

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
2 JUNE 2020

LEICESTERSHIRE'S RESPONSE TO TACKLING CHILD CRIMINAL
EXPLOITATION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the work and progress of the Child Criminal Exploitation, Missing and Trafficked Hub.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) remains a strategic priority for the County. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) CSE, Missing and Trafficking Strategy and subsequent action plan was launched in 2013, and is driven by the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) CSE, Missing and Trafficking Operations Group, which continues to build on established strengths to ensure an effective multi-agency response in respect of government recommendations "to combat the national threat of CSE and respond to the local prominence of incidents of CSE and Missing children and young people." As the understanding of the national threat of sexual and labour exploitation has been developed, other forms of criminal exploitation driven by drug gangs are now recognised, including the county lines model of distribution and selling illegal narcotics. The response is to continue to prioritise this form of child abuse.
3. In November 2019 Leicestershire County Council launched its Child Criminal Exploitation Framework 2019-2021. This has now been adopted as the East Midlands Child Criminal Exploitation Framework.
4. The Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) Operations Group reports to the Vulnerability Executive Board, a sub group of the Strategic Partnership Board. Members of the Operations Group are at Assistant Director, Head of Service and Strategic levels. Members of the Executive Board are at Director and Deputy Chief Constable Level.

Background

5. Leicestershire County Council Social Care staff became co-located with the Police in September 2014. Leicestershire Police had already brought together several safeguarding functions within the force to consolidate its response to CSE and Missing Children. Due to the subsequent growth of the multi-agency team it

relocated to South Wigston Police Station, which also houses the Child Abuse Investigation Unit.

6. Leicestershire County Council Social Care staff are represented within the unit replicating the enhanced response to CSE and Missing for cases of Domestic Abuse. The Out of Hours service is also embedded within the hub. This approach provides an environment that encourages collaborative information sharing and combined risk assessment, resulting in live time activity led jointly by Social Care and the Police.
7. The CSE and Missing team received funding from a growth bid in June 2015 which enabled the appointment of a CSE Co-ordinator. In October 2015, funding from a joint LSCB partnership bid was secured from the LLR Strategic Partnership Development Fund (SPDF) which was led by the County Council on behalf of the partnership. The SPDF project concluded in March 2018. As host to the project the County Council has provided further opportunities of redeployment for the staff involved.
8. The remaining components supported by the SPDF project are as follows:
 - **CSE Police Analyst** (Nov 2016-2021) continues to interrogate and analyse the combined partnership data to assist strategic leads targeting resources and tactically responding to the prevention of CSE. The analyst completes complex association charts, suspect profiles, and the analysis of phone data on live investigations. This identifies online offences, associations and locations of victims and perpetrators of CSE. Analytical support is also provided to the Child Abuse Investigation Unit and the Modern Slavery Team. The analytical capability around evidential products produced for court exhibits and carrying out intelligence development work continues to be developed to support successful prosecutions.
 - **Specialist CSE nurse** (July 2016-March 2021) maintains an electronic flagging system on children's health records for those at high risk of CSE. This helps to raise awareness around referrals and provide consultation with health and social care colleagues. It also identifies and refers children to support and recovery services. A CSE pathway and checklist has been developed to offer guidance to health clinicians on spotting the signs of CSE. There has been a marked increase in referrals by health professionals and to reflect the current identification of other forms of CCE the training offer includes CCE, modern slavery and advice on the completion of the Gang Association Tool. Representatives from the team attend safeguarding health network meetings, recently raising awareness of CCE with emergency and unscheduled health settings.

From October 2019 a direct pathway to sexual health services for vulnerable children has extended to a set day each month when CSE social workers support attendance at sexual health appointments.

- **Missing & Safeguarding Coordinator** (April 2019-2020) was secured by a County Council Social Worker already established within the hub. This seconded post was funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and was an LLR post situated within the Missing

from Home Police Team within the hub. The Coordinator's role was to establish professional links with Children's Homes and other providers to strengthen their response to supporting children vulnerable to all forms of exploitation. Partnership guidance has been developed alongside Leicestershire police to promote providers' responsibility to notify the local authority of children coming into their care. It also provides guidance for the completion of referrals and reporting missing children. The Coordinator was also monitoring the Return Interview provision and the completion of the National Referral Mechanism (National Crime Agency) to assist in the identification of victims of trafficking. The funding has now ended for the post.

- Leicestershire County Council recognised the value of this post and has supported the Social Worker in returning to his permanent role within the CSE Team but continuing to cover the missing coordinator role. A youth worker has been covering this post and will be maintained in this seconded position until the end of July when this arrangement will be reviewed. This worker will continue to respond to the missing children placed within the County. It is imperative that the collaborative approach to missing children is continued along with analysing the partnership data to help with the response to individual needs and wider issues.
 - **Child Criminal Exploitation Coordinator** (June 2019- June 2020) is the former Detective Inspector of the CSE hub and the main role was to develop and deliver the CCE LLR action plan. Each authority has a Framework and pathway to services, sharing a single definition of CCE and a joint assessment tool. The police risk assessment takes account of the information and overlays police information as part of the daily partnership risk management meetings.
9. The multi-agency approach to understanding and responding to children who are at risk of CCE and those who go missing from home, care or education continues to disrupt, investigate and respond to the circumstances that cause children to be exploited and exposed to abusive situations.
 10. A new multi-agency team of experts represent the "National County Lines Coordination Centre", supported by the National Crime Agency, and are working to develop the national intelligence picture of the complexity and scale of the threat. There are more than 1000 lines in operation nationally with links to increasing levels of serious violence. Over 200 people have been arrested for drug related offences during weeks of intensification under Operation Lionheart and there have been significant convictions for some young adults. This inevitably left gaps within the drugs manufacturing and distribution model but intelligence suggests that younger family members have filled these. It is possible that there could be an increase in the level of violence as some of the initial instigators are due for release. This continues to be monitored with partners.
 11. There is a collaborative approach in the Charnwood district to identify those at risk and those vulnerable to recruitment locally by organised crime groups. CCE is devastating, leaving families isolated and communities living in fear. The threat of violence, including sexual violence, is common and the bind of debt bondage, coercive control and intimidation are integral to gain compliance and territorial

control. Work is taking place to learn more about the cohort of children, why they are members of gangs and how to keep them safe.

Performance and Activity: Quarter 3 2019/20

12. A range of data is collected on behalf of the multi-agency CCE team on a quarterly basis and analysed by Leicestershire County Council's Business Intelligence Service. The themes covered are CSE referrals, the profiling of both victims and perpetrators of CSE and the identification and monitoring of the response to children who are missing from home. CCE referrals and outcomes are collated (from 2019/20)
13. This is the third quarter that CCE referrals are being reported separately. The numbers have steadily risen from 30 children in Q1 to 53 children in Q3. The main source of referrals is Children's Social Care (89%). An association mapping tool was completed for 77% of these cases. In terms of gender, 49 of the 53 were male and four were female. The predominant age was 15-16 years, although national profiling of CCE suggests the targeted age is 14-17 years. In Leicestershire 11% of referrals were from BME backgrounds, broadly reflecting the county youth population. Charnwood continues to have the highest number of cases during Q3, although the district's higher population should be noted.
14. Four of the 53 children were Looked After Children (LAC). In Q3 over half of these children were reported missing, an indicator of increased vulnerability and exposure to being exploited. Young people on the periphery of ASB and gang/group activity are often left unreported. It is possible to see parallels with CSE a decade ago, before children being sexually exploited were starting to be recognised as victims and not facilitators or perpetrators. Leicestershire adopts the inclusive approach of "Child First, Offender second".
15. In respect of working together to make an offer to identified vulnerable young people, the County Council continues to develop its assets alongside the Youth Offending Service. During Q3, 15% of children reported had current or previous involvement with YOS. The Service Manager from YOS and the Service Manager from the CCE Team are working closely under the guidance of the Senior Management Team to align services, with a focus on contextual safeguarding. Work is taking place to begin to estimate the level of gang violence in the area and it is known that at least half of the children that offend are being supported by Children's Social Care.
16. The number of CSE referrals across LLR was 117 during Q3, which corresponds with the long-term quarterly average. Looking at the rate of CSE referrals over the past twelve months per 10,000 population, Leicester City and Leicestershire are very similar. For Leicestershire County Council (LCC) the number of referrals over the past twelve months is 304. There remains significant differences between the City and County in terms of the assessed level of risk. In LCC the largest category is the lower "at risk" and this has been the case for the past three years. This would indicate that LCC is identifying children at an early stage of vulnerability.
17. Risk assessment tools are completed for all referrals in Leicestershire. More than one referral outcome can be selected for individual referrals. In LCC 207 cases were subject to consultation during Q3, including those cases considered at the

daily risk management meeting. A total of 17 cases were allocated, 16 led to no further action, 12 cases led to joint Section 47 enquiries and seven received the six weeks prevention pack.

18. In terms of the model of CSE, “online” activity remains the largest category followed by the “boyfriend girlfriend model”. The “party model” has recently reduced, largely in line with the COVID-19 outbreak. This relates to an environment such as a flat, park, recruiting ground, for children to socialise and have access to alcohol, drugs and tobacco. Sexualised behaviour between peers or children and adults is normalised, and psychologically the child may believe they are consenting to abuse due to physical/emotional conditioning.
19. Social Care continue to remain the highest source of referrals during this quarter. Over the past year Leicestershire received a consistently higher proportion of referrals from YOS and education than the other two authorities.
20. Regarding age the long-term pattern is 13-14 or 15-16 years and during Q3 there were equal numbers in these two age groups. Over the past four years most referrals have been female although LCC continues to hold more male cases of CSE. An increase has been noted over past two quarters and 43% of referrals in Q3 were male. Reviewing the long-term data for residential status shows that 76-79% of children referred lived at home. Emotional harm remains the largest health concern followed by substance misuse.
21. During Q3 39% of referrals were for Out Of Area children placed in the County (29 children). This is higher than the long-term average of 12%. The County Council continues to contribute to the placing authority’s safety planning for their children. Profiling of the cohort suggests that many of the young people had a learning disability; during Q3 this was 21 of 75 referrals, which is similar to the long term average. This indicates that young people with additional vulnerabilities are targeted by perpetrators. They may have experienced a family where drug and alcohol abuse are a concern as well as domestic abuse, or sometimes family members are already involved in criminal activity. These children are more likely to be excluded from school, suffer from poor mental health and are likely to have Special Educational Needs. Abusers using on line forums to reach children who may be vulnerable or just bored will exploit this opportunity to gain trust and meet any unmet needs of the child in question. In terms of education, many young people are on roll at a mainstream school or college.
22. Missing status refers to any child referral for Missing/CSE where they have been missing from home or care, out of their local authority area or education. For reported missing episodes for all young people across the three local authorities over the past three and a half years, the numbers indicate a general upward trend, although the overall number in Q3 for the three authorities is 819 which is lower than the peak of 926 in Q1. Three or more missing episodes in 90 days has stabilised over the long term. In Leicestershire the number of missing episodes attributed to children living at home was slightly below the previous quarter at 188 which is in line with the longer-term average. The total number for Q3 was 104.
23. In Leicestershire in Q1 the number of episodes attributed to LAC was 63, and the number of missing episodes attributed to them was 232, of which 168 were connected to out of area children placed in Leicestershire. In Q3 the number of

LAC missing was 57 children, while 30 were Out of Area and amounted to 62 episodes. 27 of these were Leicestershire children (107 episodes). Leicestershire continues to consult with placing authorities around safety planning and the sustainability of isolated vulnerable children being placed without any local connection.

24. In Leicestershire during Q3, 286 missing interviews were completed, of which all were undertaken within 72 hours.
25. From a health perspective across the three local authorities, children are being actively supported due to their involvement with CCE. 25 children are currently under the care of CAMH's; two children were in patients, some under the care of the Eating Disorder Team, others under the care of CAMH's Learning Disability Team and some being supported daily by the Crisis Intervention Team. Out of the 25 new children open to the CCE Team during Q3, 13 were already under CAMH's care, several of whom have a diagnosis of ADHD and two are awaiting neurodevelopment assessments.
26. These children do not have a voice and many who identify with a gang or group feel they have no choice or better option. Some are groomed and exploited by gangs but never identify as members. These are the children who are most vulnerable and at risk, and are regarded as collateral by perpetrators.

Developments

27. The multi-agency approach to understand and respond to children who are at risk of CCE and those that go missing from home, care or education continues to disrupt, investigate and respond to the circumstances that cause children to be vulnerable to abusive situations. This critical area of safeguarding needs specialist knowledge and partnership collaboration from first disclosure through a complex judicial process and access to post abuse therapeutic help.
28. The indicators and vulnerabilities in respect of criminal exploitation are not dissimilar to the identification of CSE: Missing from home or education, arrested in possession of drugs or a bladed article, additional phones, unexplained injuries, found in "cuckooed" properties or "trap houses".
29. Leicestershire County Council continues to prioritise the identification of the exploitation of vulnerable children. Multiagency training on vulnerable children and adults is now delivered across the LLR partnership, in order to recognise that young people transitioning to adulthood are particularly susceptible to predatory adults. Adult safeguarding social workers, Turning Point and housing are now regular attendees at CCE meetings.
30. The Service Manager for the multi-agency hub and fieldwork represents Leicestershire County Council on the Violence Reduction Network Panel, working with Leicestershire police to produce a profile of a child vulnerable to CCE. This was a local case study and tracked the child's history from the age of four to eighteen. This was to demonstrate the complexities of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's), the impact of childhood trauma and the contextual risk outside the family unit. A public health approach is hoped to empower parents, professionals and communities to identify the signs of criminal exploitation.

Learning and Priorities

31. Criminal exploitation is now a priority for the CSE hub. Criminal activity, county lines, groups and gangs are becoming a significant feature, particularly for the children who are regularly missing. County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in the importing and exporting of illegal drugs in the UK. The county line refers to a dedicated mobile telephone number to order drugs and direct distribution. The exploitation of children and vulnerable adults to move, store, and circulate drugs is its mainstay.
32. The term county lines is used to describe situations where young people may be internally trafficked for the purposes of criminal exploitation. It is believed that children are being used as runners, cutting and bagging drugs, collecting debts and cuckooing premises. Young children are regarded as “clean skins” as they often haven’t come to the attention of the courts, receive lesser sentences and are easier to groom, isolate and manipulate and encourage into debt bondage.
33. Due to the success of two films regarding CSE and online grooming, produced by Leicestershire Police in consultation with LCC, the Violence Reduction Unit has commissioned a CCE video targeted at trusted adults. The initial concept is based around a narrative of ‘are you listening to children?’ Its shock value is how simple it is for children to become involved in criminal activity with the point being that trusted adults should be actively screening for signs of grooming and exploitation. This is in the early stages of development
34. Leicestershire has delivered the Leicestershire County Council Child Criminal Exploitation Framework 2019-2021. This will ensure a coordinated response to identify risk and offer safety and support to those already at risk of harm. This legislative framework will assist LCC alongside the CCE Regional Standards in identifying local supply and demand in relation to the drug dealing business model, promote a collaboration and open lines of communication particularly around cross regional criminal activity and strengthen the County’s multi agency early intervention strategies to steer children away from county lines, gangs and knife crime.
35. The Regional East Midlands Child Exploitation Framework should ensure both a local and regional response that is coordinated for children at risk of all forms of CCE. This will be implemented through robust multi agency resources, the implementation of effective guidance and the continuous roll out of CCE multi agency training.
36. Leicestershire Children and Family Services has worked well with partners to raise the profile and tackle Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing. CCE is now regarded in the wider context of child exploitation encompassing criminal exploitation, trafficking, modern slavery and sexual violence and abuse.
37. Leicestershire County Council will ensure that the CCE Framework is aligned to the CSE, Early Intervention, Domestic Abuse and Missing strategies. An LLR delivery plan is being progressed and overseen by the LLR CCE Coordinator. The

police response is aligning to identify threat and risk through the hub partnership and will expand later this year.

38. Whilst parents will be doing all they can to support their children through this critical period of uncertainty it is necessary to remain mindful that children will have increased access to their mobile phones, devices and gaming portals. Perpetrators using online forums to reach children will have more time to gain trust and meet potential unmet needs of children. Leicestershire police have reported that there is a 93% increase in offences of indecent images online. LCC will encourage parents and carers to “Spot the Signs” of risky suspicious behaviour and have encouraged the workforce to promote the ThinkuKnow education package from the National Crime Agency CEOP Command. LCC is also promoting the #LookCloser# campaign to encourage both professionals and members of the public to spot children that may be exposed to exploitation. Warning Zone is supporting the service and will offer consultation on complex online coercion cases to professionals.
39. Work on ways to involve parents when things go wrong to develop their understanding of the child’s landscape.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

Equalities and Human Rights Implications

40. The CSE Hub is committed to equality and ensuring the human rights of all users and, in delivering the service, adheres to the Equality and Human Rights Act. The Hub receives quality and up to date data which is analysed to determine any areas that are underrepresented and may need a stronger focus. As such, in 2018, the Hub has a targeted plan to respond to this by raising awareness of and supporting males who are experiencing CSE, as evidence suggests that they are less likely to seek help. Leicestershire partners will join with regional colleagues in this work.

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