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<th>Child Sexual Exploitation Briefing</th>
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<td><strong>Report of the:</strong></td>
<td>Commissioning Director; Children’s Care and Support</td>
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<td><strong>Open Report:</strong></td>
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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 Select Committee’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 is to be taken.

**Reason(s)**
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. In February 2017, the Department of Education published: Child sexual exploitation; Definition and guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation. In July 2017 Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board adopted this definition for use across the professional partnership.

1.2 The following points show the factors that are common to all the definitions for child sexual exploitation:

- 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?

1.3 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.

1.4 CSE victimisation is not exclusive to young females and can equally apply to males yet they are often missed or 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.

1.5 However, children without any predisposing vulnerabilities or risk factors can also be 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 limit their choices and their ability to exit or avoid the abuse.

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 often refuse any 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, and this 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 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 in child protection may not recognise or identify a young person as a victim of exploitation, often thinking a victim has consented. 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. 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 local partnership has a multi-agency plan to combat CSE. The plan requires the involvement of all partners and is monitored by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). However, CSE is very 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 under-reporting.

2.2 Barking and Dagenham ranks highly on several indicators that may contribute to the exploitation of vulnerable young people. The borough is in the most at risk 10% in terms of deprivation, rate of repeat abortions and rate of substance abuse treatment. It also features in the top 50% for the rate of mental health admissions.

2.3 Trying to understand the scale of CSE victims is challenging but Barking and Dagenham’s high scores on multiple indicators suggests there may be many young people who could be 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 in 2014 to improve the way local safeguarding partners can refer and respond to concerns. The MASH has well-established referral pathways for CSE and allows for timely intelligence-sharing across a range of agencies. This assists in the process of early identification, information gathering and allows for a coordinated response to CSE. MASHs 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 The London Child Sexual Exploitation Protocol procedures are set out for the Police and partner agencies for safeguarding and protecting children from sexual exploitation. Barking and Dagenham has also introduced monthly MASE (Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation) meetings that are 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 inspection report by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) was published. This report severely criticised the Metropolitan Police 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 this report was: “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 and across the safeguarding partnership, including the police, have been working to a plan to improve responses to CSE, including developing a new CSE Strategy. Separately the police 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. This low rise in an area scoring highly on risk factors may be indicative of victims not coming forward or being identified. In 2015 the Met featured highly amongst forces with the largest discrepancy between overall crime rates and child sex offence rates. This may have indicated an issue with under-reporting or under-recording by the police which seems to be borne out in the HMIC report.

2.11 The majority of CSE victims live at home, but children who go missing from care are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. A total of 235 children in Barking and Dagenham were reported missing during the year from April 2016 to March 2017. Of these, 41 missing children (17.4% of the total number) were identified at risk of CSE. Of these:

- 19 children (8% of the total number of missing children) were in the care of Barking & Dagenham
- 11 children (4.6% of the total number of missing children) were placed in the borough by other authorities
- 11 children (4.6% of the total number of missing children) were not in the care of the Local Authority
- Whilst there has been a slight decrease in the number of children reported missing, there has been a 34.8% increase in the number of missing children identified as at risk of CSE.
- The number of children placed in Barking & Dagenham by other boroughs who have been reported missing and are at risk of CSE has increased by 58.6%
- The most significant increase (83.9%) has been amongst missing children identified at risk of CSE and not in LA care. Of these 11 children, 7 were subject to Child Protection or Child in Need Plans at the time of being reported missing. This indicates an improved position in recognising and identifying children thought to be at risk of CSE who are not in care.
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 risk factors relating to CSE, it is recommended that every area in the country should have its own local multi-agency plan. The plan should be based on an inter-agency assessment of a range of factors to provide 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 including who the victims are and who the perpetrators are. It also seeks to identify existing and emerging trends in child sexual exploitation and make recommendations as a result. The profile includes a 12-month snapshot and uses individual data from Police and Social Care which is cross-referenced with information from education, youth offending, substance misuse, children centres and preventative services, to build up a local profile. A singular area focus will not adequately capture patterns of harm and risk as cases of child sexual exploitation will 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**
- 162 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;
- 91% of the children and young people were female
- 87% were teenagers
- 6% were aged under-12
- 47% were white British
- 38% open to Children’s Social Care (statutory service/ snap-shot figure)
- 23% were reported missing/absent at some point during the year

**Key Messages: Perpetrators**
- 36 out of 48 suspects were male
- The age of perpetrators ranged from 13 – 60
- 45% of perpetrators were aged under-20
- The most common form of CSE is Peer-on-Peer abuse.
- Most perpetrators were classified as either White European or African/Caribbean

**Linking, Risk Factors and Themes**
- 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 identified with 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 of a CAF
37% were known to Victim Support Services

4. What are we doing?

4.1 Understanding and responding to CSE requires professionals, parents, and the public to understand how to identify children and young people at risk. This year has seen the commencement of a considerable amount of work to increase understanding of and responses to CSE.

4.2 The focus of the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) group has changed to respond to the revised Metropolitan Police CSE Operating Protocol that was published in June 2017. The aim of the group, that meets monthly, is to focus resources toward disruption and prosecution and to problem solve where there are barriers.

1.3 Attendance at MASE has been reviewed and it is now a much more strategic meeting, attended by decision making managers from across the partnership. Information is shared and joined up with those responsible for missing children, domestic abuse, and Gangs.

1.4 The CSE Risk Assessment has been reviewed and updated following user feedback and is now used by a range of professionals to assist with their thinking and understanding of children at risk of CSE.

1.5 A directory of CSE resources has been developed. This includes resources available locally, nationally, and on-line. The resources are targeted for a range of ages and include parents and carers. The Directory can be found on the Safeguarding Board website.

1.6 We now have over 60 CSE Champions from across the multi-agency partnership in LBBD. During 2017 three CSE Champions Forums were held and in 2018 they will be held quarterly. The CSE Champions are trained to understand CSE and to pass on this knowledge within their own agency.

1.7 There has been a range of training delivered: in August 2017, all LBBD parks and green space staff attended CSE awareness training delivered by police. In November 2017, 42 foster carers attended CSE awareness training. Also, in November 17, the police and CSE coordinator jointly delivered CSE awareness training to parents of young people working with the Youth Offending Service. This is in addition to training to social workers and other staff throughout the year.

1.8 A comprehensive programme of CSE awareness raising activity has been planned for the week leading up to CSE Awareness Day on 18th March 2018. This includes:

- A social media campaign through Twitter, Facebook.
- The distribution of CSE leaflets for young people across schools in the borough. The leaflets were designed with the support of the Young People’s Safety Group and will include a link to the BAD Youth Forum “grooming” film as well as useful numbers and websites.
- A table of other activity as attached in Appendix 2.
1.9 Consultation with young people has taken place to ensure that CSE in the borough is better understood and a full time CSE Advocate for young people with Autism and/or SEN works in the Borough through Barnardo’s.

1.10 A full-time worker from Victim Support offers 1:1 sessions with children and young people and some training to practitioners.

1.11 A worker provided by Safer London has been secured and began working in the borough in January 18. She will work with 10 young people affected by CSE and provide a consultation surgery for practitioners and several school awareness raising sessions

1.12 The Huggett Women’s Centre in Dagenham is funded through the Big Lottery. Women and girls from the age of 11 years can access a range of groups and services through Huggett. This includes empowerment and advocacy as well as access to a range of services such as Rape Crisis.

1.13 Most recently we have supported a successful funding bid that will provide the borough with one full time worker who will work with young people and schools and advising on sexual behaviour. This will include training for social workers and other front-line practitioners.

5. Challenges: Common Themes

5.1 The work in the borough will continue to focus upon the themes that have arisen as part of national reviews and learning from Child Sexual Exploitation:

- 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 & assumptions about ‘lifestyle’ choices.

6. Next Steps

- Continue to educate children and young people about the nature and risks of child sexual exploitation (both online and offline) and how to access support;
- Consider the levels of knowledge and understanding of the wider workforce, so that everyone working with children and young people can play their role in prevention of CSE.
- Continue to educate the wider community so they can identify, and report concerns and seek support.
• Develop a pathway of support for young people transitioning to adulthood so that they can access support aged 18+
• Continue our work towards a coordinated approach to managing CSE by linking with other strategies, including violence against women and girls, and youth violence and gangs.

List of appendices:

i) **Appendix 1** – Common Methods of Child Sexual Exploitation
ii) **Appendix 2** – CSE Awareness Week, Program of Events