

SCRUTINY ADVISORY BOARD – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Meeting date: 9 February 2021

From: Executive Director People

Child Exploitation Progress

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide the Board with an overview of child exploitation, the current picture in Cumbria and a look ahead at priorities for development.

2.0 Issues for Scrutiny

2.1 Note the updates provided.

2.2 To seek assurances around the actions proposed in the report.

2.3 To make recommendations to the Executive Director People and the Assistant Director Children & Young People.

3.0 Background

3.1 What do we mean by Child Exploitation?

3.1.1 As well as threats to the welfare of children from within their families, children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families. These extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking; online abuse; teenage relationship abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation.

3.1.2 Child exploitation is an umbrella term that covers Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation, Modern Slavery and Trafficking.

3.1.3 Child exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual/criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have

been sexually/criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

3.2 Governance of Child Exploitation in Cumbria

3.2.1 The Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership's (CSCP), 'Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Children Group' (MET) has multi-agency strategic oversight of child exploitation in Cumbria. This group is jointly chaired by the Police and Cumbria County Council Children & Families lead for exploitation, it meets on a bi-monthly basis and has representation from across a range of agencies. A group has been in place, formerly under the LSCB since 2013.

3.3 What does Child Exploitation look like in Cumbria?

3.3.1 There is no formal benchmarking for child exploitation as local authority children's services have a range of different risk assessment frameworks. However, to ensure we learn from best practice we are closely link in with the North West Association of Directors of Children's Services group and to the North West Regional Organised Crime Unit via our Police colleagues.

3.3.2 In Cumbria there are currently 63 children identified at risk of or being exploited. The risk levels we use are: Category 1, 2 or 3 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), with level 1 being the lowest risk and 3 the highest and Child Exploitation (CE) other, this is where Child Criminal Exploitation is suspected or known. The current county breakdown is as follows:

- a) 23 children in Allerdale & Copeland (12 CSE1; 3 CSE2; 1 CSE3 and 7 CE other)
- b) 22 children in Barrow & South Lakeland (5 CSE1; 4 CSE2 and 13 CE other)
- c) 18 children in Carlisle & Eden (10 CSE1; 2 CSE2; 1 CSE3 and 5 CE other)

3.3.3 In Cumbria we have oversight as a partnership of all children with a child exploitation category of risk through the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) group. MACE meets on a 6 weekly basis and provide the framework to allow regular information sharing and action planning to tackle child exploitation in Cumbria. This includes information relating to the links between children at risk or subject to exploitation, perpetrators or individuals who may pose a risk and/or locations and community intelligence. This meeting has continued to run throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure we have oversight of some of our most vulnerable children.

3.3.4 We have not yet seen an increase in number of children identified as at risk of exploitation following Covid. We are undertaking a county wide piece of work via the CSCP, to raise awareness of child exploitation and help improve identification, this may result in an increase in referrals.

3.4 Review of our Governance, Leadership and Practice in relation to Child Exploitation

- 3.4.1 As part of the improvement work in relation to child exploitation, a Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review was held in October 2019 with a focus on contextual safeguarding – this review covered child exploitation and children who go missing. The review included a case file audit, practice observations, meetings with relevant staff groups and case tracking. The review covered the whole of the county with the peer review team visiting the North, South and West to observe practice.
- 3.4.2 The review found that the right foundations are in place and saw examples of excellent practice with partners taking a contextual safeguarding approach in identifying and responding to child exploitation. Peer reviewers commented on the excellent examples of relationship-based practice, planning, co-operation and communication over long periods of time between agencies. Practitioners stuck with the young person despite the young person appearing to sabotage every attempt made to change the outcome for them. The review also found that leaders across the Partnership demonstrated a growing understanding of the risks presented by child exploitation across Cumbria.
- 3.4.3 Areas for action identified by the review included: enhancing the partnership in relation to contextual safeguarding; reviewing the availability of advice and guidance for professionals; embedding co-production of assessments and plans with children and families.
- 3.4.4 The learning from the review was taken forward via a Contextual Safeguarding summit, chaired by the Temporary Executive Director – People, on 1st December 2019. The learning has been incorporated into the work of the Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Children Group. A deep dive was held at the CSCP Board in July 2020, looking at progress since the review and next steps in the development of practice.

3.5 Developments

- 3.5.1 On 1st October 2020 a year long, county-wide child exploitation awareness raising campaign was launched by the CSCP in partnership with the NSPCC. The 'IT'S NOT OK' campaign will help raise awareness of child exploitation among children and young people, parents, practitioners and the wider community. It will highlight how to spot the signs of exploitation and where to report concerns. The campaign will also have a preventative approach, encouraging children and young people to think about what a healthy relationship looks like and to encourage them to speak out if they have concerns or feel like they are being forced to do something they are not comfortable with. In the first three months of the campaign, 1000 professionals attended learning and development events, the campaign has also engaged with parents and carers and children and young people.
- 3.5.2 To build on the learning from the peer review a new process for Child Exploitation Risk Assessment and Review (CERAR) has been developed

and agreed by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership. CERAR will ensure consistent application of the risk assessment for each individual child along with bespoke and effective safety plans helping to ensure there is ownership and accountability in terms of risk reduction and overall case management. As part of CERAR we will be implementing the National Police Chief Council's vulnerability tracker, which will replace our current MACE tracker. Together with CERAR this will enable the partnership to accurately identify and assess patterns of offending, geographic locations and contexts as well as the requirement for additional support services and service provision. The process is currently being implemented, with staffing resource for the process being recruited to.

3.5.3 At their December 2020 meeting, the lead safeguarding partners (CCC, Police, North Cumbria CCG and Morecambe Bay CCG) of the CSCP agreed their approach to the development of a new Child Exploitation Strategy for 2021-23. The strategy will cover young people up to the age of 25, to ensure there are robust transition arrangements for young people who are exploited. The strategy will also be co-produced with Cumbrian children and parents and carers.

3.6 Member Engagement and Challenge

3.6.1 It has been important to ensure we have member awareness and engagement in our work around child exploitation. How do the Board want to receive updates on child exploitation to support their engagement and scrutiny?

Lynn Berryman, Assistant Director Children & Young People (Deputy DCS)
February 2021

Appendices

No appendices

Previous Relevant Council or Executive Decisions *[including Local Committees]*

No previous relevant decisions.

Background Papers

No background papers.

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