Present: Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe (Chair), Cllr Melanie Bartlett (Deputy Chair), Cllr Simon Bremner, Cllr Irma Freeborn, Cllr Syed Ghani, Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole and Cllr Danielle Smith

Apologies: Cllr Edna Fergus Mrs I Robinson

24. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

25. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2017 were confirmed as correct.


The Chair asked those in attendance to introduce themselves and welcomed everyone to the meeting, including the new Chair and Deputy Chairs of the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum.

The Chair stated that the Commissioning Director for Children’s Care and Support (CDCCS) was due to present the report on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE); however, due to an urgent matter arising, he could not attend, and the Director of Operations for Children’s Care and Support (DOCCS) would present the report instead.

The DOCCS delivered a presentation on CSE, which covered the following issues:

- What do we know about CSE;
- What is CSE;
- Who does it happen to;
- Who does it;
- How does it happen;
- Warning Signs;
- Vulnerability Factors;
- CSE in Barking and Dagenham;
- CSE Problem Profile – At Risk;
- CSE Problem Profile – Perpetrators;
- Linking Risk to Themes;
- Response; and
- Challenges.

A member commented that the CDCCS should have been present at the meeting as well as the DOCCS, to present the iem. The Commissioning Director for
Education (CDE) clarified the reason for the CDCCS’s non-attendance, which was that the Council had been informed that Ofsted would be undertaking an inspection of its services for children with special educational needs and disabilities, imminently. She apologised for his non-attendance but hoped that members would note the exceptional circumstances. The DOCCS added that CSE was an area that also fell under her responsibilities, so hoped that she would be in a position to answer most of members’ questions.

A member stated that the report said that the borough’s scores on multiple indicators suggested that there are many young people potentially at risk of CSE, ranking it joint 17th out of 152 areas; however, it also stated that the rise in recorded child sex offences has been relatively small in the borough compared to the national average. He asked officers to explain the apparent discrepancy. The DOCCS stated that later in the report, there was information on Police CSE data which included a graph that showed that the borough was the fifth highest in London for suspicion of CSE and CSE related crime. She added not all CSE crime against the borough’s children would occur in the borough, which added complexity to the issue. For example, if a child was exploited in Hackney, Hackney would record the crime, which would be reflected in their statistics and they would inform the Council of the offence so it could take steps to safeguard the child. She stated that the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) mechanism included consideration of cross-boundary issues; however, more needed to be done to improve cross boundary working.

A member asked what support was given to children and their families, once agencies were aware that a child was a victim of CSE. The DOCCS stated the child’s safety would be the focus and there would be efforts to support the child understand that they were a victim of exploitation. There would be a child protection process and a plan for the child. It was important to note that not all cases of CSE involved parents who had failed their child; many victims were from loving homes. It was therefore important to tailor the response to the circumstances of each case.

A member asked whether there was anything locally to address the behaviour of perpetrators, such as rehabilitation, so that they would not re-offend. The DOCCS stated that the rehabilitation of offenders was an area outside of the scope of child protection services. She added that it was not possible to stop offences from taking place unless the relevant agencies had certain information. All local agencies worked together to share information and would act on that information to stop offences from taking place where possible; however, the young person may find it very difficult to move away from the perpetrator and report them.

A member asked what the Council and its partners were doing to address the potential concern that CSE was not being reported in the borough. The DOCCS stated that the representatives of governmental departments after their visit last year, fed-back that they felt the Council does take CSE seriously. She stated that the borough’s approach was not akin to that of Rotherham where officials were in denial of CSE. One hypothesis to explain the potential under-reporting was that the Council has a strong approach to children going missing, and may therefore be slightly ‘ahead of the game’. She added that the report listed many of the actions the Council was taking to address the potential issue of under-reporting, including meetings between CSE Champions and ‘Operation Makesafe’, aimed at raising
awareness of CSE amongst hoteliers and taxi drivers and informing them of how to report any concerns.

A member asked whether the Council had a CSE Strategy and Action Plan and who was responsible for monitoring them. The DOCCS stated that there was a local CSE Strategy and Action Plan which the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was responsible for overseeing. It could be found on the LSCB’s website. The feedback from representatives of the governmental departments after their visit also reflected that the Council’s Action Plan was of a good standard.

A member stated that due to work in schools and communities, teenage pregnancy rates were the lowest they had ever been locally and nationally. She asked what similar was being done in schools to raise awareness and understanding of CSE, to prevent more children from becoming victims. The CDE stated the borough’s schools delivered Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons; however, the extent to which schools cover CSE in these lessons, may vary. She would undertake some work to find out the extent to which it varied in order to report back to members.

A member asked whether the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) produced reports. The DOCCS stated that the MASH comprised of well trained individuals from different local agencies who used a tool to assess the risk to children and young people and take decisions on the course of action to take protect them.

A member asked how long typically, were children going missing. The DOCCS stated that it varied from a day to much longer. Sometimes, whilst the Council would record a child as ‘missing’, social workers and other professionals had a good indication of where the child was, for example, a looked after child may have gone to see their birth parents or a friend without informing the person looking after them first.

A member asked how the reporting of CSE could be increased and what the current methods of reporting were. The DOCCS stated that the efforts to raise awareness of CSE outlined in the report should lead to increased reporting. Methods of reporting included the NSPCC and Child-line telephone numbers. Schools had contacted the Council to report concerns relating to sexting. The Council and its partners had a responsibility to share information and act on information relating to all potential crime against children; not just CSE. Barking and Dagenham Police would be entering a tri-borough arrangement with Havering and Redbridge so it would be important to ensure that these new arrangements will enable them to address all the concerns in the HMIC report, which was highly critical of the Met Police in relation to CSE. The LSCB had already asked the Police for a report on this issue.

Members asked whether there was a service available for potential perpetrators of CSE, such as those who were having thoughts about harming children but had not yet acted on them. The DOCCS stated that perpetrators were not likely to report themselves to the Council or Police. They were more likely to go to their GP, which meant it was important to work with GPs so that they knew where to signpost individuals to and who to refer any concerns to. Support for potential perpetrators was a very controversial issue.
A member asked what was being done to educate young people about their rights and whether standardised information packs could be shared with children and their parents to raise awareness of CSE. The DOCCS stated that the Council employed a Children’s Rights officer who undertook much valued work with individual young people and acted as their advocate. The CDE stated that schools are obliged to teach sex and relationships education and the Council had maintained a resource for PSHE lessons to enable this. It was currently not a statutory requirement; however, this issue had been debated by parliament recently and the Secretary of State for Education had announced that it should be made statutory. She would circulate information on this following the meeting.

A member asked whether in addition to providing information in schools, information on CSE could be provided to other community hubs, such as places of worship, as it was known that in the past, many cases of CSE had occurred in such places. The DOCCS stated that the Council did not have the power to vet places of worship to check their child protection policies or the risk of children coming to harm. However, it was hoped that general awareness raising of CSE would lead to increased awareness in the whole community. The CDE stated that the regulator for community organisations which provided services for children was Ofsted. Ofsted could contact the Council if it had concerns and vice versa. The Group Manager for Adoption, Looked after Children and Prevention Services (GMLACPS) stated that the Council always checked the Ofsted report of a residential unit before placing any looked after children in it and also contacted other local authorities for references.

A member asked why some children at risk of CSE were not known to agencies. The DOCCS stated that the nature of CSE was that it was abusive, and abuse is only effective if it hidden from authorities. This is the reason for joint working as it gives agencies a chance to find out about potential abuse by sharing all the relevant information that is available.

The Chair recommended that the CSSC, Safer and Stronger Community Select Committee or, possibly, a joint meeting of both, should consider CSE in the next municipal year by making it a part of their work programme(s). The Committee agreed the recommendation.

The Chair thanked the DOCCS for presenting the item.

27. Draft Report arising from the Committee’s Scrutiny Review on 'Improving the Council's Adoption Scorecard Performance'

The DOCCS presented the draft report arising from the Committee’s scrutiny review on ‘Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance’.

Members stated that the premise of the report was that the borough has a higher proportion of harder to place children than other boroughs, which affected its timeliness performance targets. However, the report also acknowledged that the Council only had ‘soft’ evidence to support this claim. The member acknowledged that the Committee may be able to rely on soft evidence for the purposes of this report, and asked whether officers could undertake a piece of work to try and obtain hard data to support his claim, and report back to the Committee in the next municipal year. The GMLACPS stated that it may be possible to obtain this data.
from local authorities within the East London Consortium, but beyond that it would be a challenge. The DOCCS stated that every effort would be made to obtain this data.

A member asked what more could be done about the recruitment of adopters. The GMLACPS stated that a lot of the Council’s recruitment comes from ‘word of mouth’. A risk of expensive recruitment campaigns was that they could have a very poor return on investment. It was therefore very important to undertake the right type of recruitment campaigns and target people who were willing to adopt harder to place children. She added that the Council had not relied much on social media for recruitment purposes, until now. The Service was working with the Council’s Communications team to take this work forward.

The Chair thanked those who contributed to the review and asked officers to present the final version of the report to the next meeting.