSE curriculum, to include awareness of CSE. A programme for schools regarding sexual violence is also being rolled out

x) Youth Offending Service

Youth Offenders may also be victims of CSE and as such the LSCB should receive an annual report from the Youth Offending Service which would include their action plan on CSE.

x) Youth Service

The Youth Service, including YPDAT and Streets Ahead, has an important role to play in CSE and again at present does not present an annual report to the LSCB detailing its safeguarding work including CSE.

We recommend therefore that the Youth Offending Service and the Youth Service should both report annually to the LSCB on their safeguarding work, including their plans for supporting an effective CSE service.

We recommend therefore that all current cases open to the Integrated Youth Support Service (Youth Service and YOS) of children between the ages of 11 and 18 years are reviewed with a view to the evaluation of potential CSE risks.

xi) Regulatory Services

The local authority's regulatory services are members of the CSE and Missing Group and have received CSE awareness training specific to their role. CSE training has been provided to SOS bus staff and street pastors and South Essex College training for security personnel will now include awareness of CSE to raise awareness of CSE within the night time economy in Southend. Further work is to be undertaken with hotels and other accommodation providers in the area and taxi driver associations to raise awareness of CSE.

Xi) The LSCB

The role of the LSCB is to co-ordinate and to hold to account the work on CSE. The Jay report outlines that although the Rotherham LSCB was good at issuing procedures and training it was less good at assessing whether these had actually made any difference. The immediate issue is the need to establish via the LSCB how well the CSE work is currently going. As a priority the LSCB should audit the current CSE risk assessments and determine how effective and appropriate these are, making suitable recommendations. It should also receive reports on the issues outlined in this report. The LSCB Annual Report needs to make a statement about CSE and how far this work has gone and what has been achieved, and also outline any resourcing or other issues which need to be addressed in order to improve overall effectiveness of CSE services.

There are two areas which the LSCB has already recognised it needs to improve and for which reports have been commissioned, these are the need to evaluate how well we are listening to children and young people; and how well we are focusing on outcomes in all the work of the children's services.

We recommend that these two thematic reports give specific consideration to the issue of CSE within their overall approach to these two areas.

We also recommend that on a 6 monthly basis a meeting is chaired by the local authority chief executive with the chairs of the LSCB, SVAB, Community Safety Partnership, and the chief officers of Essex Police, and Southend CCG in attendance to monitor progress in implementing the recommendations of this report and have oversight of any emerging strategic issues

xii) Resources

CSE Project Officer at Level 11 to support work on CSE, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Forced Marriage – £65K pa (approx) – Propose 12 month contract

Information Analyst capacity to support the work of the CSE and Missing Group– £35K pa (approx) – Propose 12 month contract

Independent consultant capacity to review Children’s Services and IYSS cases which are currently open – 30K (approx) – Propose 6 month contract

Back filling of Children’s Services capacity to review historical cases where CSE may not have been identified –£30K (approx) - Propose 6 month secondment

LSCB Website Development – proposal to LSCB in development

Sue Hadley
Chris Doorly
John O’Loughlin

October 2014