



# Child Sexual Exploitation – intervention and prevention

Harrow LSCB's Strategy 2014-16

## **Foreword:**

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is being viewed as one of the biggest child protection issues of our time. Children at risk of CSE are often some of the most vulnerable in our society and the perpetrators of these crimes are becoming increasingly sophisticated, using the internet to protect their identity and trafficking children around the country to avoid detection.

It is therefore, not an easy issue to tackle. Continuous work needs to be undertaken to ensure that all practitioners recognise the signs and symptoms and respond appropriately to prevent and protect children and young people. This alone is not enough. We also need to ensure that all communities are able to acknowledge its existence and that we work together to prevent and disrupt CSE. Where cases of CSE are identified, there must be robust responses so that perpetrators are prosecuted and brought to justice - and victims are supported in both the short and long term.

This strategy recognises the growing problem across the country and sets out the commitment of the Harrow Local Safeguarding Children Board<sup>1</sup> to do everything possible to prevent child sexual exploitation and support victims of this abuse.

## **Background**

In June 2009 the government published its guidance on *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation (Supplementary Guidance to Working together to Safeguard Children)*. This was an opportunity for Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) to review their approach; to consider their policies; and to develop their procedures. It was also a signal to many areas yet to address CSE that they should begin to do so.

Subsequent reports from the Office of the Children's Commissioner have confirmed that too little was being done to address CSE, despite a number of high profile cases across the country. These reports confirmed that CSE is more widespread than was previously thought and that the perpetrators were far from being exclusive to any one community, race or religion and that the victims comes from an equally diverse range of backgrounds.

The reports acknowledge that the majority of children at risk of sexual exploitation are not looked after children living in residential care but they do highlight some of the particular risks faced by such children and young people.

More significantly, the Children's Commissioner report: "If only someone had listened" November 2013, found that despite the high profile attention CSE cases had been having, there were still practitioners in key roles who often did not acknowledge its existence; did not recognise the powerlessness of the young

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victims; and did not respond to the support needs of identified victims. Serious gaps were found in the knowledge, practice and services required to tackle this problem.

Similar findings were identified in the 2014 Rotherham Independent Inquiry, but additionally, a culture of denial was found to be reinforced by a lack of accountability and governance at the highest level across agencies.

In November 2014 Ofsted published its thematic inspection of eight local authorities' effectiveness in relation to CSE: 'The sexual exploitation of children: it couldn't happen here, could it?' This inspection report found that local authorities and their partners were still not meeting their full responsibilities to prevent CSE in their area, nor were they adequately protecting victims or pursuing and prosecuting the perpetrators. Where local arrangements were in place, they did not link up with other local strategic plans. Few areas were adequately evaluating what they were doing and much more work needed to take place in raising awareness and engaging local communities.

As a consequence of the 2013 and 2014 reports, Harrow LSCB revised the existing strategy to better reflect the themes identified.

### **The role of Local Safeguarding Children Boards**

LSCB's have the key responsibility for ensuring that the relevant organisations in each local area co-operate effectively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation statutory guidance emphasised the importance of LSCBs ensuring that the needs of children and young people who have been, or may be, sexually exploited and their families are considered as they:

- Plan and commission services
- Develop policies and procedures
- Ensure that appropriate training is in place
- Communicate and raise awareness
- Monitor and evaluate the work that is being done

*(Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan, DfE, 2011)*

In Harrow we aim to work together across agencies to identify those vulnerable to sexual exploitation, build resilience, and prevent exploitation taking place. We aim to work with young people, their family, professionals, and communities to raise awareness of the issue, and ensure our early help services are well placed to provide effective support.

Harrow LSCB recognises that only a proactive, co-ordinated, multi-agency approach will be effective in disrupting child sexual exploitation and prosecuting perpetrators.

## Definition and Context

CSE is a form of child abuse that is often hidden from sight, difficult to identify, and harder still to stop. It preys upon the most vulnerable in society and perpetrators mostly evade prosecution.

***The National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People developed the definition of child sexual exploitation which is now used by government and other organisations:***

*Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities.*

*Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain.*

*In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources.*

*Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.*

Sexual exploitation can be group and gang associated. Group associated sexual exploitation refers to the number of perpetrators involved in the violence and abuse. It is recognised that some young people who are associated with a gang can be sexually exploited as part of the gang culture such as initiation, paying debts.

What all victims have in common is that they are subjected to exploitation, although some may not recognise this or understand that they are victims of crime.

Victims come from across a range of different social groups, but many will have additional vulnerabilities such as: problems in their home life, previously victims of child abuse, experiencing emotional and mental health needs, or affected by substance use problems. Some may have friends who have been exploited, others have links to gangs.

There is an overlap with other areas of need such as young people going missing, those involved in offending behaviour, and those in local authority care. Some young

people are moved around or 'trafficked' either within the UK or from abroad, further intensifying the imbalance of power.

The majority of victims are female, but not exclusively so, and the evidence suggest that boys who are exploited are even further hidden from sight.

Some of this abuse is based on a group of adults abusing young people - often via a 'boyfriend'. Other patterns of exploitation involve gangs, and this can form part of the gang rituals including 'initiation'. The internet, social media and mobile technology are also utilised by perpetrators to identify potential victims.

### **HSCB's CSE Strategy**

The overall objective of this strategy is to ensure a coordinated approach across all partner agencies which also incorporates the engagement of local communities, so that together we effectively help to prevent risks to vulnerable young people; and ensures that we have a proactive approach to identifying those at risk; providing appropriate support, and disrupting and prosecuting offenders.

Engagement will only make a positive difference if it reflects the experience and views of the young people themselves, their families and their communities. The effectiveness of this strategy must be informed by their voices – sourced both from a local and national perspective.

This strategy will also involve collaboration with the Harrow Safeguarding Adults Board in recognition of the risks extending to and overlapping with vulnerable adults. Any successful strategy needs to consider the complex roles and needs of young adults and link to other strategic plans e.g. the Community Safety Partnership and Health and Wellbeing plans.

This strategy is structured to:

- ensure that accountability and governance is explicit within the strategic response to CSE - and that this 'ownership' at the highest level links to related strategies overseen by the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Community Safety Board e.g. strategies for responding to gang culture; peer on peer abuse; trafficking; missing children
- understand the scale of the problem in Harrow to ensure the development of an informed co-ordinated multi-agency response;
- raise awareness of the issue through education
- identify those at risk and provide early help to prevent exploitation;

- support victims to break free from sexual exploitation and help reconstruct healthy lives;
- use information to disrupt patterns of exploitation and prosecute perpetrators; and
- set out a plan of action to achieve these aims and monitor our progress through the HSCB's CSE Sub Committee.

**The aims of the HSCB will be achieved by:**

- The HSCB forming a dedicated CSE Sub-committee to :
  - Develop a multi agency methodology to collate a picture of CSE prevalence in Harrow, including a dataset regarding intervention and outcomes;
  - Oversee prevention work (awareness raising activity and training in identification and early response –to reach Lead Officers/Members; practitioners, children/young people, parents/carers; and local communities);
  - Oversee activity to support the Police Strategy for disruptions and prosecutions;
  - Review the effectiveness of both early help and specialist support.
  - Create lead roles for CSE within key agencies (Health, Police, Probation, Youth Offending Service, Family Service and Social Work) and a CSE Champion of good practice for the borough. Leads will be responsible for implementing actions in their host agency.
  - Implement new CSE guidance to be used by all agencies across a continuum of need. The guidance will set out key themes to improve support offered to vulnerable groups and victims, and a shared model of risk assessment.

**The above activities are reflected with outcome measures within the attached HSCB's Action Plan – [Add link](#)**

**Detailed guidance for practitioners and their managers is provided in the London LSCB Operating Protocol and Guidance – [Add link](#)**

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