

Task and Finish Review of Child Sexual Exploitation

March 2015

Children and Young People Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1LD

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Task and Finish Group Committee – Membership

Councillor Carol Clark (Chair)
Councillor Norma Stephenson OBE (Vice Chair)
Councillor Mrs Sylvia Walmsley
Councillor Tracey Stott

Co-opted Representatives

Tony Beckwith - Healthwatch

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Select Committee thank the following contributors to this review:

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Shaun McLurg – Head of Children and Young People’s Services
Jayne Parry – Service Manager, LAC
Ron Donaghy – Detective Inspector, Cleveland Police and Chair of the Strategic VEMT Group
Melanie Douglas – Fieldwork, Team Manager
Tanya Evans – YOT Operational Manager
Cllr Bob Cook – Leader of the Council
Cllr Jim Beall – Deputy Leader
Cllr Ann McCoy – Cabinet Member of Children and Young People
Diane McConnell – Chief Adviser
Anne Marie Cartwright – Attendance Service
Linda Russell Bond – Head Teacher of Virtual Schools
Claire Mason – Thornaby Academy
Allan Bimson – Northfield School
Jean Freund - CCG
Wendy Shepherd - Barnardos
Jane Harmer - A Way Out
Denis Brown - Spark of Genius NE
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Original Brief

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) has been identified by children's charities and highlighted in the national press as a growing problem. Furthermore the Jay report into the Rotherham child sexual abuse scandal criticised the Metropolitan Borough Council for failings in the handling of abuse. This has in turn led to Local Authorities reviewing their own and partnership arrangements for identifying and dealing with the problem.

The overall aim of this review will be to assess whether the Council's and partners' VEMT (Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing, Trafficked) arrangements are effective in dealing with CSE in the Borough.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

- What is the level of the problem in Stockton?
- How do the Council's and partners' VEMT arrangements work in practice to tackle CSE and how do we measure their effectiveness?
- What do front line staff say about the VEMT arrangements?
- Do arrangements comply with statutory guidance?
- How effectively are partners sharing information and how well do partner agencies work together?
- How are young people at risk identified?
- What is the extent and effectiveness of CSE prevention work?
- What support is available for those at risk/ seeking help? Is there any unmet need?
- Where are young people at risk placed?
- How is the quality of the service held to account and what role should Members have?

Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

Cabinet, Council Services, partner agencies, Local Safeguarding Board.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 On 9 October 2014, Cabinet considered an update on CSE as part of a regular report on social care activity and performance. At that meeting Cabinet requested that a Children and Young People Select Committee Task and Finish Group be established to review how robust the Council and Multi Agency Partners' procedures are with regard to children deemed to be at risk of child sexual exploitation and that the review involves all partner agencies. Executive Scrutiny Committee agreed to add the review to the Scrutiny Work Programme and a Task and Finish Group was appointed from the Children and Young People Select Committee.

1.2 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) has been identified by children's charities and highlighted in the national press as a growing problem. Furthermore the Jay report (and more recently the Casey report) into the Rotherham child sexual abuse scandal criticised the Metropolitan Borough Council for failings in the handling of abuse. This has in turn led to Local Authorities reviewing their own and partnership arrangements for identifying and dealing with the problem.

2.0 Background

Aim

2.1 Locally, there are established mechanisms in place to monitor the safety and wellbeing of all children deemed to be at risk of CSE through the Council's and partners' VEMT (Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing, Trafficked) arrangements.

2.2 The overall aim of this review has been to assess whether these VEMT arrangements are effective in dealing with CSE in the Borough.

2.3 In undertaking the review, the Group concerned itself with the following key lines of enquiry:

- What is the level of the problem in Stockton?
- How do the Council's and partners' VEMT arrangements work in practice to tackle CSE and how do we measure their effectiveness?
- What do front line staff say about the VEMT arrangements?
- Do arrangements comply with statutory guidance?
- How effectively are partners sharing information and how well do partner agencies work together?
- How are young people at risk identified?
- What is the extent and effectiveness of CSE prevention work?
- What support is available for those at risk/ seeking help? Is there any unmet need?
- Where are young people at risk placed?
- How is the quality of the service held to account and what role should Members have?

Methodology

2.4 The Group received a range of documentary evidence; this has included:

- Tees Strategic VEMT Group – Terms of Reference
- Tees VEMT Strategy
- Tees VEMT Action Plan

- Operational VEMT Group Terms of Reference
- VEMT Practitioners Group Terms of Reference
- Tees Protocol – Runaway and Missing from Home and Care
- Stockton Policy, Procedure and Practice Guidance
- Tees-wide Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Tool
- Stockton Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham
- Ofsted Thematic Inspection Report
- Ofsted Thematic Inspection Framework
- Information on referrals
- CSE evidence record for forthcoming Ofsted inspections
- Examples of action plans issued at the safeguarding sessions for feedback to educational settings
- Minutes of relevant groups including VEMT groups, LSCB Board, Health and Wellbeing Board and Children and Young Peoples' Partnership
- Written evidence from A Way Out following discussion at the 4 February Group meeting

2.5 The Group also received verbal evidence from a wide range of partner agencies and services over seven meetings. Much of the questioning focused on recommendations from the Jay report and the recent Ofsted thematic inspection report:

5 January – Introductory Session

Jane Humphreys – Director of Children, Education and Social Care

Shaun McLurg – Head of Children and Young People's Services

Jayne Parry – Service Manager, LAC

Ron Donaghy – Detective Inspector, Cleveland Police and Chair of the Strategic VEMT Group

8 January – Governance Issues

Jane Humphreys – Director of Children, Education and Social Care

Shaun McLurg – Head of Children and Young People's Services

Melanie Douglas – Fieldwork, Team Manager

Tanya Evans – YOT Operational Manager

Cllr Bob Cook – Leader of the Council

Cllr Jim Beall – Deputy Leader

Cllr Ann McCoy – Cabinet Member of Children and Young People

29 January – The role of schools

Diane McConnell – Chief Adviser

Anne Marie Cartwright – Attendance Service

Linda Russell Bond – Head Teacher of Virtual Schools

Claire Mason – Thornaby Academy

Allan Bimson – Northfield School

4 February – The role of providers/ support services

CCG – Jean Freund

Barnardos – Wendy Shepherd

A Way Out – Jane Harmer

Spark of Genius NE – Denis Brown

Alyson Lawty – Virgin Care (sexual health)

Jo Moore – LAC provision, Hartington Road

Partners – 5 February – Partnership Working

Jane Humphreys - Director of Children, Education and Social Care

Shaun McLurg - Head of Children and Young People's Services

Rob Donaghy - Detective Inspector, Cleveland Police and Chair of the Strategic VEMT Group

Peter Kelly – Director of Public Health

Steven Hume – Community Safety Manager

9 February – Discussion with the Chief Executive

19 February – Discussion with Collin Morris, Independent Chair of the LSCB

3.0 Evidence

What is CSE?

3.1 The Department of Education defines CSE as:

“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.”

The national picture

3.2 Child Sexual Exploitation is not new. However, there has been an increasing awareness of the extent and scale of the problem. The recent Ofsted thematic inspection report “The Sexual Exploitation of Children: It couldn't happen here, could it?” highlights that:

- The Office of the Children's Commissioner found that at least 16,500 children and young people had been identified as being at risk between April 2010 and March 2011; during a 14 month period between August 2010 and October 2011, 2409 children and young people had been confirmed as being victims of sexual exploitation in gangs and groups. The report warned that the scale of abuse was likely to be much larger
- The majority of victims lived at home with their families
- Children who are missing from home, school or care are at greater risk
- Poor emotional health, self-harm, drug and alcohol misuse, exposure to bullying and violence, poor social work assessments and plans that result in unsuitable, distant or unstable placements all increase the likelihood of a children and young people going missing from care
- Around 40% of CSE victims are caught committing offences

Barnardo's Spectrum of Exploitation

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Inappropriate relationships | Usually involving one perpetrator who has inappropriate power or control over a young person (physical, emotional or financial). One indicator may be a significant age gap. The young person may believe they are in a loving relationship. |
| 2 | 'Boyfriend' model of exploitation and peer exploitation | The perpetrator befriends and grooms a young person in to a 'relationship' and then coerces or forces them to have sex with friends or associates. Sometimes associated with gang activity but not always. |
| 3 | Organised/networked sexual exploitation or trafficking | Young people (often connected) are passed through networks, possibly over geographical distances, between towns and cities where they may be forced/coerced into sexual activity with multiple men. Often this occurs at 'sex parties' and young men who are involved may be used as agents to recruit others into the network. Some of this activity is described as serious organised crime and can involve the organised 'buying and selling' of young people by perpetrators. |

3.3 Barnardo's highlight a number of tell-tale signs or indicators that a child is being groomed for sexual exploitation:

- Going missing for periods of time or returning home late
- Disengagement from education, children not in school during the day are more at risk of sexual exploitation
- Appearing with unexplained gifts or new possessions
- Association with other young people involved in exploitation
- Sexual health issues
- Changes in temperament/depression, mood swings
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviours, being over-familiar with strangers or sending sexualised images via the internet or mobile phones
- Involvement in exploitative relationships or association with risky adults

Local Context

3.4 The Committee were advised that in Stockton during 2013/14 the number of children and young people considered under the VEMT arrangements was as follows:

- 61 children considered
- 46 female, 15 male
- 59 under 18, 2 care leavers 18+
- 42 at risk of CSE (no disclosures/prosecutions)
- Monthly average – 24
- Average length of time considered - 2 months

3.5 The Task and Finish Group were also made aware of a number of current live investigations across the Force area.

3.6 However, the Committee were aware that the true scale of the problem was not known and that victims often did not recognise themselves as being victims of abuse. The Committee also learned that the grooming and exploitation of young people could take many different forms and that both perpetrators and victims could come from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The majority of victims lived at home, however, looked after children accounted for a disproportionate number of victims. Boys and young men can also be victims and women could be perpetrators primarily in helping to procure victims. Sometimes victims were also perpetrators.

3.7 In Stockton, the occupations of known perpetrators were varied with no recurring themes.

VEMT Arrangements

3.8 In Stockton, the safety and wellbeing of children deemed to be at risk of CSE is monitored through the Council's and partners' VEMT arrangements.

3.9 The Tees Strategic VEMT Group is chaired by Detective Superintendent from Cleveland Police and is responsible for overseeing arrangements across Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton.

3.10 The Strategic VEMT Group reports to the four Local Safeguarding Children Boards. To date the Strategic VEMT group has been responsible for:

- Introducing a standardised risk assessment tool based on national guidance and best practice
- Launching the "Silent Victims" and "Say Something if you see Something" publicity campaigns
- Devising a Running or Missing from Home or Care protocol
- Sharing case studies and examples of best practice

3.11 The ongoing work programme of the Strategic VEMT Group included:

- Conducting a benchmarking exercise against recommendations arising from national CSE reviews and publications
- Developing a performance and quality assurance framework
- Reviewing the Strategy/Action Plan
- Reviewing Tees CSE procedures including return interviews

- Developing a communication strategy and ongoing awareness raising campaigns

3.12 Sitting underneath the Strategic VEMT Group in each area there is a VEMT Sub Group which in Stockton's case is chaired by the Head of Children and Young People's Services and is made up of representatives from the Council and partner agencies. The VEMT Sub Group implements the agreed strategy at local level and reports back to the Strategic VEMT Group on progress and any issues arising.

3.13 The VEMT Sub Group is also responsible for overseeing the work of the VEMT Practitioners Group which monitors any children who are considered to be at risk.

3.14 Both the Strategic VEMT Group and the VEMT Sub Group report into the Stockton-on-Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board who hold them to account on a monthly basis in order to ensure that all SLSCB agencies are kept informed of progress in relation to CSE and the wider VEMT issues.

Governance Issues

3.15 Key findings highlighted at meetings included:

- Multi agency working allowed the sharing of intelligence although this was harder when children moved out of the Borough/area
- The Council and partners were proactively seeking intelligence about CSE activity
- Senior management (Members and Officers) showed a clear commitment to tackling the problem and would not stand for any evasion of the issue
- The Chief Executive was committed to promoting a culture of honesty, openness and challenge
- The Director of Children, Education and Social Care goes to great lengths to assure herself that CSE is being dealt with appropriately in Children, Education and Social Care
- The Tees Strategic VEMT group were developing a shared data set to build up information and better understand the scale of the problem

The Role of Schools

3.16 Key findings highlighted at meetings included:

- There had been a strengthening of the education link on the Safeguarding Board
- There were robust mechanisms in place for disseminating information from the Board to schools
- Safeguarding forums raised issues to action which were clearly captured and tracked through action plans
- All schools had a designated safeguarding officer
- All staff received safeguarding training
- Attendance at safeguarding training was scrutinised by the Education Improvement Service through the central record
- PHSE had been updated to reflect recent developments in relation to CSE and internet safety
- Schools had a responsibility to ensure that all children were safeguarded regardless of their background
- All schools adhered to registration procedures and all children were tracked

- There were robust arrangements for dealing with attendance with anything below 90% being subject to scrutiny
- Templates had been issued to schools to collate information about children on one place and the Education Improvement Service were implementing spot checks and file audits

The role of providers and support services

3.17 Key findings highlighted at meetings included:

- The Strategic VEMT Group were undertaking work to map out services provided
- Whilst there were a range of services in place for more serious cases, there was a lack of tangible/ bespoke support for children and young people at lower risk
- A clear strategy was needed to tackle the adult sex trade and sexual exploitation more widely; in an attempt to address this, an operational multi-agency operational sex workers meeting had been established aimed at providing partnership intervention to support vulnerable women; progress will need to be closely monitored
- Robust training was needed for children and young people in respect of social media and healthy relationships as well as work with parents
- Robust support was in place for LAC and those children known to agencies
- A lot could be learned from young adults over the age of 18 who had been subjected to exploitation in the past
- CSE was included in the child safeguarding training delivered to GPs. NHS providers have also included information about CSE in training delivered to A&E staff. All contracts with providers required training in safeguarding (including CSE) and the compliance rate was set at 95%

3.18 Following the meeting with providers on 4 February, A Way Out provided further written comments which highlighted:

- Within the profiles of the over 21 year old women involved in survival sex work, there was an extremely high incidence of childhood sexual exploitation
- Young girls and boys did not realise that they were being subjected to online exploitation
- The development of an online educational course for children and parents as a preventative measure would be beneficial
- There is a complete lack of preventative work within the Borough

The role of partners

3.19 Key findings highlighted at meetings included:

- VEMT structures facilitated information sharing about available services as well as sharing of intelligence. The VEMT arrangements also enabled operational delivery to inform the wider strategy
- Notwithstanding the commitment of partner agencies, partnership working through the VEMT structures was still developing with information gathering and sharing across the partnership was in its infancy
- A benchmarking exercise was planned across Tees in response to Ofsted requirements
- The Strategic VEMT Group were leading work on developing a performance and quality assurance framework; the Strategy and Action Plan were also under review

- Because young people did not recognise that they were being abused, it was important to raise awareness with professional such as health practitioners, schools and youth workers
- An audit of CSE case files had recently been carried out; the results were still awaited at the time of the review
- A recent audit of return interviews revealed a variance in consistency and quality which was being addressed. However, no link had been identified between missing episodes and CSE
- An audit of licensing applications referred to social care revealed that applications had been dealt with appropriately
- There was a need to continue to raise awareness with all public facing services

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 This short and focused Task and Finish Review has enabled Members to gauge an initial assessment of the robustness of the Council's VEMT arrangements in meeting the challenge of CSE.

4.2 However, the Committee is acutely aware that this important issue merits further investigation. This is in part because much of the evidence collated by the Committee has relied to a large extent on verbal contributions and partly due to the absence of quality assurance and performance management data at the time of the review (in development by the Strategic VEMT Group). The Task and Finish Group believe that it is vital that feedback from children is also sought to assess the quality of the council's and partners' response to this issue.

4.3 Notwithstanding the above comments, the Task and Finish Group found:

- There was a strong commitment from all Members, officers, partners and providers interviewed to tackling the problem and there was no evidence of any evasion or reluctance to deal with the issue
- The Council and partners were proactively seeking intelligence about CSE activity
- VEMT structures facilitated information sharing about available services as well as sharing of intelligence. The VEMT arrangements also enabled operational delivery to inform the wider strategy
- There was an overlap in the roles and membership of VEMT groups/ SLSCB
- Notwithstanding the commitment of partner agencies, partnership working through the VEMT structures was still developing with information gathering and sharing across the partnership still in its infancy
- The Strategy and Action Plan required updating to better reflect and respond to the issues (at the time of the review, the Strategic VEMT Group were reviewing these)
- There was an absence of a performance and quality assurance framework (at the time of the review, the Strategic VEMT Group were developing a framework)
- Ongoing training for children and young people was required in respect of social media and healthy relationships as well as work with parents
- A lot could be learned from young people over the age of 18 who had been subjected to exploitation in the past
- Although there was evidence of effective training in various sectors/ agencies, there was a need for a co-ordinated approach to training including mapping out what was being provided and identification of any gaps

Recommended

1. That the number, membership and accountability arrangements for the VEMT groups/ SLSCB be reviewed to ensure that all appropriate agencies and providers are represented, avoid unnecessary duplication and any conflicts of interest and that the outcome of the review be reported back to Children and Young People Select Committee as part of the forthcoming review of the LSCB.
2. That the LSCB consider formal mechanisms for sharing information from the VEMT groups including how best to raise awareness with the wider voluntary and community sector, including the Faith Community.
3. That consideration be given to developing early support services for children at risk of CSE as part of the Early Help Strategy and Implementation Plan.
4. That the Health and Wellbeing Board be asked to consider and commission appropriate prioritised services for children at risk of CSE.
5. That awareness raising activities be developed for children and young people in respect of social media and healthy relationships as well as work with parents and via schools.
6. That the LSCB ensure that a multi-agency co-ordinated training strategy be developed to:
 - a. Map out current provision
 - b. Identify any gaps
 - c. Identify who should receive training, frequency of training and assurance mechanisms
 - d. Introduce mandatory safeguarding training for Elected Members (including CSE)
7. That CSE should feature in regular performance reports to Cabinet and Children and Young People Select Committee as part of quarterly performance updates.
8. That information about the prevalence of CSE be included within the JSNA together with appropriate commissioning decisions and priorities.
9. That work is commissioned, accepting the challenges, to obtain feedback from children as part of further assurance work.
10. That the revised VEMT Strategy and Action Plan and strengthened performance and quality assurance framework be subject to further scrutiny together with the internal audit of CSE case files and the outcome of benchmarking work against the Ofsted thematic report recommendations as part of the scrutiny review of the LSCB.
11. That this report is submitted to the LSCB for their consideration.

Glossary

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| CSE | Child Sexual Exploitation |
| VENT | Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing and Trafficked |
| LSCB | Local Safeguarding Children Board |
| SLSCB | Stockton Local Safeguarding Children Board |
| LAC | Looked After Children |
| YOT | Youth Offending Team |
| JSNA | Joint Strategic Needs Assessment |