CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Report: Child Sexual Exploitation

Date: 15th January 2015

Officer Contact: Cathy Griffiths, Head of Quality (Children and Young People), Gloucestershire County Council

1. Purpose of this Report:

To provide an update for members of the Committee, including the local Child Sexual Exploitation Commissioning Strategy.

Members will have opportunity to discuss the current position and Strategy with Detective Superintendent Simon Atkinson from Gloucestershire’s Public Protection Bureau. The discussion is part of the framework Committee uses throughout the year to consider safeguarding issues for local children, young people and their families. This covering report also highlights the online training opportunities for all elected members.

2. Background

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a crime that is not limited to any particular geography, ethnic or social background. It has destructive and far reaching consequences for victims, their families, and society. It involves young people being offered incentives (for example, food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) to participate in sexual acts. Perpetrators have power by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources.

Identifying children and young people at risk and protecting them from sexual exploitation in Gloucestershire is a collective, multi-agency responsibility. Working with safeguarding partners, our priorities are:

1. Prevention, awareness raising and public confidence
2. Early identification and protection
3. Bringing perpetrators to justice
4. Intervention and support to young people and their families
5. Intelligence gathering and performance monitoring.

By working closely with partners through the Safeguarding Children Board, the Council has done a lot of work to ensure that all professionals are fully aware of the risks of CSE and know what to do if they have concerns. For example,

- We have equipped frontline staff with advice and guidance; a screening tool to help identify children of concern; and training through workshops, an e-learning programme and forums targeting particular staff.

- We are making sure that young people are aware of and understand the dangers, by introducing curriculum lessons for schools on CSE and safe relationships and an interactive play called “Chelsea’s Choice”. The play, which
many Elected Members have also seen, has been presented in all secondary
schools. Over 99% of the young people who were surveyed said that it increased
their understanding and made them more aware of CSE.

4. Strengthening our Local Approach

Most recently, the attached Gloucestershire Child Sexual Exploitation
Commissioning Strategy was requested by the Director of Childrens Services,
developed by the CSE Strategy Group and coordinated by GCC Commissioning. The
Strategy Group includes experienced representation from the Police, Police and Crime
Commission, Council’s Children’s Services, GCC Commissioning Team, Prospects,
Public Health, and Gloucestershire Domestic Violence Support and Advocacy Project
(GDVSAP).

The strategy builds on current agreements between agencies, and has been checked
against the Jay Report about CSE in Rotherham, to make sure we have not missed
anything. The Strategy includes a national overview; local objectives; and a local
overview of actions to date. The Strategy, Action Plan and accompanying Position
Statement following the Jay Report were signed off by the GSCB in December 2014.
Both the Strategy and the Gloucestershire Position Statement were also reviewed by
the new GSCB Independent Chair to check their fitness for purpose.

It is important to note that the Strategy and Action Plan continue to be ‘live’ documents
in that they are subject to regular scrutiny and potential amendment by the GSCB.

GCC is undertaking an options appraisal to evaluate different models of
coordinating CSE outreach, engagement and intervention work across the county. A
GCC member of staff (Louise West) is acting in a CSE Coordinator role from December
2014 – the role being to work alongside a dedicated Detective Sergeant and the Police
team to work on the relationships, roles and structure being determined over the next
six months, and to ensure that the strategy and action plan move forward.

The CSE strategy working group will regularly report progress on the above to the
GSCB. Meanwhile the existing data framework continues to be developed to make sure
that all relevant information is captured and can be presented to allow the identification
of trends, ongoing work and identify problems or issues in a co-ordinated way.

5. Elected Members

Protecting children from harm is one of the most important things the Council does, but
we cannot stamp out CSE without the help of the wider community. This is therefore an
area where Elected Members play a key role; raising awareness of this type of abuse
as an essential part of preventing it and stopping it early when it does happen.

All Elected Members are therefore encouraged to access the GSCB e-learning training
resource called Protecting Children and Young People at risk of Child Sexual
Exploitation (CSE). The course will help you to:

- Understand the nature and scope of CSE
- Recognise its impact on children, young people and families
Know what to do if you suspect a child or young person is being exploited
Promote effective partnership working with other agencies

To access this course, follow the instructions on the GSCB E-Learning page, logging on with a specific user name and password set up for Members, to be taken straight to the launch page for the course.

In addition, Elected Members are encouraged

- to check with frontline practitioners you meet whether they have accessed the above e-learning course, or the specialist CSE Inter agency training course – details are available on the GSCB website training pages.

- to promote the free e-resource for parents; available on the GSCB website, this was developed by Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation (PACE) in partnership with the Safeguarding Children e-Academy.

- to support GSCB awareness campaigns, building on the awareness material already delivered to all the county’s taxi drivers and 30+ hotels, alongside radio and TV coverage of the county’s work.

- to recognise that CSE is not limited to any particular ethnic background, but in doing so to support the development work being done with housing and with some of our local communities, for example through links with local Madrassahs.

Conclusion

The challenges involved in preventing and tackling CSE are complex and require professionals at all levels, members of the community and Elected Members to be alert to the risks and take action wherever possible. Going through the Jay Report with a fine tooth comb, reassuringly confirmed that the majority of recommendations had already been addressed; but also informed areas for improvement incorporated into the CSE strategy and action plan. The CSE subgroup and the GSCB will review progress, learning and best practice from other sources and incorporate into local strategy, action plan and working practices where appropriate. Meanwhile, the wider priority on continuous improvement in standards of referrals, assessment, safe plans for children and management oversight will directly contribute to prevention of CSE.

3. Recommendation

Members of the Children and Young People’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to receive the Strategy, note its content and comment accordingly.