Title: Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Briefing

Report of the
Commissioning Director; Children’s Care and Support

Open Report: Yes For Information

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Summary:
This report provides the Children’s Services Select Committee (CSSC) with an overview and analysis of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in Barking and Dagenham. The report aims to bring to the CSSC’s attention the latest data relating to CSE, provide an overview of the context and challenges on this topic and outline activity that has been, and will be, taken.

Recommendation(s)
The Children’s Services Select Committee is recommended to:

(i) Note content of the report and comment upon further action that they feel should be taken;

(ii) Identify any key areas of this report that they wish to see expanded upon in future updates to the Committee.

Reason(s)
The Children’s Services Select Committee have requested a general briefing on Child Sexual Exploitation in Barking and Dagenham to develop understanding, facilitate meaningful challenge and determine any areas for future scrutiny.
1. Introduction and Background

What is Child Sexual Exploitation?

1.1 Defining child sexual exploitation (CSE) is difficult, as the boundaries between sexual abuse (which includes CSE) and exploitation are often hard to determine. As models of CSE have changed, definitions are adapted to reflect this. The following points show the factors that are common to all the definitions:

- It is a form of sexual abuse
- It involves under-18s
- It is an exploitative situation in which a young person is manipulated, coerced or deceived into sexual activity to receive something they want or need, or it is to the advantage of the perpetrator
- There is an imbalance of power
- The abuse does not always have to be physical and can be perpetrated using technology.

Who is at risk of child sexual exploitation?

1.2 The diversity of victims of CSE cuts across all cultures, social backgrounds, ethnicities, and gender identities. Victims come from different backgrounds and what makes one child vulnerable to CSE is individual to them. However, there are some factors that increase a child’s vulnerability, such as having a learning disability, or going online to talk to strangers. The first response to children, and support for them to access help, must be the best it can be from social workers, police, health practitioners and others who work with children and their families.

1.3 CSE victimisation is not exclusive to young females and can equally apply to males yet they are often not identified as victims of CSE. Whilst it is impossible to generalise, research indicates that male and female victims have a common range of factors that increase their risk of exploitation. Among these are:

- experiences of childhood abuse; poverty; family conflict; poor parental role models;
- an unsettled care history; a history of running away; homelessness; learning and mental health difficulties;
- drug and alcohol misuse; and financial problems caused by addictions.

1.4 However, children without any predisposing vulnerabilities or risk factors are also at risk of exploitation through use of the internet, social media, and gaming. Many children will experience multiple types of sexual exploitation, that are complex and overlapping. Perpetrators will often use a variety of ways to trap a child that limits their choices and their ability to exit the abuse.

1.5 Appendix 1 explains the most common methods of exploitation used.

Barriers to victims accessing support services

1.6 Sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse that raises unique issues for any agency involved in safeguarding children. Often, victims may be considered ‘hard-to-reach’ because they are not known to agencies. Where they are known, they may be
considered ‘challenging’, as they are often disengaged from services, or may not recognise the exploitative nature of their relationships. In some cases, young people will have emotional links with perpetrators, and with others in criminal networks, as well as personal involvement in criminal activity such as drug use and dealing.

1.7 Children and young people may exhibit extreme forms of defensiveness, demonstrated through anger and hostility if concerns about their lifestyles are expressed which will also serve to keep professionals away. Fear, stigma, and shame can often make it difficult for young people to disclose their experiences of sexual exploitation to support agencies and young men in particular may have experienced exploitation that presents challenges for workers. The indicators for child sexual exploitation can sometimes be mistaken for ‘normal adolescent behaviours’. It requires knowledge, skills, professional curiosity and an assessment which analyses the risk factors and personal circumstances of individual children to ensure that the signs and symptoms are interpreted correctly and appropriate support is given.

1.8 Some male victims describe having been attracted to the social aspects of relationships with older men, or the opportunity to explore their sexuality. In many cases, statutory agencies working within the remit of child protection may not always recognise or identify a young person over the age of 18 as a victim of exploitation often thinking a victim has consented, which can discourage anyone from seeking further support. In the absence of any police disruption or legal prosecution, perpetrators may continue to control children and young people – for example, via text and mobile phone contact. Children rarely self-report child sexual exploitation so it is important that practitioners are aware of potential indicators of risk.

1.9 Everyone should be alert to the potential signs and indicators of child sexual exploitation, as well as other forms of abuse, and exercise professional curiosity in their day to day work.

2. CSE in Barking and Dagenham

2.1 The Council has a local multi-agency plan to combat CSE which requires leadership across the partnership and meets the principles of safeguarding as set out in Working Together 2015. The plan requires the involvement of all multi-agency partners and is monitored by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. However, CSE is complex and children are often reluctant to disclose experiences of exploitation due to misplaced feelings of loyalty and shame. Many children and young people may not recognise what they are experiencing as abuse or that they require support or intervention, believing they are in control or in a healthy consensual relationship. Because of this there will inevitably be an under-reporting of CSE in Barking and Dagenham.

2.2 Barking and Dagenham has high scores on several indicators of potentially high numbers of vulnerable young people. This was due to the borough being in the most at risk 10% of local authorities in terms of its deprivation, its rate of repeat abortions and rate of substance abuse treatment. It also featured in the top 50% for its rate of mental health admissions.

2.3 While measuring the unknown number of CSE victims is challenging, Barking and Dagenham’s high scores on multiple indicators suggests there is potentially many young people at risk of CSE victimisation.
2.4 Of the 152 areas in England, Barking & Dagenham ranked joint 17th based on the victim based risk factors.

2.5 A Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was introduced to improve the way local safeguarding partners work together on the ground. MASH has well-established referral pathways for CSE and allows for timely intelligence-sharing which assists in the process of early identification, information gathering and the response to CSE. MASH across London are also helping to strengthen cross-borough information sharing. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has officers based in the MASH who have CSE experience and knowledge and who link with social work practitioners and managers to share information.

2.6 Through the London Child Sexual Exploitation Protocol, procedures are set out for the MPS and partner agencies for safeguarding and protecting children from sexual exploitation. There are also introduced monthly MASE (Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation) meetings chaired by the Police to determine local profiles of CSE.

2.7 MASE meetings bring together CSE leads to share information, review individual referrals, and ensure action is being taken – providing a coordinated approach with other London boroughs and an opportunity for professional challenge and learning. Intelligence from the MASE meetings is shared at a local level and across borough boundaries to inform both the operational and strategic response.

2.8 In November 2016, an HMIC inspection report on the MPS was published. This report severely criticised the police across London for their work on child protection,
including CSE. The report stated that “The MPS still needs to do more to understand the extent and nature of CSE locally within each borough, and particularly across London. At present, there is insufficient information and intelligence about CSE in London, especially in terms of knowing where perpetrators live and offend, and links to missing children. Furthermore, the information and intelligence about CSE that does exist is not used effectively to safeguard children. While some individuals in other agencies know about children who are at risk and the work the police may be doing to manage that risk, better analysis of all the information held by all relevant agencies could lead to more targeted and effective work to protect children and prevent offending. Such analysis would also help refine the requirement of what information should be gathered by which agency.”

2.9 One of the ‘immediate’ actions arising from the report is: “improving staff awareness of the links between children going missing from home and the risk of sexual exploitation, particularly where there are repeat episodes”. Staff from the council, across the LSCB and the police will be working to a plan to improve responses to CSE by the MPS and separately the MPS have in place a response to HMIC on improvements to the concerns raised in the report.

2.10 90% of all Local Authorities have seen rises in Police recorded child sex offences, however the rise in Barking and Dagenham has been relatively small compared to the national average. The issue of potential concern is that this small rise in an area scoring highly on multiple victim risk factors and may be indicative of victims not coming forward. However, it may also be the case that there are comparatively few being victimised in the area.

2.11 In 2015 the MPS featured among the forces with the largest discrepancy between overall crime rates and child sex offence rates (83.1 overall crime per 1,000 population vs. 3.6 CSE crimes per 1,000 population). This may have indicated an issue with under-reporting, under-recording or where this crime type is less of a priority, which seems to be borne out in the HMIC report published in 2016.

2.12 Missing and looked after children are proportionately more at risk of CSE. While most CSE victims live at home, children who go missing, from residential care, are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

During the year 2016:

- 31 children (8.7% of the total number of missing children) were considered to be at risk of CSE. Of that 31:
  - 18 children (5% of the total number of missing children) were in our care;
  - 7 children (1.9% of the total number of missing children) were placed in B&D by other authorities;
  - 6 children (1.6% of the total number of missing children) were not in the care of a Local Authority.

3. CSE Data

3.1 There is currently no national or regional dataset for Child Sexual Exploitation so at present we are unable to compare Barking and Dagenham’s performance against other areas. To provide a local understanding of CSE every area should have its own data and intelligence. The local multi-agency plan should be based on an inter-
agency assessment of the local profile of perpetration, and this requires effective local arrangements for sharing and collating intelligence and other information about communities, environments, perpetrators, and victims into a Problem Profile.

3.2 The key aim of the Problem Profile is to provide an analysis of child sexual exploitation locally, the characteristics of CSE i.e. who are the victims, who are perpetrators. It also seeks to identify existing and emerging trends in child sexual exploitation and make recommendations thus. The profile includes a 12-month snapshot and uses individual data from Police and Social Care cross referenced with education, youth offending, substance misuse, and access to children centres, Tier 2 services, SEN, and domestic violence to build up a local profile. However, a singular area focus cannot adequately capture patterns of harm and risk as cases of child sexual exploitation frequently cross local authority, police force and even country boundaries in terms of the movement of both perpetrators and victims.

Key Messages: Victims/At Risk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count/Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>children in total were flagged as at risk of or subject to CSE by either the Police, Children’s Social Care or by both agencies;</td>
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<tr>
<td>82%</td>
<td>of the children and young people were female</td>
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<tr>
<td>85%</td>
<td>were teenagers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>were aged under-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51%</td>
<td>were white British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47%</td>
<td>open to Children’s Social Care (statutory service)</td>
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<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>were reported missing/absent at some point during the year</td>
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Key Messages: Perpetrators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count/Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 out of 23</td>
<td>suspects were male</td>
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<tr>
<td>The age of perpetrators ranged from 15 – 62</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>72%</td>
<td>of perpetrators aged under-30</td>
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<tr>
<td>63%</td>
<td>of perpetrators lived in-borough</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most perpetrators were classified as white European</td>
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High proportion (15%) of victims experienced **school exclusion** with the majority being female and white British.

Attendance data was variable for victims, ranging from 22% to 100%

**Very low** numbers were **SEN**

**Educational attainment** levels of victims are **low** at all Key Stages

20% of victims had been **reported missing** with a high number of instances of ‘repeated missing’ reports

10% of victims known to **substance misuse** (drug and alcohol) services and 12% known to **Youth Offending**

66% of victims had accessed **Children’s Centres** in early years, with 34% having been subject to a **CAF**

37% were known to **Victim Support Services**

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**Police CSE Data**

3.3 The graph below illustrates the different stages of CSE used by the Police across London - Suspicion, Crime, Detections, and Interruption/Disruption. Overall Barking and Dagenham holds the fourth place after Redbridge, Havering, and Hackney. Looking only at the number of committed crimes, Barking and Dagenham with 24 cases holds the 5th highest place after Westminster (with 29 cases), Hounslow and Havering (both with 27 cases) and Lambeth and Haringey (both with 26 cases).
4. **What are we doing?**

4.1 Tackling CSE requires all partners to understand how to identify victims and children and young people at risk of CSE. A range of work is taking place to increase understanding of CSE and training is being delivered across partnerships to enhance knowledge.

1. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) delivers a multi-agency annual training programme which includes CSE and there are online training modules that can be accessed for staff unable to attend training in person.
2. The CSE Co-ordinator has a network of CSE leads from a range of agencies who act as ‘CSE Champions’ and who meet on a quarterly basis.
3. There is a CSE ‘surgery’ held for social workers and managers on a fortnightly basis and discussion with the Police via the MASH.
4. Daily review of the Missing Children list with the Police to co-ordinate upon any children where there are CSE concerns.
5. Quarterly attendance by the CSE Co-ordinator at operational team meetings to update on CSE.
6. The Young People’s Safety Group, a subcommittee of the LSCB, has CSE as a standing item on their agenda.
7. We have been successful in a bid for Barnardo’s to provide a specialist worker in CSE and Child Trafficking to support families who engage with and are known to the Private & Voluntary sector (specifically Carers Association, Young carers, Sycamore Trust- Mencap and PACT) to educate vulnerable young people around CSE. The project will provide 12 families with direct work around CSE and
keeping safe and provide the voluntary sector with training to increase the knowledge of CSE and staying safe, to include online safety.

8. Last year we held a range of events to commemorate ‘CSE day’ which falls on the 18th March. This year we plan to hold:
   a. Community events in Sydney Russell school, Dagenham and Gascoigne Community Centre, Barking.
   b. A business breakfast at Care City on ‘Operation Makesafe’, a police operation targeted at hoteliers and taxi drivers who may witness concerns around CSE but not be clear what they are seeing or who to report to.
   c. CSE awareness material will be displayed in libraries, schools, and Children’s Centre’s.
   d. During the week, Youth workers will arrange focused sessions around CSE/online grooming/healthy relationships.
   e. It is hoped that the ARC theatre will perform at Sydney Russell school and Barnardo’s will provide an information stall.

5. **Challenges: Common Themes**

5.1 Some of the themes that have arisen as part of national reviews and learning from Child Sexual Exploitation are:

- Lack of understanding about the impact of CSE, its effects on victims and their ability to protect themselves.
- Lack of understanding about the nature of grooming, the degree of control exerted by perpetrators.
- Children often did not recognise they were being exploited.
- Professional misunderstanding about consent and view of victim’s credibility.
- Weaknesses in engaging with and understanding young people.
- Inadequate understanding of family and social context or history.
- Assessments not involving the young people themselves.
- Focus predominantly on dealing with the young people’s ‘difficult behaviour’, not enough consideration as to what was behind it.
- Failure to understand the needs of adolescents and the impact of adolescent neglect.
- Attitudes towards the young people and assumptions about ‘lifestyle’ choices.

6. **Next Steps**

6.1 There are some key next steps that need to be taken to strengthen our approach to CSE in Barking and Dagenham. As a priority, an update to the ‘Problem Profile’ is required to ensure that we continuously have the most current understanding available to us. This should include contributing to the work going on across London to formulate a common dataset.

6.2 Work to educate children, young people, parents and professionals about the nature and risks of CSE (both online and offline) must continue. This includes how to access support. More focus must be brought upon online protection.

6.3 As part of the programme of ongoing education we will be providing training for GP’s with information to be displayed in surgery’s and to work with hospitals and clinics to ensure that staff are up to date with CSE information with clearly displayed
information in areas young people may attend such as clinics, providing support and advice on STD's and abortion.

6.4 More work needs to be done with local schools to support them in identifying, and protecting, children at risk of, or who have suffered from CSE. This will be a key role of our new CSE Co-ordinator who will also visit all care homes and semi-independent housing providers in the borough to discuss CSE preventative measures.

6.5 We also must ensure that we have a coordinated approach to managing CSE by linking with other strategies, including violence against women and girls, and youth violence and gangs.

6.6 A robust response from the MPS is required to the recently published HMRC report, replete with a clear indication of how the deficiencies identified will be addressed as a matter of urgency.

7. Recommendations

7.1 The Children’s Services Select Committee are requested to consider the contents of this report and challenge the effectiveness of work on Child Sexual Exploitation in the borough. The Committee may wish to focus on the following themes:

- How well children at risk of, or suffering from, CSE are identified in the borough;
- The effectiveness of the response in the borough from both the Council and the Council’s partners in responding to CSE;
- The approach that is being taken and the efficacy of the key next steps highlighted in the document;
- Any areas that the Select Committee feel could/should be expanded on for future or interim updates.

List of appendices:

i) Appendix 1 – Common Methods of Child Sexual Exploitation