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**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 18<sup>th</sup> February 2014**

**Report of the Interim Director of Children's Services**

**Child Sexual Exploitation**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To present to the Scrutiny Committee a Report on Child Sexual Exploitation and how this is being addressed by Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board.

**Background**

2. Child Sexual Exploitation is a form of child abuse which is complex and can manifest itself in many ways.
3. Essentially it involves children and young people (boys and girls) receiving something – for example accommodation, food, drugs, alcohol, status, 'friends' 'boy friends', gifts, money or affection in exchange for sexual activity or having others perform sexual activities on them.
4. It can occur through use of technology with or without the child / young person's knowledge for example a child / young person being persuaded / bullied / coerced to post sexual images on the internet / mobile phones. 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.
5. Public awareness of sexual exploitation has grown enormously, fuelled by media and public outrage at the pain and suffering of the victims exposed during high profile court cases. The Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups 2013, revealed the true scale of Child Sexual Exploitation and violence that children and young people are suffering from perpetrators operating in gangs and groups. *Berelowitz, S. et al (2013). 'if only someone had listened' The Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and groups final Report. London: Office of the Children's Commissioner.*
6. National research and service case reviews identify a significant range of common features relating to this area of concern:
  - a. Violence, coercion and intimidation, 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.

- b. Perpetrators target areas where individual children and young people frequent or young people gather including shopping centres, cafes, takeaways, pubs, bus / train stations, parks, taxi ranks, children's homes, schools and colleges etc...
- c. Perpetrators may use other young people to build initial relationships
- d. Perpetrators can operate individually as well as part of a group/organised gang
- e. Young people can be groomed and sexually exploited by their peers
- f. Young people may be groomed into 'party' lifestyles where they may go to houses/flats with numerous adults and other young people. These parties introduce young people to alcohol and drugs as a means to exploit them.
- g. The majority of sexually exploited children and young people will be hidden from public view, probably houses / flats.
- h. Sexual exploitation may also take place over the internet, through mobile phones, online gaming and instant messaging, with social networking sites and mobile technology playing a role in the grooming process.
- i. There are clear linkages between Child Sexual Exploitation by perpetrators and the use of alcohol and drugs as part of the grooming process to reduce resistance to abuse.

7. Dudley Safeguarding Children Board and Dudley Children's Services are represented on West Midlands Regional Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy Group which includes 7 Local Authorities and West Midlands Police and is chaired by Stephen Rimmer, seconded by the Home Office as the region's strategic leader on action against the sexual exploitation of children and other vulnerable people. The focus of the strategy group is to determine three broad themes – prevent, protect and justice. The aim of the Strategy group is to:
  - Coordinate responses to Child Sexual Exploitation
  - Develop a consistent minimum standard in responding effectively to Child Sexual Exploitation in the West Midlands
  - Ensure effective multi agency arrangements to tackle Domestic Violence across the West Midlands
  - Build an intelligence and information function across the West Midlands. Support a range of work to improve collective capability
8. Looked After Children are an additionally vulnerable group to Child Sexual Exploitation and being defined as 'Absent' or 'Missing'. Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board commissioned an independent review of children and young people missing from home and care which was completed in 2013.
9. The report found that Dudley has positive strengths including good working relationships between West Midlands Police and Youth Offending Service runaway project, the genuine concern that everyone has for the young people, and In the house provision for Looked After Children.
10. A number of recommendations were made to strengthen the work currently undertaken including future development of listening and responding to the views of parents and young people, interim support whilst the young person waits to access some services, development of a strategic protocol and pathway and broader use of some existing services.

11. In the period April to December 2013 there were 29 Child Sexual Exploitation cases referred to Young Persons Sexual Exploitation Panel. Of those, 2 were reported as frequently missing to the police (3 or more occasions within a three month period). This equates to a fifth of all cases of young people in the borough (10 in total) who were reported as frequently missing during the same period.

## **Prevention**

12. Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board has an identified Child Sexual Exploitation Lead, a Vulnerable Children's Task Group and a Child Sexual Exploitation Strategic Group to address this critical and multifaceted agenda. Dudley is well represented at Regional and National forums.
13. Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board with its partner agencies is engaged in a wide range of awareness raising and training for professionals in the Dudley Borough as well as support to parents and individual young people. A sample of the training undertaken is attached at Appendix 1. The main focus of the awareness raising is to ensure that professionals are supported in assessing a child's level of risk of sexual exploitation in a consistent manner.
14. In 2013 a Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Tool Kit and Resource Pack entitled Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Trafficking and Young Runaways was launched which provides guidance for professionals, contact details and how to report concern.

## **Protection**

15. Dudley Young Persons Sexual Exploitation Panel is a multi agency panel that meets regularly to discuss the needs of children and young people where there is a concern that they are being sexually exploited. The remit of the panel is to:
  - Discuss young people who have been referred to agree a support package from one or more services/agencies
  - Consider the need for more specialist intervention from Dudley Street Teams and agree whether targeted or specialist intervention is required for the case in discussion
  - Gather and share information through the formal referral process with a particular focus on adults and locations, which can be considered for grading as intelligence by the police
  - Support the shared understanding, consistency and quality of responses (and provision/support) to children and young people sexually exploited and trafficked in Dudley and across its borders
16. Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board work closely with the Community Safety Team who are represented on the Board. The focus on this collaboration is the provision of

alcohol and substance misuse services, responding to victims of domestic abuse, gang related crime and community cohesion.

17. In Dudley there are a range of Child Sexual Exploitation victim support services which are delivered directly through the Local Authority and its partners or commissioned through the voluntary and private sector. A list of service available are shown as Appendix 2.

## **Justice**

18. All offences of alleged Child Sexual Exploitation are reported to and investigated by police teams and taken very seriously with positive action taken with all offenders and disruption tactics used (whether the victim supports a prosecution or not). Social Care and Safeguarding Services work very closely with West Midlands Police and the local Protection Unit to ensure that there is appropriate identification of potential victims, evidence gathering and information sharing through a coordinated multi agency approach.
19. It needs to be acknowledged how challenging this area of work is in relation to victim disclosure and prosecution. Perpetrators are often highly organised, determined, manipulative and highly controlling of children and young people who become victims of this activity. This then makes information sharing and evidence gathering extremely difficult. In Dudley there have to date been no prosecutions of Perpetrators of child sexual exploitation.
20. As the tactics of Perpetrators becomes more sophisticated and different mediums of contact and control are used the Police are responding proactively in terms of how Perpetrators are dealt with to maximize our ability to protect children at the earliest opportunity.

## **Finance**

21. Dudley Safeguarding Children Board has annual budget of £222,500 for 2013/14 financial year, receiving core funding from the local authority (52%), Primary Care Trust (26%) and West Midlands Police (6%). The remainder of income is received from contributions from other partner agencies and through training.
22. The Local Authority funds the Head of Safeguarding & Review post and a number of administrative posts within the Safeguarding & Review Unit which contribute directly to supporting the business of the Board.

## **Law**

23. The key legislation underpinning the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board is the Children Act 2004, supported by statutory *Working Together to Safeguard Children* guidance.

## **Equality Impact**

24. The work of the Dudley Safeguarding Children Board supports parents, families, communities and partner agencies in providing safe homes and environments, security and stability for all children and young people in the Borough. The Dudley Safeguarding Children Board responds to the needs of vulnerable groups to minimise the incidence of child abuse and neglect to ensure that all children can maximise the opportunity to achieve positive outcomes.

## **Recommendation**

25. The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee note the content of the report.



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