

# Cherwell District Council

## Executive Meeting

3 March 2014

### Safeguarding and Child Sexual Exploitation

#### Report of Head of Community Services

This report is public

#### Purpose of report

To set out the role the Council plays in Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, to advise on the Council's response to the issues around Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), and to inform the Executive on the Community Safety Partnership's CSE action plan.

#### 1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To note the work across Oxfordshire and through the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board in relation to CSE and Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.
- 1.2 To note the Council's role in Safeguarding and the Community Safety Partnership's action plan developed in response to CSE.

#### 2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 A paper on CSE in Oxfordshire was considered by the County Council's Cabinet on 26 November 2013. From this work, local authority Chief Executives in Oxfordshire agreed to report to their Executive committees the role their organisations play in Safeguarding and responding to CSE.
- 2.2 As raised in the Home Affairs Select Committee's second report into CSE and response to localised grooming, district councils have an important role to play in Safeguarding and in raising awareness around CSE. This is particularly in terms of sharing information and concerns from frontline workers, and in district councils strategic roles as housing and licencing authorities. This report describes the activities Cherwell District Council (CDC) has undertaken in response to CSE, within the wider context of activities led by Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), Thames Valley Police (TVP), Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) and other partners.

The report covers three sections:

- CSE in Oxfordshire and the national context.
- Key areas of activity by OCC and the OSCB.
- CDC's approach to Safeguarding and its contribution to tackling CSE in Oxfordshire.

### **3.0 Report Details**

#### **Child Sexual Exploitation in Oxfordshire and the National Context**

- 3.1 CSE is a national issue. Over the past few years there have been a number of high profile trials in the Midlands and north of England and in May an investigation by the Daily Mirror identified more than 50 active police investigations underway across the country and a number of trials underway.
- 3.2 The 2013 Operation Bullfinch trial, involving Oxfordshire victims of CSE and defendants, has been one of the most high profile. In May 2013 seven men were found guilty of a total of 59 counts including rape, conspiracy to rape, rape of a child, sexual activity with a child, using an instrument to procure a miscarriage, facilitating child prostitution, conspiracy to facilitate child prostitution and supplying class A drugs. The men are now sentenced to a total of 95 years of imprisonment, including five life sentences.
- 3.3 The abuse uncovered by Operation Bullfinch is known as 'street grooming'. This involves offenders deliberately targeting their young victims with affection, alcohol and drugs; isolating them from friends and family, and then subjecting them to extreme violence, sexual abuse and trafficking.
- 3.4 Operation Bullfinch has demonstrated that victims do not always understand that they are being exploited and the prevailing culture at the time meant that the agencies did not understand the grooming process or recognise the scale of the sexual abuse.

#### **Key areas of activity by Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxfordshire Children Safeguarding Board into CSE**

##### **Serious Case Review**

- 3.5 The OSCB has commissioned a Serious Case Review that will examine the robustness of the professional responses and whether appropriate local and national policies and professional standards were followed. The serious case review is unlikely to be completed before the end of 2014.

##### **The Kingfisher Team**

- 3.6 In November 2012, social workers and Thames Valley Police set up a special joint team called Kingfisher, with support from the local health service and other statutory and voluntary agencies, to prevent, protect and prosecute cases of CSE. A peer review of the early impact of the Kingfisher Team by the Local Government Association in March 2013 identified good practice. The review also commented on strong co-operation between Kingfisher and secondary schools.
- 3.7 Work from the Kingfisher Team is now been taken forward to develop a new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) - one of the recommendations of the Home Affairs Select Committee report into CSE.

#### **Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board Strategy**

- 3.8 The OSCB is responsible for the co-ordination of the work of agencies responsible for safeguarding children. Its role is not operational but is about assurance that all agencies have appropriate arrangements in place and work together effectively. It is an independent body, with an Independent Chair.
- 3.9 The Board has produced a strategy for tackling CSE that seeks to outline a tailored response to different models of exploitation and protect all young people.
- 3.10 Awareness raising amongst professionals of the “warning signs” of CSE is a critical area for the Board. A new screening tool has been developed for use by practitioners and agencies.
- 3.11 Child protection training for staff working with children now includes a designated section on spotting the signs of, and responding to, CSE. To date this training has been delivered to more than 3,500 multi-agency staff in Oxfordshire, including all frontline county council staff working with children.
- 3.12 CDC and the Safer Communities Partnership activities to tackle CSE contribute to the OSCB overarching strategy and training and awareness raising is part the Action Plan the CSP has established.

#### **Securing resources to tackle CSE**

- 3.13 OCC has increased their children's social care budget from £24m in 2006/7 to £48m in 2013/14, an increase of 80% in real terms. The County Council spent in excess of £3m during Operation Bullfinch on social work and other support to the investigation. In 2013-14 county councillors agreed to provide an additional £1.4m to enable the recruitment of an additional 21 child protection social workers.
- 3.14 The county council have also committed to building four new children's homes in the county to keep children closer to home.
- 3.15 TVP have invested substantial additional resources into safeguarding children in the Child Abuse Investigation Units.

#### **Absconding and Placements**

- 3.16 OCC have taken action to prevent absconding include strong management oversight and high expectations of school attendance and attainment; ensuring that social workers are immediately aware if a child fails to attend school and that immediate action is taken.
- 3.17 The OSCB Inter-agency Procedure for Children Missing from Home or Care has been updated to reflect the latest guidance. The monthly Missing Persons Panel that tracks and monitors all young people at highest risk within the county. The county council also seek to improve the packages of support that are available to support children to keep their placements. This involves more integrated work with mental health and youth offending services.

#### **Work with Schools**

- 3.18 OCC has briefed head teachers and chairs of governors across the county on CSE.
- 3.19 The Kingfisher Team have developed a model for regular multi-agency forums on CSE which have a dual function: awareness raising and practice development

of all agencies, including schools; and intelligence gathering on children of concern.

- 3.20 Improving behaviour and attendance include:
- Notifying carers of looked-after children immediately if the child fails to turn up for school.
  - Ensuring that looked-after children who are placed in Oxfordshire from outside the county are immediately placed on a school roll at our Pupil Referral Unit and provided with tutor support.
  - Work with schools to help children understand the risks that they may face and the types of child sexual exploitation. Earlier in 2013 all Oxfordshire state school year 8 and 9 children saw a play called Chelsea's Choice, which has now been seen by around 12,000 secondary school children in Oxfordshire, accompanied by a letter and leaflet for parents.
  - A youth mentoring project is in development to work with young men focused on preventing them getting involved in sexual offending and a parents' worker post is being created within a local voluntary sector organisation.
  - Foster carers have also received targeted training on identifying potential warning signs of CSE.

#### **Working with Communities**

- 3.21 The county council are working closely with the police to liaise with community leaders and faith groups and taking action as needed. For example in focused work with families of potential perpetrators and targeted youth mentoring projects. Multi-agency funding has been secured to employ a national charity, Street UK to identify young people and their families 'at risk' in hard to engage communities in relation to child sexual exploitation.

#### **Working with Partners**

- 3.22 Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board have included tackling CSE as a priority in the new Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- 3.23 The Oxfordshire Safer Communities Partnership (OSCP) and the District Community Safety Partnership (CSPs) are bringing together key players to share intelligence and take appropriate actions to prevent and tackle CSE. There is also work being undertaken to create closer links between OSCB and the CSP's.
- 3.24 Police and Crime Commissioner funding will be used to raise awareness about how to recognise the signs of potential abuse. The health service has a key role to play in terms of identifying potential victims of this abuse and supporting their health needs, which can often be complex.
- 3.25 Support for the introduction of specialist child sexual abuse courts and further protection and support for victims, including offering video-recorded cross examination, and limiting repeated cross-examination by multiple defence barristers when witnesses give evidence.
- 3.26 The county council has reviewed its approach to commissioning housing services for children, families and vulnerable adults to ensure that risks are minimised.

#### **Future direction - longer term strategic issues identified by the County Council**

- 3.27 The OCC Cabinet report (summarised above) identified a number of longer term strategic risks and issues relating to CSE. A selection of the issues are set out below and it is expected that these will be supplemented by the formal recommendations arising from the Serious Case Review when it reports in 2014.
- a) How best to work with vulnerable adolescents who may demonstrate challenging behaviours?
  - b) How best to support victims and families who are currently being abused and do not recognise what is happening to them, or want to be supported?
  - c) How to look for patterns 'horizontally' rather than 'vertically'?
  - d) How to work as effectively as possible with the police and other agencies?
  - e) What is the role of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board?
  - f) What else is needed for an effective prevention strategy?
  - g) What more is needed to work as effectively as possible with partners, including district councils, health, the criminal justice system, schools, the voluntary and community sector?
  - h) How can the county council best use commissioning arrangements to keep children safe?
  - i) Should the county council bring safeguarding approaches within children and adults services closer together?
  - j) What can other areas learn from Oxfordshire?

### **Cherwell District Council's Response to CSE and Safeguarding**

- 3.28 The Cherwell Community Safety Partnership has established an Action Plan to tackle CSE locally.
- 3.29 CDC plays an active part in the CSP with multi agency representation, including OCC and TVP and it links and contributes to the work of OSCB.
- 3.30 The CSP has worked with other CSP's across Oxfordshire to establish appropriate local strategies for raising awareness and dealing with the signs of CSE. This has been set out in an Action Plan (Appendix A) that is attached to this report. Cherwell's Local Strategic Partnership has also been briefed on the Council's work around Safeguarding and CSE.
- 3.31 The Council has a Safeguarding Policy in place which is reviewed regularly and safeguarding awareness raising is undertaken across the Council, as well as with Voluntary Organisations in receipt of Council funding.
- 3.32 Generalist training is provided to every member of staff as part of their induction and staff who may have greater contact with children and young people, and who have a role to play in safeguarding and promoting children's welfare, have been identified and a programme of refresher training is being rolled out alongside CSE awareness training in conjunction with TVP trainers.
- 3.33 Service Planning undertaken annually also requires that Service Managers consider Safeguarding implications when planning their services.
- 3.34 CDC also participates in Information Sharing Protocols with agencies across the County. Staff are able to make referrals to appropriate agencies and to the Local Area Designated Officer that is employed within the Area Team of the County Council.

- 3.35 Monitoring and evaluation arrangements through an Annual Audit of Section 11 of the Children's Act 2004 is undertaken and reported to OSCB. CDC's return was submitted in January and a peer review took place last month with the opportunity to learn from best practice across the County.
- 3.36 The Head of Community Services is the nominated lead officer for Safeguarding at CDC and ensures that Cherwell District Council's policy procedures and practice meet the appropriate standards. There is good collaboration with other Oxfordshire district authorities to benchmark our service, share good practice, and maintain a presence in the OCSB.
- 3.37 In its capacity as Licensing Authority, the Council is responsible for the administration and enforcement of licences in relation to alcohol and entertainment, gambling, street trading and taxis. All applications are processed in accordance with the Council's own policies and the relevant governing legislation. This includes ensuring that applicants are deemed 'fit and proper' persons to undertake the roles they fulfil, especially if they are to be in contact with vulnerable persons.
- 3.38 Various checks are carried out upon License applicants and where relevant and permitted, checks are carried out through the Disclosure and Barring Service to decipher whether any criminal records are held by the applicants and if so, determine whether or not the applicant is suitable for the role. The Licensing Authority works closely with both external and internal partners to ensure that intelligence is shared proactively.
- 3.39 Other Council work that contributes to Safeguarding includes the Recreation & Sport Activator initiative. The Council employs two full time members of staff (DBS checked) who work across the district to engage young people in positive activities using physical activity. The activator programme works to prevent young people getting involved in anti-social behaviour, encourages healthy lifestyles and provides new opportunities that will divert young people from descending into risky behaviour. Due to the nature of their work, the team work in a variety of settings with young people aged 9-19 years, allowing them to gather intelligence in this area of child protection which can be fed back to the correct authorities.
- 3.40 Joint agency tasking takes place and is coordinated by the Council. This is attended by Housing Officers, ASB staff, Licensing Officers and Community Safety staff. Information and case details are discussed and action planned across the agencies that also attend.

## **4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1 Safeguarding practices within the Council are well developed. Safeguarding Policy has been reviewed and training and awareness raising is maintained.
- 4.2 Work on CSE has been picked up in Cherwell by the CSP and an Action Plan established that the CSP Board will be responsible for.

## **5.0 Consultation**

- 5.1 Consultation has been undertaken across staff groups internally and with partners within the CSP and the LSP.

- 5.2 Discussions have been undertaken with TVP and regular joint agency tasking takes place to identify issues and to exchange information on victims and perpetrators.
- 5.3 Peer reviews with other Districts and with the OSCB has been undertaken on the Councils Safeguarding procedures to gain best practice and to inform and develop training and awareness raising on Safeguarding and CSE issues.

## 6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 Given the nature of the report no alternatives have been considered

## 7.0 Implications

### Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Additional training and awareness raising and the delivery of the CSE Action Plan will be undertaken from within approved budgets.

Comments checked by:

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### Legal Implications

- 7.2 Local authorities, including the Council, have a statutory responsibility under the Children Act 2004 to safeguard the welfare of children. The Council seeks to discharge its own duties under the 2004 Act through the various actions outlined in this report.

Comments checked by:

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## 8.0 Decision Information

**Key Decision**            **No**

**Financial Threshold Met:**                            **No**

**Community Impact Threshold Met:**            **No**

### Wards Affected

All.

## Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Safe and Healthy Cherwell.

## Lead Councillor

Councillor George Reynolds, Deputy Leader

## Document Information

Appendix No	Title
1	Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan
Background Papers	
None	
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