

**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 4 APRIL 2016**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

**LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S RESPONSE
TO CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

Purpose of Report

1. This is the third in a series of reports that brief the Committee on the County Council's work to address Child Sexual Exploitation. This report focuses on the deployment of resources to address the continually emerging challenge of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). The report sets out the action taken to put in place a new operational team of specialist staff, deployed alongside police colleagues and based with the police. The report also comments on the volume of work currently being done with young people at risk of, or suffering, sexual exploitation and outlines the intended next steps.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. In February 2015, the County Council approved growth of £560k to the budget for Children and Family Services in order to address the emerging challenge of Child Sexual Exploitation.
3. This step had been taken to begin to address local incidents of CSE and to take account of the growing national concern of the role played by councils and other public bodies following criminal cases in Rochdale, Oxfordshire and Rotherham.

Background

4. Recruitment to the specialist CSE team has been underway since April 2015, with considerable care being taken to ensure that skilled and resilient individuals are recruited. The team is led by the Children and Family Services department's Strategic Lead for CSE and Complex Abuse and currently comprises an operational lead, two senior social work practitioners, four CSE Officers (two social workers, a therapist and a support worker) and an Administrative Officer.
5. The purpose of the team is to identify and take action to safeguard and protect children at risk of CSE, or who are being sexually exploited (online or in the real world), trafficked or have gone missing or run away. The team

provides a victim centred approach combining criminal investigation, safeguarding and educational programmes.

How the team works

6. Concerns and referrals in relation to CSE are jointly triaged with the police to agree appropriate safeguarding action whether the child or young person is at risk of CSE and/or has gone missing. The team undertake specialist assessments and lead on the development of risk management plans in relation to children at risk of and victims of CSE. The team monitor and track cases where there are concerns about CSE and/or where children have been reported missing. The majority of cases are co-worked with existing early help or social care team workers with the CSE Team having a clear role to provide specialist direct intervention in relation to CSE. Occasionally the team will get involved with children or young people not known to current services.
7. CSE Officers have a low case load which enables the team to deliver intensive and focused direct work and respond quickly to incidents involving children and young people. A strong focus is on developing, planning and delivering disruption activity with the police and other partners and achieving successful prosecutions as a key way to safeguard and protect children. The team coordinates the response to missing children ensuring return interviews are conducted and information from return interviews centrally collated to help build intelligence in relation to trends, hotspots and potential perpetrators. This has resulted in a more targeted response to missing children and supported investigations into CSE.
8. Individual members of the team have nominated localities to ensure links are made with local schools, independent children's homes, neighbourhood police areas, community safety partnerships and joint action groups (JAGs). This enables the monitoring of concerns and two way flow of sharing information and intelligence. For example the CSE Team, Youth Offending Service, East Midlands Serious and Organised Crime Unit and a county JAG collaborated together, and with a range of agencies and local businesses, to successfully disrupt a situation where a number of children and young people in a locality were involved in criminality, anti-social behaviour and drug taking; some were frequently going missing and at risk of CSE.
9. Co-location with Leicestershire Police has led to much better information sharing and more effective action in a greater number of CSE related cases. Working in a more joined up way has allowed the sharing of relevant intelligence and improved coordination of responses. This has already resulted in an improved ability to disrupt and prosecute perpetrators and provide early intervention to reduce harm and promote wellbeing. In addition it is clear that co-location has improved the timeliness of joint decision-making about cases of concern, it has assisted in a greater understanding of the respective roles played by the County Council's staff and police staff, and it has significantly assisted in the development of the collective understanding of those at risk of CSE. Earlier intervention in relation to concerns has

resulted in the profile of the cases in relation to the level of harm dealt with by the team changing since its inception.

Data and performance information

10. The numbers of CSE referrals continues to rise. Between Q1 and Q3 (April to December) 2015, a total of 214 referrals were received by the specialist CSE Team, compared to 184 referrals during the whole of 2014-15. The increase highlights greater professional and public awareness following national media attention and success of the local 'Spot the Signs' awareness raising campaign. This has translated into an increasing number of joint investigations and operations with the police. The team continues to coordinate the response to a number of high profile and cross boundary investigations.
11. In addition to directly dealing with 68 open cases, the CSE Team is currently coordinating the Council's response to 8 police operations, including complex operations spanning local, regional and national areas, collaborating with a number of police forces. One operation has involved working closely with West Midlands Police – the investigation has culminated in a current court case. The team has collaborated with Staffordshire Police in relation to an operation with national links. There are also 4 ongoing local investigations that haven't reached the police threshold to become an operation. Joint investigations are increasingly resulting in successful disruption activity and prosecution being achieved where the specialist work by the CSE Team with children and young people is resulting in earlier disclosure.

Next Steps

12. There are still two vacant posts in the team, and completion of the recruitment to all posts is a priority. This process has taken longer than anticipated because it has been necessary to adopt the same levels of background checks and clearance for employment as colleagues in the police side of the team. Addressing those issues and ensuring the best possible appointments are equally important.
13. The intention is that in addition to the County Council and Police contributions to the team, others will join from Leicester City Council and from the NHS to ensure that the team has a Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland wide approach.
14. Earlier this year, the Police and Crime Commissioner agreed a grant £1.3m to support various projects that will be carried out through the team over the next two years. The first project was the launch of CEASE – the Campaign to Eradicate Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of children and young people.
15. Raising the profile of the work of the team continues to be a priority so that Leicestershire residents and bodies such as schools can continue to 'spot the signs' and make referrals if they have concerns. There has been overwhelming support by local and regional media and in the next few months

the team will be shadowed by local press as part of the County Council's media strategy: 'keepingchildrensafe'.

Resource Implications

16. The resource provided by the County Council to establish the specialist team has been deployed innovatively and thus far, successfully. However these resources do not address the pressure that is evident in placement costs when some of the young people known to Children and Family Services need to be brought into care as a direct result of actual or imminent CSE. In particular the costs of such placements are significant because of the complex and demanding challenges faced by those young people.

Background Papers

18. Reports to Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2nd November 2015, 'Leicestershire's Response to CSE' - <http://10.0.64.13/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=4208&Ver=4>

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None

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Equal Opportunities Implications

17. Children and Young People who are at risk of, or suffering Child Sexual Exploitation come from families across the demographic profile of the County. The insidious nature of this abuse means that those children and young people are very likely to need a timely response from the County Council and the Police. In addition, national and local research indicates that concerns about boys and young men are less frequently coming to light that might be expected. Similarly, children and young people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities are less frequently identified. Both of these important areas are addressed in the strategic approach guiding the work of the team.